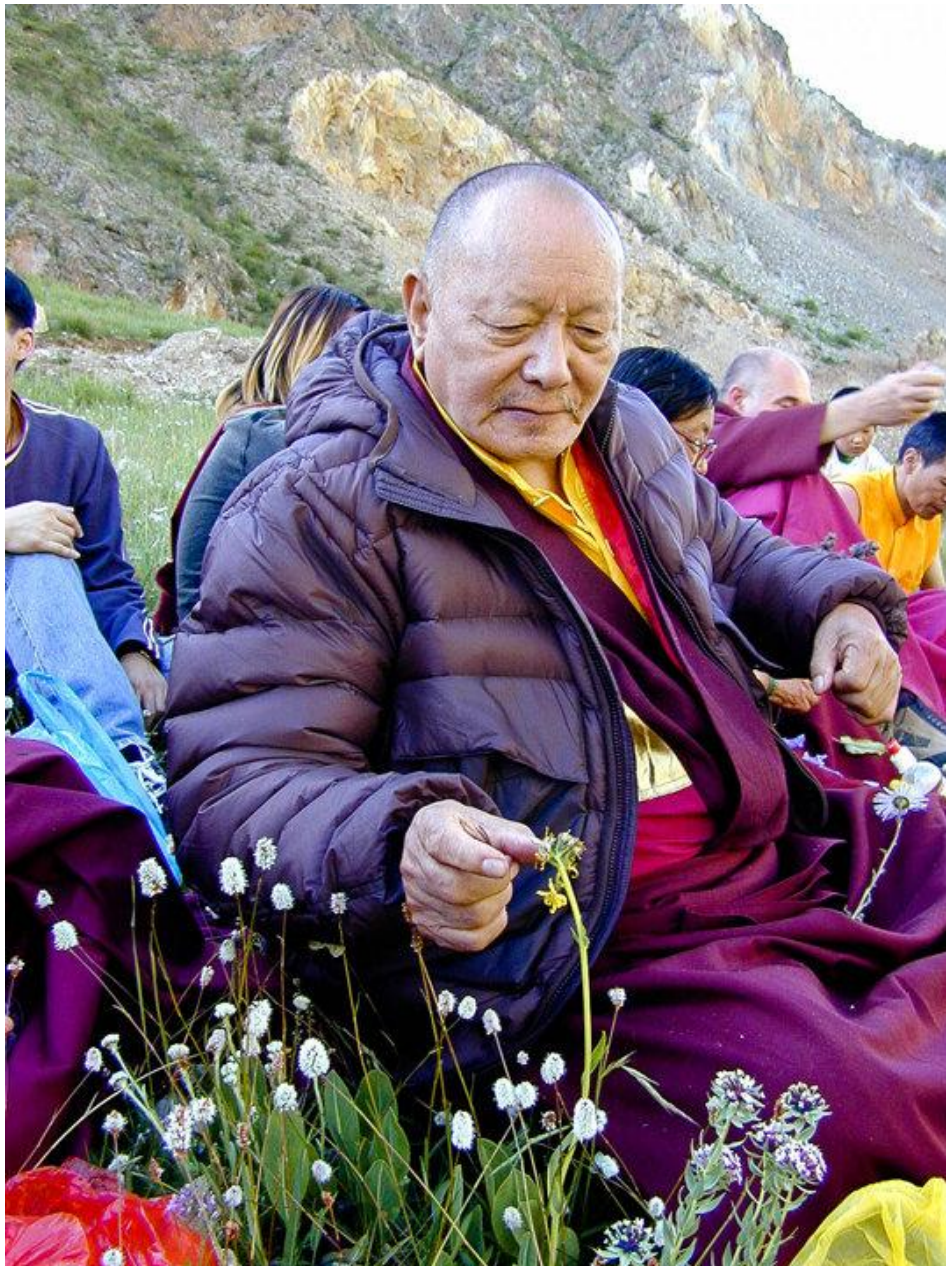


**THE BIRTH OF ASTROLOGY – WU TAI SHAN  
CHINESE ASTROLOGY AND MANJUSHRI  
August 24, 2010**

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The Story of how the Tibetans and Chinese believe astrology arose in the world (and my visit to that area of the world) is worth telling, so here goes:

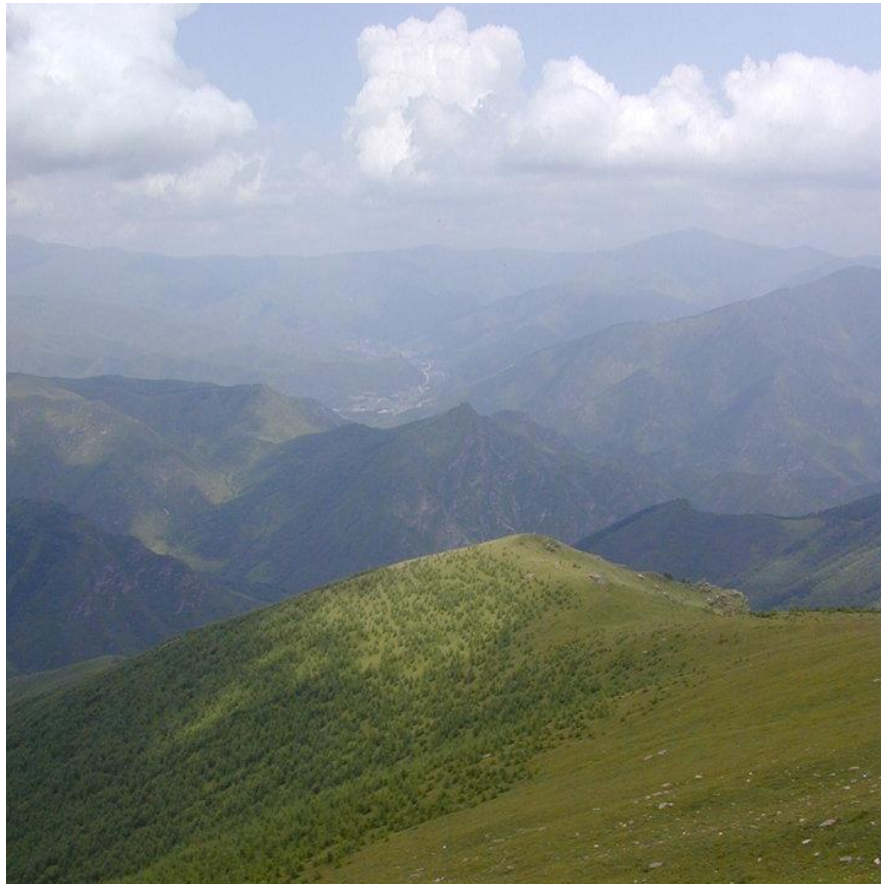


This is the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, taking us on a picnic.

I had studied some Chinese astrology over the years, but never got too much beyond the “I was born in the Year of the Snake” kind of approach. I knew there was a lot more to it, but I couldn’t seem to penetrate to wherever that might be. Then in 2004, something happened that changed my approach.

I have been studying Tibetan Buddhism well before 1974, and quite early on found a Tibetan lama that I clicked with and have worked with now for many years, like almost thirty. By sheer time, I guess I had become one of his senior students. Certainly I am a senior by now!

My teacher’s name is Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche and he is the abbot at ‘Karma Triyana Dharmachakra’, a monastery located high on a mountain above Woodstock, New York. Rinpoche was in his eighties when I heard that he was going to travel to Tibet to a remote area in eastern Tibet called Kham to visit his home monastery - Thrangu Monastery. I was told it would probably be his last trip there. And to my surprise my wife and I were lucky enough to be invited to make the trip with him, along with some of his lamas and other students. Of course, we had to go.



I have to be frank and tell you that the trip was wonderful of course, but also very difficult. I had been to Tibet to meet His Holiness the Karmapa years before. The Karmapa is the lama that the movie “The Golden Child” was based on, but our trip to Tibet with my kids is another story, which is available on Amazon.com in a paperback called “Our Pilgrimage to Tibet” or as a free

e-book (see my info page on Facebook). Be that as it may, I knew that I was in for a certain amount of suffering because I don't tolerate high altitudes well. And I was right.

When I get around twelve to fourteen thousand feet, I invariably get altitude sickness, which is no fun by itself, but for me leads to bronchitis, which goes south fast and requires antibiotics and all that nasty stuff. I also get sleep apnea, which simply means that every time I try to sleep, I can't breathe and I wake up gasping for breath. It is a whole syndrome and it really messes you up. Thanks to acupuncture and acupressure from fellow travelers, it was not as bad as it might have been, but I am getting away from telling you something about my introduction to the real Chinese Astrology. My time in Tibet during this trip I have yet to write about, but I do want to tell you about our trip to Mount Wu Tai Shan in China.

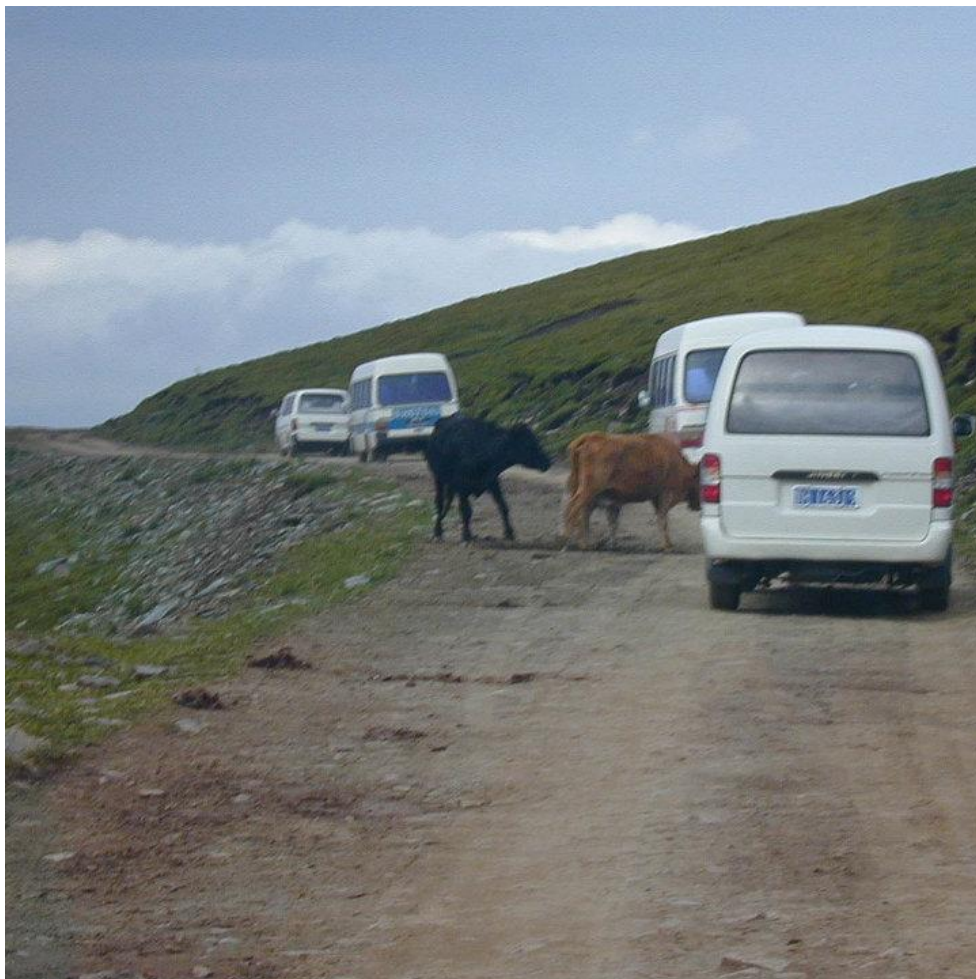
After an amazing visit to eastern Tibet, Rinpoche decided to take us to a very special place in China called Mount Wu Tai Shan and we stayed there for something like a week. I am not clear whether Rinpoche himself had always wanted to visit there or if he just wanted to make sure his students got that chance. Since he does not speak English (and what little spoken Tibetan I know is restricted to reading practice sadhanas and a meal prayer) I never got that question answered. At any rate, let me tell you about Wu Tai Shan.



Wu Tai Shan is a group of five mountain peaks that reach up to about 11,000 feet located southwest of Beijing, an altitude just shy of where I begin to react negatively, so that was good. Anyway I already had been sick in Tibet. The five mountains are arranged in the shape of four mountains in a square with the fifth and tallest in the center, like a number-five die. The whole Wu Tai Shan area is considered sacred, not just by the Chinese, but by many Asian religions, including Buddhism. Scattered throughout Wu Tai Shan are a great many monasteries of all faiths, including many Tibetan Buddhist gompas as well. For some reason it is frequented by almost all the world's religions as a sacred spot.

It is traditional for those on a pilgrimage to travel to the very peak of each of the five mountains and perform various prayers and pujas (rituals). As an astrologer, I was fascinated to note that the Chinese and the Tibetans both claim that the Mt. Wu Tai Shan area is where astrology first entered this world, and spread from there. Of course this fact interested me right off, so here is the legend about that place.

Wu Tai Shan is where the bodhisattva Manjushri, the emanation of discriminating intelligence and also the bodhisattva connected to divination and astrology is said to have first emanated on Earth. Manjushri appeared as a youth, a young adult, bright and shining like the Sun. From the top of his head poured the 84,000 teachings on astrology and they were all given to mankind, who loved, treasured, and used them. This was the introduction of astrology to this planet.



In fact, the world's people so loved astrology that they neglected some of the more basic dharma practices in favor of doing astrology. My teacher had told me years before (when I asked him) that astrology was one of the limbs of the yoga, but not the root itself. The root dharma practice is essential to make the limbs grow and function.

Manjushri was displeased that mankind was abandoning some of the basic practices of dharma and spending more and more time on secondary issues (the limbs, not the root, again) and he withdrew all the astrology teachings so that mankind might better see the root practices of the dharma better.

The world of humans was very sad to lose their astrology and one of the greatest of Tibetan saints (Guru Rinpoche / Padmasambhava) saw this happening and felt compassion for all humans in this regard. Guru Rinpoche knew well that astrology is what is called a relative truth, while the dharma itself was an absolute truth, but he also knew that mankind often depended upon relative truths in order to reach the absolute truth.



A relative truth is a path or method to get from here to there, while an absolute truth is motionless, stateless, and non-changing, having neither beginning nor end. An example of an absolute truth would be knowing the true nature of the mind, while a relative truth might be practicing methods that prepare us to know the true nature of the mind. Astrology is one of the relative truths; it gets us from here to there.

Guru Rinpoche then approached Manjushri and pleaded the case for humans, asking Manjushri to please return the astrology to us. In the end, Manjushri was persuaded and he gave astrology back, but with a caveat. Instead of giving it all back as he had previously, he hid the various teachings in places where we could find it over time, kind of like a timed-release capsule. Some teachings he actually hid by placing scrolls under rocks and in caves. Other teachings he hid deep within the mind itself (Mind Terma), so that at prescribed times in the future someone would find this or that particular teaching. These hidden teachings are called 'terma' and those who find them are called 'tertons.' The Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism is most famous for their tertons.



I believe I mentioned that during the trip I got sick, but I didn't say that on top of that I got a bit ornery as well, over little things like food, etc. For example, here in the states we think of Chinese food as egg rolls, Chow Mein, and so forth. There is no such thing in China. Our take on Chinese food is not what the Chinese themselves eat. They don't serve egg rolls, Lo Mein, and Chow Mein. Instead, everything seems to be coated in oil (and often very bad oils – bad to the taste and health) and served up. I soon got very sick of all that oil and grumpy on top of that or partly because of that. You get the idea.

During our stay in the Wu Tai Shan area, we did many practices and visited many holy places. For one, we visited all five of the mountains that make up the Mt. Wu Tai Shan complex, traveling to the very peak of each to offer prayers and other ritual practices. Moreover, as tradition dictates, we did all five peaks in a single day, which is saying something because each one is literally a 'trip'.

Many of the roads were little more than trails in the side of a mountain, but on the top of each peak was an area for practice, with a stupa or some other building or shrine. Many of the peaks were cloud covered, so we literally were up there walking around in the clouds.

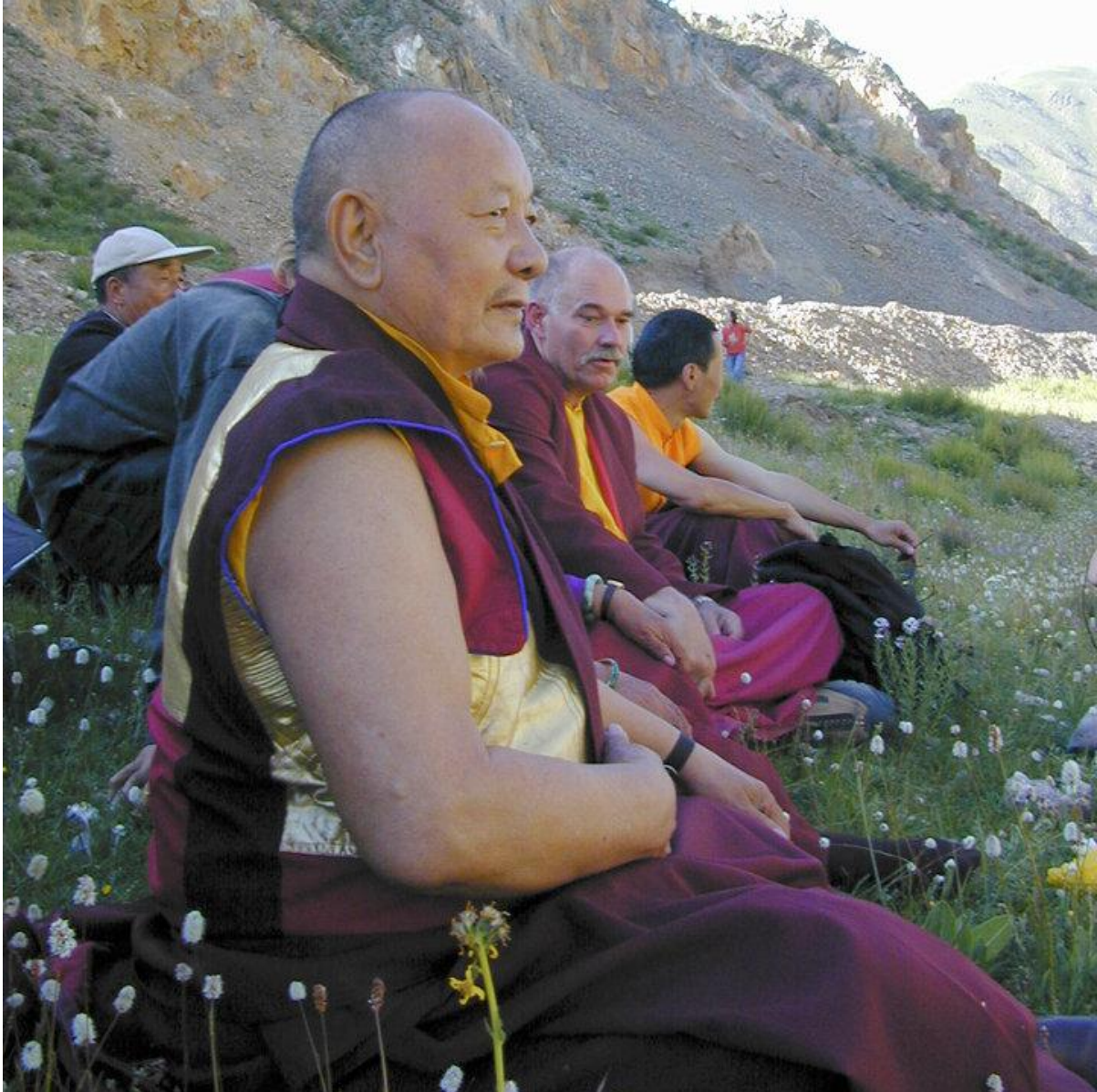


The view from the mountains.



Everywhere there were butter lamps burning.





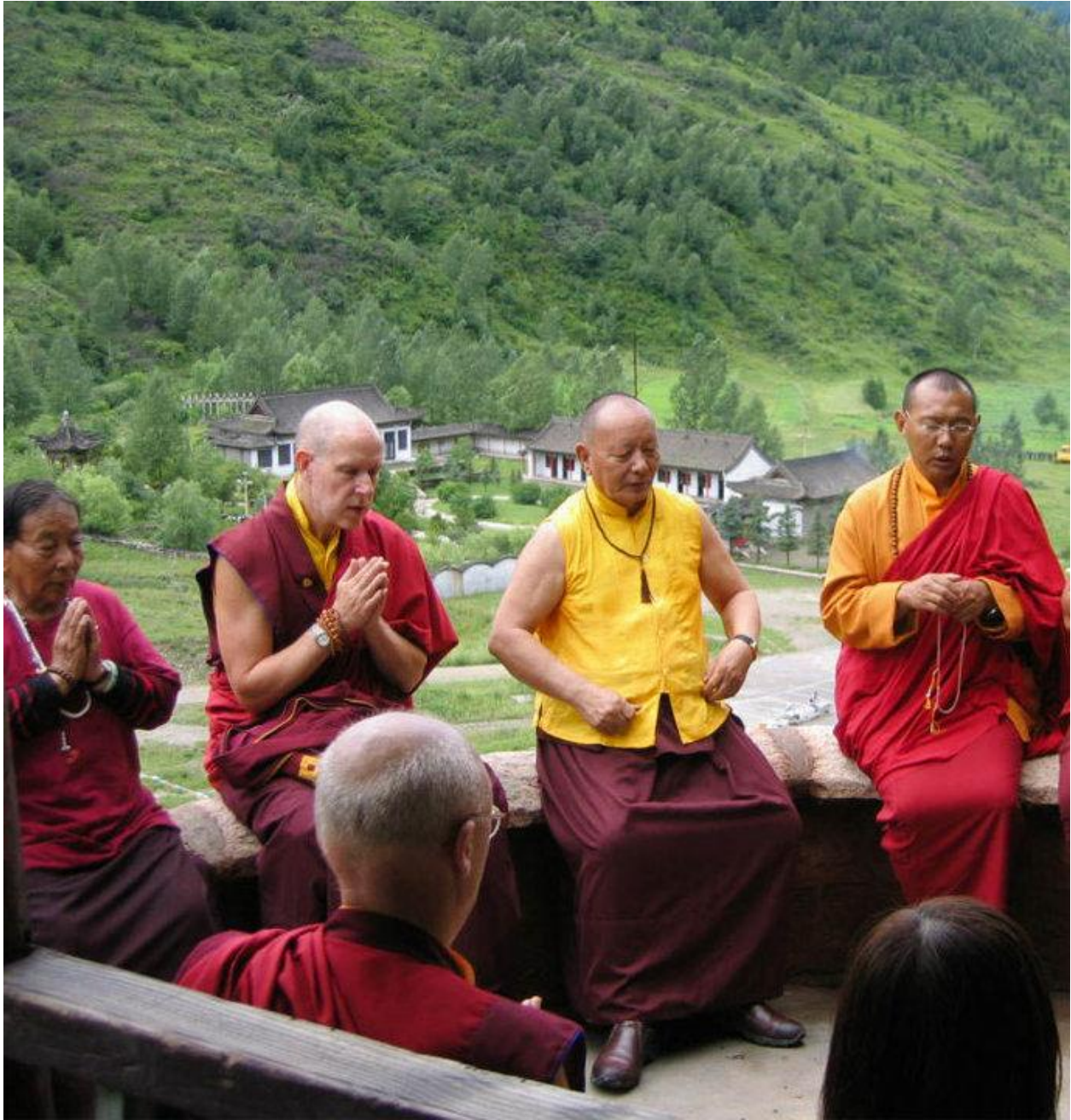
Rinpoche took us all on a picnic and made each of us perform something. Since I used to be a blues harmonica player, I had my little Marine-band style harp with me and I stood up in front of everyone to play. But I did not realize that at that high altitude there was no air or not the same air, and all that came out were little toots. It was humiliating and very funny at the same time.



In China, like India, animals just wander around. Although she can't read the prayer flags, perhaps there is a blessing in digesting the sacred flags.



Often just beautiful.



Here is Rinpoche and some of the group saying prayers up near the cave of Chenrezig.



In this photo I am in the middle, left, and Margaret is behind me to the left. This is the entrance to the Mother Buddha Cave.

Another incredible place was the Mother Buddha Vajrayogina-Tara Cave near Wu Tai Shan. This very special cave found us standing in line single-file and very slowly moving deeper into the cave itself until we reached a solid wall in which was a single very small opening. You are said to literally walk between the legs of the mother Buddha to where here yoni is, a very small opening about the size of a meditation cushion at an angle. You can't see through it, because the opening extends upward into a small almost airless room, with no other ventilation. If you have the right karma, the yoni will open for you and you can crawl or be pulled through the channel into the inner womb areas, where it is said you can see all of her inner organs and

secrets. No matter what size you are, not everyone can pass through the opening.

It is said that those who can pass through the channel will be reborn in Buddha Amitabha's Buddha field called Sukavati. My teacher Khenpo Rinpoche did not pass through the opening; he was just too big. He laughed and tried really hard to get through, but no go. As for me, I tried but also did not pass through, although I probably could have. It is not like there is a hole and you can put your arms or head through and see what is inside. Oh no.



But despite my illness and despite my grumpiness part of the time, the Wu Tai Shan mountains somehow still managed to affect me. After we left China and returned home, the most amazing things began to happen to me. All kinds of astrology began to occur to me, both western and eastern. Perhaps it was due to having traveled to that sacred area, an area sacred to astrology and astrologers. I can't say for sure, but I went into renaissance mode astrologically and proceeded to understand and write out a whole lot of new astrology, most of which ended up in one book or another. It also precipitated a lifelong love of astrology that was deep in there into a dozen or more books. Bam! They just came out.



The Ven. Lodro Nyima Rinpoche, who accompanied us to Wu Tai Shan.



I can say that not only did I burn through a lot of veils to western astrology, but also burned through whatever obstacles or resistance I had to Chinese astrology and began to see what it was really about and to study it more deeply. And it is so beautiful. Let me give you one small example of the philosophy we find in the Chinese approach to astrology:





In western astrology, we have something called the “Four Elements,” fire, earth, air, and water. And we count up how many planets we have in each of the elements. Those elements with few to no planets are considered weak areas for us. We lack or ‘want’ them.



They also count elements in Chinese astrology, but what they mean by elements is different from our meaning, but that is not the point here. They use five elements and when they look at your chart they always want to find your “Lucky Element.” And what is cool (and unlike western astrology) is that in Chinese astrology your Luck Element is always the element you have the least of and here is their thinking:



Carving names into stone.

Chinese astrology is all about balance and if you lack or want a particular element, you cannot be in balance. Furthermore, every time the element occurs in your life in any quantity (however that may come about), your wheel of progress turns and you grow from it. In other words, it is only when we are balanced that we grow into who and what we are, and fulfilling that missing element is our way to achieve that balance. That element we want is our “Luck Element.” That is a sample of the profound nature of Chinese philosophy, philosophy like the I-Ching, the Tao, and so on. Cool? I think so.



I also went into a kind of deep state for some years, during which I designed some 13,000 tarot-like cards for astrologers. It was like a meditation; it just happened. More about the cards and samples here:

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=238631&id=587252657>



All kinds of spontaneous insights and mini-visions took place. As an astrologer, I have no explanation for this, other than my visit to the sacred Mt. Wu Tai Shan somehow linked me up with the astrological sources and regardless of my grumpiness blessed me. I know I didn't deserve it, but it happened anyway.

So there you have a little history of my trip to China. There are other stories, and I will try to get to them.

Here is our beloved Rinpoche, who is now in his late 80s, but still very robust and clear. You can meet him at the Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Monastery near Woodstock, NY. He is still with us.