

# THE CRAZY WISDOM COMMUNITY JOURNAL

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FREE



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# What's Doing at Jewel Heart Tibetan Buddhist Center?

*We wanted to check in with Jewel Heart Tibetan Buddhist Center, to see how life has been for the Jewel Heart community over the last couple of years. So we connected with Kathy Laritz, long-time program director.*

*Bill Zirinsky: How long since Jewel Heart moved from its former location on E. Washington Street in downtown Ann Arbor to its new place on Oak Valley Drive?*

**Kathy Laritz:** We moved from 207 E. Washington late fall 2007 and into our new home at the end of December 2007 with special ceremonies. We were able to step right into our programming which, gratefully, continued at Neutral Zone and Genesis for those few interim weeks.

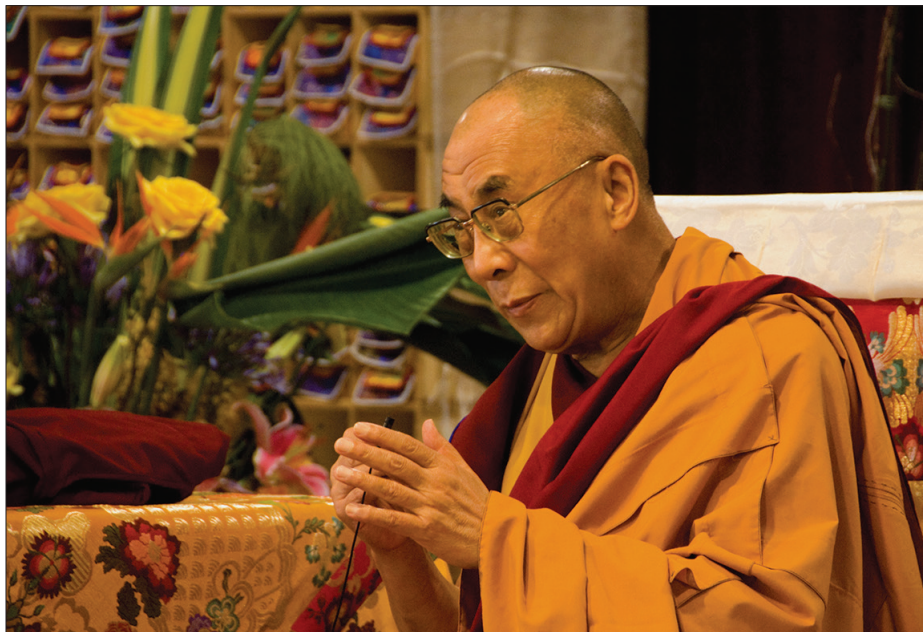
*BZ: And how is it working out, so far, in your new location? What has been the most pleasant surprise for you all? And what has been most challenging for Jewel Heart in its new quarters?*

**Kathy Laritz:** Our new location has been a very positive experience. Through the kindness of many hands, we quickly made the space our own and resumed our regular programs, including teachings by Gelek Rimpoche, our founder and spiritual director. People seem to be finding us easily at our new location. A much appreciated difference has been the convenience of our parking lot.

We have been able to host numerous wonderful retreats, workshops, and events – however the most pleasant visit was by His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he inaugurated our new home and shared fond memories of his and Rimpoche's youthful days together. We were very honored by His Holiness' visit and appreciated his request to Rimpoche and Jewel Heart to continue the benefits of serving people by sharing the dharma.

*BZ: This has been a year of economic turmoil, and certainly many non-profits have seen donations decline. Has it been a challenging year for Jewel Heart economically, and how has your organization met this challenge?*

**Laritz:** It is certainly a challenging time, particularly for non-profits. We have held various events and grass roots activities including weekly community bake sales, a yoga workshop with world class yoga teacher Cyndi Lee of OmYoga Center in NYC, and an inspiring discussion on Art, Creativity and Tibetan Buddhism with Rimpoche, Philip Glass, Francesco Clemente and Michael Imperioli, just to name a few.



**“...the visit by His Holiness (the Dalai Lama) reveals the rare treasure we have in Ann Arbor with Gelek Rimpoche and his teachings. Rimpoche lived and trained in a unique spiritual setting that no longer exists; that was forever changed in 1959. He is one among the very few living great masters from that world and amazingly, he is here in Ann Arbor today.”**



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As a member based organization, we welcome everyone to become a member and help Jewel Heart continue its good work. In addition to our programs, Jewel Heart also supports many cultural and humanitarian causes. A small sampling of our humanitarian work includes support for young lamas studying in India and for schools in Tibet, including an orphanage for handicapped children in Lhasa and the Namling County Schools Project, which builds schools for children in underserved areas of Tibet. The Project aims to promote literacy, preserve the Tibetan language and culture, and enable Tibetans to compete and survive in greater China. Jewel Heart supports the Project through the sale of Tibetan-made carpets available at the Jewel Heart Store in Ann Arbor and at the Jewel Heart Store online.

Finally, we recently began a live video broadcast subscription service which allows the subscriber to have easy computer access to Rimpoche's live teachings from Ann Arbor as well as other select events. We look forward to extending the service in the future to include recorded teachings.

*BZ: Bringing the Dalai Lama to Ann Arbor in the spring of 2008 was a great and meaningful event for the spiritual life of this region. It was magnificent to see how deep is the community of spiritual strivers in southeastern Michigan, and the level of interest in the Dalai Lama's teachings. Looking back on it, what was most important for the Jewel Heart community in having hosted the Dalai Lama?*

**Laritz:** On one hand, it was very important to support His Holiness and to provide an opportunity for people to meet him and hear his message. His Holiness' message of compassion and wisdom is urgently needed in our world today.

On the other hand, the visit by His Holiness reveals the rare treasure we have in Ann Arbor with Gelek Rimpoche and his teachings. Rimpoche lived and trained in a unique spiritual setting that no longer exists; that was forever changed in 1959. He is one among the very few living great masters from that world and amazingly, he is here in Ann Arbor today. During more than 20 years with Jewel Heart I have seen so many people's lives positively changed through their study with Gelek Rimpoche. The importance of finding a teacher of Rimpoche's quality, someone who can reliably help us bring more understanding and compassion into our daily life, is indeed rare and immeasurable.

*BZ: Was the Dalai Lama's visit helpful to Jewel Heart, in an economic sense, in terms of raising money for the organization?*

**Laritz:** In the case of His Holiness, as with guest lamas visiting Jewel Heart, the money raised goes to the guest. In addition, with His Holiness, he has publicly expressed his wish to all organizations sponsoring his teachings that the expenses and income balance out and if there is any profit, His Holiness gives it to charities.

*BZ: How old is Gelek Rimpoche? And what are his short and medium-term plans in terms of teaching, leading your community, and so on?*

**Laritz:** In fact, we will be celebrating Rimpoche's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday this





Photo by Peter van Wanrooij, courtesy of Jewel Heart

**Gelek Rinpoche, founder and spiritual director of Jewel Heart.**

**“There is no plan for retirement for Rinpoche. He reminds us that there has never been a Rinpoche before that has retired... They all continue their work until the end of their life.”**

year with some fun activities including an afternoon tea with appetizers on Sunday, October 25, a special performance by the *Not Yet Ready for Enlightenment Players* comedy troupe on Saturday, October 24, and a traditional Tibetan Buddhist long life ceremony on Monday, October 26.

Short/medium plans remain the same with teachings and public talks continuously in our area and around the world - at Jewel Heart chapters as well as in response to invitations with other organizations, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Rinpoche also continues to hold about 9 retreats a year, in Ann Arbor, New York, the Netherlands, and Singapore/Malaysia.

Preservation of the endangered Tibetan culture is an important element of Rinpoche’s work and one aspect can be seen through his teaching Tibetan Buddhism to Tibetans living in the United States. His Holiness applauded Rinpoche’s activities and requested he step up his efforts which he most certainly has, teaching Tibetans in San Jose, Albuquerque, Philadelphia, Vermont, Chicago and Boulder just this year.

While Rinpoche’s Collected Works of transcripts in book form continue to grow, he is also working on a new book scheduled to be published late next year. Stay tuned!

*BZ: Jewel Heart is a dynamic Tibetan Buddhist teaching center, both on a local level, and nationally and beyond. Does Jewel Heart have a succession plan in place --- as to who will lead your community when Gelek Rinpoche retires or becomes significantly less active? Or is that already in place now?*

**Laritz: There is no plan for retirement for Rinpoche. He reminds us that there has never been a Rinpoche before that has retired and offers examples such as Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa, and friends who have passed such as Geshe Tsultrim Gyaltzen or Ribur Rinpoche. They all continue their work until the end of their life.**

When the time comes, there are a number of people that would be turned to – for instance, Venerable Demo Rinpoche and others who are linked with Rinpoche at the Nyagre Khamtsen and Loseling Colleges/ Monastery, where there are plenty of upcoming Buddhist scholars who are also versed in English. There are also many western teachers that will work side by side with the Tibetans from Nyagre Khamtsen. Teachers who have been working with Rinpoche for 20 - 30 years and presenting in Jewel Heart chapters within and outside of the U.S. as well

as other venues. Some local examples are Aura Glaser, Sandy Finkel, Hartmut Sagolla, Supa Corner, and Tony King, with so many more here and outside of Ann Arbor. There are avenues for succession within both western and eastern lineages.

*BZ: Is Jewel Heart offering some new programs this year which you are particularly excited about, and which you’d like to share with our readers?*

**Laritz: Yes, we have a few things to share –**

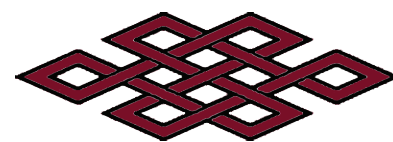
**One is our work with offering meditation instruction to people incarcerated. We are scheduled to provide our mindfulness meditation program at Jackson Prison this fall. Similar mindfulness meditation programs offered at the Washtenaw Forensic Center were much appreciated and a desire was expressed for programming for staff as well.**

**On the basis of Rinpoche’s teaching, we have developed GOM –a meditation program aimed at developing strong concentration and available not only to Buddhists but anyone interested in reaping its benefits. We will branch out beyond the Jewel Heart programs with it this fall at the OMyoga Center in NY and look forward to it being offered at many more venues.**

**We are very excited about the advantages of video broadcasting and look forward to more people being able to access the teachings, workshops and retreats; people who may have otherwise been restricted by geography or commitments or health or the many challenges we experience in our busy world today.**



**Aura Glaser, Gelek Rinpoche, and Sandy Finkel in the autumn of 1984 at their home in Dexter, Michigan, during Rinpoche’s first visit to Ann Arbor.**



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**Ann Arbor-based Jewel Heart Tibetan Buddhist Center will celebrate founder Gelek Rimpoche's 70th birthday with three days of special events, on October 24th - October 26th.** Gelek Rimpoche, an incarnate lama within the Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, fled to India fifty years ago, at the age of 20, in order to escape Chinese Communism in Tibet, and he has been living in the Ann Arbor area since the mid-1980's. (One of his long-time students, Aura Glaser, founded Crazy Wisdom Bookstore in 1982.) As many of our readers know, Gelek Rimpoche is widely considered to be an important spiritual leader, Tibetan Buddhist teacher, lecturer, and author, and he has introduced many in the West to Tibetan Buddhism. He has also been instrumental in preserving Tibetan manuscripts. Despite his position, he is a humble man. "People can bow down to the Buddha as much as they want, I don't care. But not for me!" he laughs.

About his life, he says, "The greatest joy in my life, so far, was childhood, particularly childhood in the monastery," where he found "a tremendous learning capacity, wonderful friends, great masters, and a fantastic atmosphere that was really free of those pressures you have today." In his opinion, "younger people always have wisdom. Every idea that the younger generation has may not work, but that doesn't mean that older ideas are right. We say 'old wisdom' but the younger generation has fantastic ideas," he says, pointing at me typing away on my MacBook computer as an example.

He admits that he has always been rather uncomfortable with his role as a teacher, stating, "It was really people's demand. My old master was telling me to teach and really pushing me into it." Even with decades of experience under his belt, he finds that "teaching is not easy," especially giving spiritual lectures, which have to be "spontaneous," as opposed to "academic lectures that you prepare," he says. "What you are saying has to be true. It cannot contradict the direct mind or reliable sources," and "it has to be suitable for the person you are talking to," as well as "use a little humor" at the same time. "Being spontaneous while keeping these things in mind has given me a lot of grey hairs. It really has!" he laughs.

Gelek Rimpoche says that Tibetan culture is "in danger" at least in part because "the language is very endangered there. Now there is a huge influence from China and outside China over the original Tibetan language." He adds, "Tibetan literature is such a rich literature. It contains rich spiritual information. This language is not only the language of Tibetans, but it contains tremendous treasure for the whole world." He makes the point that "you can't preserve dress," gesturing to the western-style clothing he wears. "If you want to preserve Tibet, you have to preserve language."

In his lifetime, he has seen Tibetan Buddhism's reception in the western world transition from virtually unknown to "popular," which he attributes to its incorporation into beatnik culture, on the one hand. "Then on the other hand, you have people like Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, and those people doing LSD experiments at Harvard," who "kept thinking that they are discovering uncharted territory," he explains. Then came "Hollywood," and then "all the artists followed, and then everybody else." Today, he sees scientists taking an interest, however "they are not looking for compassion, they are looking for the wisdom of the Buddhist mind." Ultimately, although more people are familiar with Buddhism now than when he first came to the United States, "Buddhism is still a stranger in many ways." Looking towards the future, he cannot predict what will happen, stating, "It might not come out the other end as Buddhism. It will come out as whatever it is."

Despite Tibetan Buddhism's "abstract" existence in the western world, he truly appreciates the level of commitment many people in the Jewel Heart community have to seriously studying what it is really about. Above all, he wants to thank the Ann Arbor area community for "giving me shelter, giving me support and being kind. I am very grateful. With open arms you embraced me," he concludes.

Gelek Rimpoche's birthday celebration will kick off on October 24th with a performance by the Not Yet Ready for Enlightenment Players. On the afternoon of October 25th, Jewel Heart will host a tea and appetizer birthday celebration. Then he will be honored with a Tenzhuk, a Tibetan Buddhist long life ceremony, on October 26. Some of the details are forthcoming. Jewel Heart encourages you to phone them at (734) 994-3387 for further details as the celebration approaches. Find out more at [www.jewelheart.org](http://www.jewelheart.org). Jewel Heart is located at 1129 Oak Valley Drive.



**Tibetan Buddhist teacher and spiritual leader, Gelek Rimpoche, is turning 70!**