

The death of Henry Lau



Left: Henry Lau with Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, circa 2002.

Right: Henry and Catherine Lau and their sons with Lama Zopa Rinpoche, some thirteen years ago at Kopan Monastery. The elder boy on Henry's right is Feng-Yuan, and on Catherine's left is the younger son, Howie. Yuan is now working, and Howie is in his final year at law school in the UK.

In November 2007 Lama Zopa Rinpoche wrote to long-time student Henry Lau who was seriously ill and who has now passed. Rinpoche has asked that we all read this, especially those who are suffering a serious illness:

My very dear Henry,

Even non-Buddhists should prepare for death every day, and especially as practitioners we should all prepare like this – “Death is definitely going to happen” – rather than to think that I will have a longer life through operations. This doesn't mean not to have an operation; I just mean how to think.

1. For liberation from samsara and especially for enlightenment, as well as for all sentient beings, it is very good if you can read the “five powers at death time,” that I wrote recently.

2. Then also it is very good if you can play and listen to the recitation of the Arya Sangata Sutra if possible all the time – best version is the one I have recorded: www.fpmt.org/media/podcast/teachers/lama_zopa.asp

3. Also listen to and play the Golden Light Sutra ...

4. ... and the Diamond Cutter sutra, these could be one recited by myself or Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche: www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/default.asp#audio and www.fpmt.org/shop/product1.aspx?SID=1&Product_ID=1583&Category_ID=25&AFID=17

5. Also you can listen to the “Namo Amitabha” recording. The way Taiwanese chant this (that is, in a small box that plays continuously) is very good to uplift the mind. Listening to this fills the mind up, and you feel that there is nothing else in the world, except the Buddhist path. It creates the cause to be reborn in Amitabha Pure Land – maybe you will be the first bank manager in Amitabha Pure Land, HA HA!! Then from there you can help all the suffering sentient beings in this world, also all our projects, HA HA!!

6. So it is very good if you can chant this mantra: “*Whatever sufferings I have, may they ripen on me; whatever happiness*

I have, may it ripen on sentient beings.” This is Nagarjuna's teaching of thought transformation: Please keep reciting this. Also it is very good if [your wife] Catherine can recite to you to remind you, but best thing is if you can chant it yourself.

7. Also if you can chant this verse from the Guru Puja, this meditation and tong-len prayer:

Tong-len: Meditation on taking and giving

“And thus, venerable, compassionate gurus,

I seek your blessings that all karmic debts, obstacles, and sufferings of mother beings

May without exception ripen upon me right now,

And that I may give my happiness and virtue to others

And, thereby, invest all beings in bliss.”

Actually, this is the best Dharma gift, the best protection from delusion, the best protection from the terrifying lower realms, where there is so much unbelievable suffering. Doing this meditation and in this way taking on all the sufferings of all mother sentient beings, as well as all one's own sufferings on oneself. Then letting all sentient beings have the state of no death, enlightenment, the cessation of all sufferings. All the happiness, including enlightenment, all the merit I have, may this be ripened on all sentient beings

This practice should be entered into the Olympics, and if you win, then at death time you go to the Pure Land, instead of being reborn in the impure world, where we are now, or the

lower realms. This would be the best Olympic game. Dying with tong-len (bodhichitta) is best death, best Olympic game.

The other most challenging thing is to pray to be born in the suffering world, in order to help another sentient being, even to pray to be reborn in the lower realms to help others.

Definitely, you can think that you have nothing to be afraid of, including death or the lower realms, because Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have all the power and qualities to save you, so think that you can rely on them. This is taking refuge and thinking in this way can give you great release or peace at the time of death.

Definitely, I am praying for you, also all your Dharma friends are praying, as well as your business friends, we are praying for you, everybody who has received help from you, is praying for you, OK, don't worry.

Since I have met you, you have been thinking always how to help others. You have not been mean, or bad, or had harmful thoughts. Your life always went towards helping others, towards supporting virtuous projects, my projects, serving the Sangha, which has inconceivable merits.

Rejoice! Thank you!

With much love and prayers,
Lama Zopa

And here is Henry's reply:

Dearest Guru Lama Zopa,

Right now I think I have no issue with death. Also I will try as much as possible not to be attached to this body so that I can overcome death easier and die with the thought of bodhichitta.

Rinpoche, you always reminded all of us that death is certain but I want to fight this sickness so that I will have some extra time to fulfill your wishes and benefit others. Hopefully

with some extra time of practice and purification I can then qualify as 'first banker' to enter Amitabha Pure Land. Attachment still, ha ha ha!

*"Magnificent and precious root Guru
Please abide on the lotus, sun and moon
seat at my heart*

*Guide me with your great kindness
And please remain stable, without
separation from my body, speech and
mind until I attain enlightenment."*

Love, Henry

Henry later reported from his hospital bed:

"I first met Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1986. He stayed with us for about two weeks. Somehow we lost touch, but later our paths crossed again. I had met Tan Hup Cheng, with whom Rinpoche was trying to set up an FPMT center in Singapore. This was during the late 1980s when I was asked to re-organize a Private Banking Centre for a local bank in Singapore. It was then that I started helping with the Sera Food Fund and I used to go to Kopan quite often to meet up with Rinpoche. From then on, with his guidance, I began helping with Wisdom Publications and subsequently the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archives.

"Right now, I am involved with a few projects, including Drati Khangtsen Building Project, Jade Buddha and Lama Zopa Endowment Fund. I hope to fulfill this vision as soon as possible and some of these are in their final stages."

Mandala is also very grateful to Henry Lau for his generous support of this magazine. Vale, Henry.

Guru devotion

Is one's aspiration

Which should not be loosened

Even in time of desperate dereliction

Henry Lau Hwee Tiang, a banker, organizer, golfer, squash player, friend, son, brother, father, husband and Buddhist, who never stopped living until the end, passed away peacefully on February 9, 2008, aged 61.

By Henry's elder son, Feng-Yuan

Henry passed away at an age which is fairly young by today's standards, but he led a full life. It is as if he squeezed twice as much activity into the 61 years that he had. Even throughout his illness he would continue working, whether on Buddhist projects or making sure that certain business transactions entrusted to him were completed. At first we tried to slow him down, but we realized that it was part of who he was, and that he refused to live life with an idle moment. And when he decided not to do any more chemotherapy, because it made it difficult for him to live life to the fullest, we understood why.

But my dad was also a very social and fun-loving person. He loved to be in the company of friends and good food. He was also a perpetual organizer: organizing lunches, golf games and golf trips for his friends. He got himself onto the club green committees, management committees of our apartment and school advisory boards. He loved his regular squash and golf games. My dad had this great ability to make friends and he cherished his friendships, whether they were old friends from his youth or new people he'd made a connection with. In the last few days the number of people who have told us that they had been touched or helped by my dad has moved us. Bank colleagues who have told us he helped them get started in their career or guided them along, friends who have told us that he helped them when they were troubled, and others who simply remember him as a kind person who always had a smile.

This idea of always trying to help others, or bodhichitta, was something

that my dad as a Buddhist tried to pursue. He was involved in many different projects over his lifetime, contributing to the Sera Food Fund and Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archives and more recently, the Drati Khangtsen monastery project, Lama Zopa Endowment Fund and the Jade Buddha project. And in each of them his motivation was really to help as many people as possible. His Dharma practice was very important in dealing with his illness and death. In his final days we could see him getting rid of all attachment to worldly objects and events. In the final moments, he was gazing intently at the *thangkas* of various Buddhas by his bedside, and we could see he was doing his Dharma practice up till the last moment before closing his eyes peacefully.

My father was a wonderful son, husband and father. He was never very vocal in his affection, and taught us all to be independent, but was always there to support us and guide us in the decisions we chose to make. But he never hesitated to tell us if he thought we were wrong.

I would also like to thank all the people who have helped my father and our family during these difficult times. There were many Buddhist groups and individuals who prayed for my father, chief among them was Amithaba Buddhist Centre. My dad was very fortunate to have the guidance of many wonderful gurus: Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Lati Rinpoche, Khen Rinpoche and Dagri Rinpoche prayed for him and sent much advice on coping with his illness. Geshe Chonyi, Geshe Tenzin Zopa, Ven. Sean Price, Ven. Tenzin Palzang, Ven. Tenzin Gyumey, Tan Hup Cheng, Fred Chong, David Jian, Wee Sin Tho and Wee Geok Hwa, Clarence Khoo, Pang Mui Cheng and Valerie Jacob were there to help provide support during this difficult period for us.

To all his friends and former colleagues, who are too numerous to name, thank you for your friendship

and all your well-wishes which kept Henry positive and filled with energy even as he was battling his cancer.

My father wrote a poem when he was ill, entitled "Fly Getwell Airline 2007," which I think encapsulates much of his beliefs and attitudes.

Fly Getwell Airline 2007

There is only one airline
Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche would
want you to fly
Better than boarding SIA
(Singapore Airlines)
This airline is owned by you and me

What bigger shareholdings
can you ever see
Got it for free, yet fulfills your
guru's wishes
Bodhichitta Airways is one you want
to board, no missing

For the sick like me, for all you
sentient beings
Bodhichitta is both medicine
and panacea
Removing all obstacles and desire
Unwanted habits and conditioning

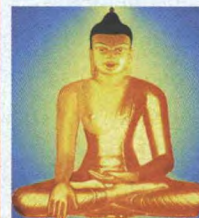
Practicing every day incessantly
Easier than tong-len and
self-cherishing ego
Zillion times one can freely let go
How powerful that can generate
Why wait, now venerate

Let us all fly fast
No more calling the guru from afar
He is onboard every day and no
flight delay
What better way than Bodhichitta
Airways

Soon you renounce and all three
harnessed
Attain wisdom, understanding,
emptiness

Realizing Arya Bodhisattva hovering
above the clouds
You do visualize from flight when
looking out
Your guru smiling
Your heart pitter patterring. ☸

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"It has truly changed my life"

- Grant A (Toongabbie)

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