



# Khagyun

Stories from the Tibetan Diaspora

*“There are two great forces in the world today. One is the force of the people with power, with armies to enforce their power, and with a land to recruit their armies from. The other is the force of the poor and dispossessed. The two are in perpetual conflict, and it is certain who will lose... Unless this is changed, the world will perish. Therefore every poet, every religious man, every political leader, should fight against this division till he dies.”*

*...His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (New Delhi, 1959)*

## WELCOME

First things first. If you are receiving this informal newsletter directly, you probably already know about Khagyun. If you are not familiar with this project, you may wish to skip ahead to the Project Description. If, after reading this issue, you know of people you think might be interested, please forward it to them. If this newsletter was forwarded to you, and you would like to be added to the mailing list, please let us know at: [khagyun@gmail.com](mailto:khagyun@gmail.com) And if you do not wish to receive this newsletter, please send an email to the same email address and we will cancel future mailings. Finally, if you have any suggestions about the content, have found any errors, or are interested in contributing to the next issue, please let us know.

Next, a quick apology to the reader. It will probably be necessary to use the pronoun “I” more frequently than is appropriate. This is simply because “I” (Hillel Natanson) am the only person working full-time on the project. I have the luxury of working part-time here in India for my basic living expenses, so I have time for Khagyun. Also, for the time being, I have good access to the internet. Therefore, I am the one who is most active. But there are many other people who are helping in many ways, and some of them will be mentioned in this first issue of the Khagyun newsletter.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

While many are familiar with the story of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's journey into exile, the experiences of the tens of thousands of housewives, shopkeepers, farmers and craftsmen who fled Tibet in the Dalai Lama's wake have not been recorded. *Khagyun: Stories of the Tibetan Diaspora*, has taken up this task. Using basic equipment and volunteer help, we are audio-taping and transcribing these stories of courage, loss, fortitude and survival, and offering the stories to the family of each storyteller. Young Tibetans in India face a particularly uncertain future since they have no country of their own. We hope that these stories will serve to help them as they grapple with the difficult decisions they face. Clues to help all of us solve the riddles of war, ecological devastation and racial and religious intolerance also lie like buried treasure in these tales.

The tellers of these stories are now old and every day some die. We are therefore looking for immediate support to do a one-year pilot project in Bylakuppe, the largest Tibetan settlement in India. We need funds for a professional video camera, a desktop computer and printer, a laptop computer, storage media, transportation, and communications. We estimate at this point that we need US \$40,000 to complete the initial phase.

Things look hopeful. We have received our first grant of \$2,000 from the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace. We have the support of the local representative of the Central Tibetan Authority, of Bylakuppe's largest monastery (Sera Je), and several volunteers from within the lay Tibetan community. We also have the support and help of Lama Doboomb Tulku, the Director of Tibet House in New Delhi. Most importantly, our work so far has demonstrated an enthusiastic willingness on the part of the older generation to share their stories with the young.

Upon completion of the pilot project, we will train and equip small teams to further this work in the three areas containing the major Tibetan settlements in India (the south, the northeast, and the northwest). Our long-term vision includes a proper archive of video, audio and transcribed materials, indexed and housed in a suitable facility, and a website that provides online access in both Tibetan and English. And we hope to provide paid work at a good Indian salary to young Tibetans to help in this effort to preserve a precious part of their heritage. Your questions, suggestions and letters of support are most welcome at: [khagyun@gmail.com](mailto:khagyun@gmail.com).

- Hillel Natanson, Coordinator & Transcriptionist; Bangalore, India.
- Tsewang Dorje, Videographer; Old First Camp, Bylakuppe, India.
- Jampa Rinchen, Videographer, Sera Je Monastery; Bylakuppe, India.
- Lobsang Tsultrim, Translator; Sera Je Monastery, Bylakuppe, India.
- Tenzin Datse-Translator; New Sixth Camp, Bylakuppe, India.
- Jake (Cassidy) Sterling, Newsletter and Web; Concord, Massachusetts, USA.

[khagyun@gmail.com](mailto:khagyun@gmail.com) • [info@khagyun.org](mailto:info@khagyun.org)

<http://khagyun.org>

## NEWS

**We have recorded fourteen** life stories so far, all in the refugee settlement of Bylakuppe, the largest Tibetan settlement in India and located west of Mysore in the south of India. Nine of these tales have been transcribed into English to date (some excerpts follow). Beginning in mid-May, we will begin recording some stories here in Bangalore, where there is a small Tibetan refugee population, many of whom sell sweaters and clothing on the streets. Tenzin Datse arranged and translated these interviews in Bangalore, and her family provides comfortable and friendly lodgings when I am in Bylakuppe. Jampa Rinchen and Lobsang Tsultrim, young monks at Sera Je High School, have been the most enthusiastic supporters of Khagyun. Their practical skills have made the first interviews successful. Their energy and generosity first convinced me that the goal was attainable. Their principal, the Ven. Acharya Ngawang Nyima, has offered the long-term use of a room at the Sera Je Secondary School to Khagyun. Lama Doboomb Tulku at Tibet House in New Delhi and his wonderful team there have provided support, suggestions, and a Tibetan name: "Khagyun." It means "oral history."

In April we received a grant of \$2,000 from the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace to be used as "seed money" to keep the project alive and to enable us to continue work while looking for more funding. Thanks

*continued on page 5*

## KHAGYUN: STORIES OF THE TIBETAN DIASPORA



**...A son was born on the way.** After this snow incident, I gave birth to a baby boy, in a cow shed. I felt so sad at the time. I still feel so sorry about that, because we weren't in our home country, and I had to deliver my baby in a cow shed. We stayed there for ten days after the child was born. A Tibetan family owned the shed and let us stay there. The animals helped keep us warm...

...In 1961 we came to Manali in Himachal Pradesh, in the north of India. And in Manali we had different groups for road construction work. My parents were in another group, a different group from me, so they were sent to a different place. It was a road to Ladakh that was being built, up very high and far away. Before the winter would come, we would have to come back, because once the snow comes it's not possible to return. There was four months to work without snow. We also stayed in small tents. After the snow came, we worked removing snow from the roads that were already built...

...We didn't do any truly hard physical work in Tibet before we came to India, because we were nomads. I did milking most of the time, and weaving also. I would make the borders on traditional Tibetan clothing, on chubas, because it's very cold. But both of us had to work very hard on the road work. The baby was on my back much of the time, and sometimes the baby was kept in a basket on the roadside while I worked. I had to take some cloth, and put the baby in the cloth, and keep it that way, and come back and feed the baby. Fortunately, the baby had no health problems, at least I don't remember any. We had to buy and prepare our own food, including lunch. We worked seven days a week-there were no rest days off, not until the job was done. If you didn't go for a day, you were fined. We worked in Manali for twelve years...

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Let us know that you think this work is worthwhile;

Provide us with suggestions that might lead to financial support in the way of grants and donations;

Research potential venues and publicity for an autumn presentation tour in the UK and North America

Provide us with strategic suggestions that might help us to fulfill our goals better and more efficiently (how to do good interviews, information of a technical nature related to digital archiving, etc.)

Give us the contact information of individuals or organizations who would be interested in our work

Forward this newsletter to people or organizations who might be interested

#### **To make a donation, make check out to:**

Jake Sterling, 181 Holdenwood Road, Concord, MA 01742, USA; Phone: (978) 369-3315;

Email: [jake@khasidi.net](mailto:jake@khasidi.net). As of now, donations are not tax deductible.



***Denchen Wangmo, 74 years old,  
"Old Second Camp", Bylakuppe India***



*Karma Dhonya, 83 years old,  
“New Fourth Camp”, Bylakuppe India*

**...I was a monk from the age** of six to eight years old. After that, an uncle of mine who was one of the managers of the monastery sent me to the north. Because my uncle was appointed as a manager of the monastery, and since my uncle was very old, I was sent on behalf of my uncle. I knew everything about the place, about the area, since it was my home...

...There was a Tibetan volunteer army called the Chushi Gangdrug, and the soldiers took me along to show them the way around since I knew the land so well. This was around 1956, I don't remember exactly. I then fought against the Chinese for two days. They were riding horses and shooting. The Chinese had vehicles and armored jeeps and better rifles. I was shot by one of the Chinese soldiers. (He points to a scar that is there just below his throat and to the right). Karmapa gave me an amulet for protection, and this saved my life. Even though I was shot there, I didn't die. I fell down when I was shot. It was a Russian bullet. I fell down, and one of my friends asked me, "What's happened to you?" And he saw the blood, and he took the bullet out from just below my throat. There was a little blood, but it didn't really go very far inside. I was senseless, like in a dream. I didn't know what was happening, and was unaware, really. He didn't put any bandage on it, nothing. I was on a hill when I got shot, not on a horse. Nobody was shooting at that time, there didn't seem to be

any Chinese soldiers around, so I just stood up, and immediately I was hit...

...On the way, I met some nomads and they gave me butter and tsampa barley flour, and a bit of curds (yoghurt). And I just had this, there was nothing else to eat. It was not really a matter of winning and losing in this battle. You killed as many as you could, and then ran away. It was a guerrilla war. This was guerrilla war, because I was not in the Tibetan government—they had their own soldiers. Most of us were volunteers. Since we were volunteers, people gave us food on the way. We wore our bullets in belts around our waists, along with a gun and a knife that were hanging there. Almost all of us had horses. In our army company, it was our rule at that time, that you were not able to rob any people.

If you did rob anybody, the leader would kill you. It was against our religion to rob. You would have to be very bad to do this. It was a rule. I think I killed some Chinese, but I'm not completely sure. Although I was a Buddhist and a former monk, I felt that we were fighting for our own reasons. The Chinese government had destroyed so many things, so many precious things, and they had occupied our country. And there was anger, and I had real reasons for fighting. I felt sorry for those who were killed. Now I feel grateful to those who died. At that time, we were very angry, and it was very dangerous. Now I can feel compassion, and I did some bad things, but then it was different. We were trying to save our region, our culture.

Later, one time I was on a mountain, and I saw helicopters of the Chinese army landing. I also saw a horse in the background. There was a large packet of bullets on the horse, and I wanted to get the bullets. So I shot the horse in the leg, and it fell down. And I went and collected the bullets, and just moments later the Chinese shot me in the leg. The bullet went into the calf, into the muscle, but it missed all the bones, so at first it was almost as if nothing had happened. But it was so hard, the muscle was just torn away with the blood. I became unconscious. Some of my fellow soldiers put some ointment on the wound. I think it was medicine that was made in America. Then they

put a bandage on it, and they left me and went away. So I stayed with a family of nomads. I stayed quite separately from them. The Chinese would always come and ask the older nomads if there were any rebels there. So I stayed quite far away, separate from them, but they looked after me very well, and I stayed for two months to heal the wound. After two months, the wound was completely healed, and I went on foot to my own monastery where I had been a monk...



[NEWS continued from page 2]

to Simon Guerrand-Hermes and to Scherto, the secretary at the Hermes foundation, for all their help.

I took the opportunity, while in England, to make contact with people at both the Tibet Foundation and the Tibet Society UK in London. At both stops, people were very generous with their time and their suggestions, despite my having arrived completely unannounced at what were both busy offices. Karma Hardy and David Kelly at the Tibet Foundation gave much encouragement and also provided several good contacts and suggestions for possible funding. And Philippa Carrick, the CEO of The Tibet Relief Fund (a project of Tibet Society UK) and several staff members took time to speak with me. Philippa has promised a list of contacts when her schedule slows down a bit. I was relieved to learn from these two visits that, because Khagyun is working outside of China, and only working with the refugee population, political and economic pressure from the Chinese government is not likely to be a major obstacle to winning financial support from corporate donors, NGO's, and governments.

One of the greatest challenges we face is purely organizational. In order to function at a level commensurate with the size of our vision, we will eventually need to be registered as a non-profit organization, either in India or in the USA. Not surprisingly, there is a long list of plusses and minuses attached to either option, and time will tell us which is preferable. Some grants are available to me as an individual, but larger grants will

*continued on page 6*

### Thanks also to...

- Dr. Issac Mathai at Soukya International Holistic Health Centre in Bangalore for inviting me on a pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash in far western Tibet last year. During this amazing journey the inspiration and courage to record the lives of these everyday heroes came to me.
- Susan Thompson of upstate New York, whose specific encouragement of this idea during the long and arduous days bumping across Tibet in an ancient jeep helped to spur me on, and to "Ms. Sangeetha" of Bangalore, whose spirit and fearlessness during the journey set an example for our entire group of pilgrims.
- Dr. Mathai and the staff at Soukya International Holistic Health Centre ([www.soukya.com](http://www.soukya.com)) have also been patient as I use their computer and internet connections for Khagyun business (and at least occasionally for Soukya business.)
- Dr. Betty Bernhard, Professor of Theatre at Pomona College in Los Angeles, for many suggestions of potential funding sources, as well as her wish to use the dramatic stories we are gathering as the basis for a theatre piece.
- Maduri Rao in Bangalore for her donation of a still useful laptop computer.
- Simon Guerrand, Sharif and Tuti Horthy, and Daphne Tibbs who provided support for Khagyun and hospitality to me while I was in the UK.
- Emmy Award-winning videographer David Skillicorn in New Salem, Massachusetts ([www.sunrisemedia.org](http://www.sunrisemedia.org)) for his wise suggestions and his offer to provide free professional training to our videographers in the future.
- Kiran Ganguly in New Delhi for his shrewd and thoughtful suggestions.
- Andy Robinson at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont, for the trouble he took to gather the contacts he has generously provided.
- Many thanks to Jake (Cassidy) Sterling and Jillian Hensley in Boston for their help with this newsletter and Jake's willingness to be the "bag man" by processing donations from the USA.

[NEWS continued from page 5]

require a legally registered entity and a properly developed organizational structure. A third possibility is to work under the auspices of an existing Tibetan cultural organization or project which is legally registered and can receive funds on behalf of Khagyun. As long as our visions match closely enough and there is a reasonable level of independence, this remains a viable option.

Later this summer, I will be making a trip to Delhi and Dharamsala to make contact with various organizations to promote Khagyun's mission. It will also give me a chance to make contact with the official offices in Delhi and, hopefully, to return with a long-term "Protected Areas Permit" for the Tibetan settlements. These permits are used to restrict and administer areas in much the same way as the "tribal" areas of India. The process of applying for and receiving these permits is complicated and can take months. Acquiring a long-term permit valid for more than a week or two is a particularly challenging task.

A presentation-and-fundraising tour of the U.K. and North America is in the early planning stages. Stops in London, New York, Washington DC, Boston, Montreal and Toronto are very likely. If conditions allow it, we would also like to make presentations in Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, and perhaps Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. October and early November look promising. Help will be needed with locating a venue and doing some publicity in each location, so any suggestions will be appreciated.

## LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Khagyun has received letters of support from:

- Lama Doboomb Tulku, Director of Tibet House in New Delhi, India;
- Dr. Issac Mathai, CEO and Medical Director of Soukya International Holistic Health Centre in Whitefield, Bangalore, India
- Acharya Ngawang Nyima (Ven.), Principal and Director of the Sera Je Monastic Secondary School at Sera Je Monastery in Bylakuppe, India;
- Dr. William Sullivan, scholar and author of, *Secret of the Inca: Myth, Astronomy, and the War Against Time*. (Dr. Sullivan's letter is to the right.)

Dr. William Sullivan  
Historian, archaeoastronomer  
Easter Sunday, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

My friend Hillel Natanson has asked me to write in support of the project creating the Oral Archive of the Tibetan Diaspora. As a cultural historian with a specialty in Native American Studies (PhD. University of St. Andrews), I am familiar with the human misery that follows in the wake of cultural annihilation. It is this misery that the Tibetan Project seeks, at a minimum, to mitigate, by maintaining a continuity between a dying generation and those young people left to face an uncertain future. The recent tragic events in an Ojibway Indian community in Minnesota in the USA occurred in a family where the grandfather had been ripped from his own mother culture and forced into the dominant culture's reservation school. The role of Grandfather was destroyed and with it the means of cultural transmission.

In Tibetan culture there is an icon of the completed human being—imagined as a couple in ecstatic union—called the Marriage of Wisdom and Compassion. Many Westerners think that the "male" valence in this couple is Wisdom, but, of course, it's not. In the Old Testament "Wisdom was an angel who danced at the feet of the Lord." She had many names, Sophia, Beatrice and so on. Compassion is the "male" side of the awakened human. Compassion is action. Wisdom is knowing what to do. Compassion is doing it. I hope that a culture so filled with wisdom and compassion will survive, and find the compassion it so richly has earned at this difficult moment.

I have known Hillel Natanson for more than twenty-five years. More than almost anyone I have encountered, he has always aspired to be useful, most recently in his efforts on behalf of Doctor Isaac Mathai's International Health Conferences, where he has selflessly applied his expertise in computers and organization. It is typical of his modesty to describe his role in the Tibetan project as "coordinator and transcriber." If the project is funded, I have great confidence that the archive will be successfully created.

Sincerely yours,

William Sullivan  
Orange, Massachusetts, USA