24th of April

It is 3 O' clock in the morning and we are up very early this morning. It is special day because we are going on a journey in a hired bus to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama!! He is visiting Sikkim for 5 days to give talks and to inaugurate some holy sites. We are leaving at 4 O'clock to Ravangla and the children are utterly excited. In Ravangla is a Tibetan refugee camp where a new Buddhist temple is being built which will be inaugurated by His Holiness today and he will also give a talk and a blessing.

We start to recite the different mantra's that the children have learnt as soon as the bus leaves and the kids are chanting full of enthusiasm. Their voices are so beautiful! After the devotional chants quickly follow the English and Nepali songs. Of course it doesn't take long on these winding mountain roads before the kids are hanging out of the windows…vomiting….

Lots of Buddhist monks with traditional long trumpets and drums and colorful banners are standing along the road in Ravangla to welcome His Holiness. In front of the entrance of the newly built temple stands a beautifully decorated throne on which His Holiness will take a seat to give a talk to the people. A couple of hundred of Tibetans are waiting patiently, sitting on the floor for His Holiness to arrive. It is beautiful to see how much admiration and devotion they have for their spiritual and political leader in exile.

We, teachers and children (all dressed in a clean blue schooluniform) sit down amongst the Tibetans with a white silk scarf in our folded hands, a custom in the Buddhist tradition to pay respect.

After waiting for an hour and a half do we hear the sound of trumpets and horns: a sign that the Dalai Lama is approaching.

He is walking amidst a group of security people and monks playing traditional instruments and some holding burning incense sticks which is symbolic for purifying the place. A colorful traditional parasol is held over His Holiness, symbolic for the protection the Buddhist doctrine gives against negativities in the mind.

Everybody stands up immediately with folded hands and bowed heads….hoping to get a good glimpse of His Holiness walking passed. Seeing the Dalai Lama is considered t be a huge blessing in itself.

Palla, our 60 years old Tibetan cook is sitting next to me with a very concentrated gaze fully focused on the Dalai Lama….tears in his eyes…so touching!

His Holiness speaks for almost 2 hours….it goes over the heads of most of us since we do not understand Tibetan…..but still….it is a wonderful experience and I am extremely happy that the children are able to see the Dalai Lama (may be just once in their lives!)

After all this we are having lunch and head back to the school, a long drive over the winding roads again….The kids are chattered and most of them are lying up and over each other sound asleep. Some sing some songs and every now and then a window

has to be opened in a rush again….there goes lunch….

Such a special day and so wonderful to receive so many blessings!

All the best and many blessings to you too!!

Hedwig