

Venerable Lhakdor Visits SFU

—Trish Graham

Venerable Lhakdor was born in Yakra, Western Tibet, in 1956. He left Tibet in 1962 following the communist Chinese invasion of 1959. He received his monastic ordination in 1964, and in 1976 he joined the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, where he spent seven years in specialized study. In 1989 he received his Master of Madhyamika Buddhist Philosophy from the same institute, and his Master of Philosophy from the University of Delhi.

In August 1989 he joined the office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and is now his official translator and religious assistant, as well as Joint Secretary of the Private Office of the Dalai Lama. In these capacities, he has accompanied the Dalai Lama on many of his extensive visits throughout Europe, North America, Australia, Africa and Asia.

While Venerable Lhakdor ordinarily remains with the Dalai Lama, he was able to make a speaking tour in April of 2002 because of the Dalai Lama's being on extended retreat on doctors' orders. This marks the first time that a Secretary of the Private Office has agreed, with the blessing of the Dalai Lama, to travel to North America and to give a series of

lectures to the general public, sponsored locally by the Institute of Asian Research at UBC. On April 10, 2002, during his first visit to Canada, he spoke to SFU faculty, students and staff at the Halpern Centre.

Venerable Lhakdor told his audience at SFU that when the Dalai Lama travels and speaks to people, his focus is on three central issues: 1) he teaches that we need to break down the destructive barriers erected between peoples; we need to strive to see universal humanness in each other, rather than dwelling on the apparent differences in race, religion and gender; 2) we need to teach religious harmony. Religion must not be used as a weapon which creates suffering: no religion is the right religion for all peoples; 3) and lastly, the Dalai Lama focuses on Tibet and the need to preserve its culture, which is in great danger of extinction. In summary, his focus is on promoting positive ethical values and religious harmony, as well as preserving Tibetan culture.

Venerable Lhakdor went on to elaborate on what is meant by "positive ethical values." When one recognizes the interconnectedness of all life, he said, one takes more care. When one develops



Trish Graham and Venerable Lhakdor

ethical values that lead to positive and life-enhancing actions, one's behaviour has positive effects. Similarly, destructive actions have equally negative effects or reactions. We must take responsibility for everything that we do—or do not do—quite simply because we are not living as isolated or independent units, but rather live in a world where every action has a reaction. "Karma is not an external agent or force," said Venerable Lhakdor. "It is something you do."

We offer our thanks to Victor Chan, of the Institute of Asian Research, for arranging for the visit of Venerable Lhakdor to SFU. Victor Chan is currently in residence in Dharamsala, India, where the Dalai Lama lives, and is working with him on a forthcoming book.

Critical U

The Institute for the Humanities was pleased again to support the Fall 2002 12-week Critical U program. This program, subtitled 'Making a Space for Critical Dialogue in our Community', was held at Grandview Woodlands Britannia Community Centre.

The program's sponsors were the Vancouver Eastside Educational Enrichment Society (VEEES), Britannia Community Education Services, SFU Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University Student Society (SFSS) and the Vancouver Institute for Social Research and Education (VISRE).

The philosophy of Critical U is that popular education brings together the university and the wider community. Critical concepts are used to frame community issues and to create a setting where participants discuss issues such as pedagogy and co-operative learning; the environment; control: top-down? bottom up?; citizenship and democracy; citizenship, civil liberties and the law; capitalism and the market; globalization; co-operative alternatives; urban environment; language and everyday life; media and culture; and empowering individual communities.

Throughout the weeks, participants were involved in selecting and formulating

specific topics for the following weeks in this experiment in community education.

Participation was free and open to all. Instructors were faculty and students from Simon Fraser University as well as local community educators.