



25 YEARS SINCE LAMA'S PASSING:

Mandala celebrates his life and work through

Intimate Reflections on the Early Days of FPMT

Twenty-five years ago, Lama Thubten Yeshe, a unique Tibetan lama committed to transmitting Mahayana Buddhism to his growing number of Western students, passed away in California. Over fifteen fruitful years of working with Westerners (beginning in the late 1960s in India and Nepal) Lama Yeshe, (“Lama” to his students), established thirty centers and twenty projects in thirteen countries. He named his burgeoning organization the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). Currently spiritually directed by Lama Yeshe’s heart disciple, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, FPMT has approximately 150 centers, projects and services in over thirty countries – extending far beyond the Western scope.

Lama Yeshe’s success with the early Western students was due, in part, to his keen understanding of the sensitive, strong, concrete tendencies of the Western mind and the “super samsaric” Western world. He taught that the essence of Buddhism is a universal teaching of non-duality not to be confined to any Eastern cultural trappings, a hard message for many early students who hoped to try on new cultures as counter options to their own.

Young Westerners coming of age in the ’60s were grappling with the realities of war and social discord while navigating a world in transition. Students, politicians, artists and seekers of all varieties were experimenting with new ways of deconstructing and interpreting their inner and outer worlds, and were proposing alternatives to the dominant conservative cultural models found in education,

politics, lifestyle, laws, entertainment and spirituality. Many young Westerners, disillusioned with and burnt out by revolution, simply wanted to disengage with Western social norms completely and traveled to the East for answers. Some of these young people found their answers and direction in the charismatic Lama Thubten Yeshe and his austere young disciple, Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

These early students of “the Lamas,” self-diagnosed “out of control Westerners from around the world,” had found a home in Buddhism and subsequently gave their body, speech and mind to helping form centers and communities committed to establishing Buddhism amidst an “explosion of the dualistic delusion,” as coined by Lama Yeshe. Recognizing that this Western interest in the Dharma “was something very special,” Lama Yeshe literally offered his life to his students and the abolition of their “ego trips.”

This special issue of *Mandala*, “Intimate Reflections on the Early Days of FPMT,” aims to honor a great Tibetan Buddhist master, Lama Thubten Yeshe, whose contributions to the proliferation of Dharma in the West cannot be measured. We’ll transmit the story of FPMT’s origins directly from Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and we’ll travel back in space and time with some of the early pioneering students who paved the way for future generations of Buddhists all over the world. We hope to uncover what it was *really* like in the early days of FPMT when Lama Yeshe was among us, and then, what it meant to lose him.

All unspecified photos courtesy of Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive

ORIGINS OF FPMT

The Very Beginning: Lama Thubten Yeshe, Founder of FPMT

The origins of FPMT can be traced to the birth of Lama Thubten Yeshe, born close to Lhasa, Tibet in 1935. Clearly a special child, he was soon recognized as the incarnation of a great yogini, Ache Jampa, the learned abbess of Rakor Gompa, near Chimelung, a popular pilgrimage spot and home to about one hundred nuns of the Gelug tradition.

As a young boy, Lama Yeshe spent many days at the nunnery attending various ceremonies and religious functions. At his parents' home he was taught the alphabet, grammar and reading by his uncle, Ngawang Norbu, who studied at Sera Monastery.

From a very early age he expressed the desire to lead a religious life. Whenever a monk would visit his home he would plead to leave with him and join a monastery. Finally, when he was six years old, he received his parents' permission to join Sera Je, a college at one of the three great Gelug monastic universities located in the vicinity of Lhasa. He lived there with over 10,000 monks, under the charge of an uncle who was also a monk there. At the age of eight, he was ordained as a novice monk by the Venerable Purchog Jampa Rinpoche.

Lama Yeshe lived under the rigorous monastic discipline of Sera Je until he was twenty-five years old. There he received spiritual instruction based on the educational traditions brought from India to Tibet over a thousand years ago. From Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, the Junior Tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, he received teachings on the lam-rim, the graduated path to enlightenment. In addition, he received many tantric initiations and discourses from both the Junior and Senior Tutors to His Holiness the Dalai



1972



Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Lama Thubten Yeshe



Lama, as well as from Drag-ri Dorje Chang Rinpoche, Song Rinpoche, Lhatzun Dorje Chang Rinpoche, and many other great gurus and meditation masters. In addition, he studied the famous Six Yogas of Naropa, following a commentary based on the personal experiences of Lama Tsongkhapa.

This phase of his education ended in 1959 when, as Lama Yeshe explained, “the Chinese kindly told us that it was time to leave Tibet and meet the outside world.” Escaping through Bhutan, he eventually reached northeast India where he met up with many other Tibetan refugees. In spite of considerable difficulties in such an alien environment, these Tibetans continued their studies at the settlement camp of Buxa Duar. While in Tibet, Lama Yeshe had already received instruction in *Prajnaparamita* (the Perfection of Wisdom), Madhyamaka philosophy and logic. In India his education continued with courses in the vinaya rules of discipline and the abhidharma system of metaphysics. In addition Tenzin Gyaltzen, the Kunu Lama, gave him teachings on Shantideva’s

Bodhisattvacharyavatara (*Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*) and Atisha’s *Bodhipathapradipa* (*Lamp of the Path to Enlightenment*). He attended additional tantric initiations and discourses and, at the age of twenty-eight, received full monk’s ordination from Kyabje Ling Rinpoche.

It was here in Buxa Duar in 1962, that a young disciplined lama, called Zopa Rinpoche, came to Lama Yeshe as a disciple. Nine years younger than his teacher, Zopa Rinpoche was the reincarnation of the Lawudo Lama, Kunzang Yeshe, an accomplished and realized Sherpa lama from the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal. Educated at the Dung-kar Monastery in southern Tibet, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, too, had fled his country.

The special relationship that would grow between these two lamas would benefit countless others and play a great part in fulfilling the prophecy of the eighth-century Tibetan saint, Padmasambhava, that “when iron birds fly, and horses run on wheels, Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the face of the earth and the Dharma will come to the land of the redskins.”

How We Started Teaching Dharma to Westerners

By Lama Thubten Yeshe

I began teaching Westerners in the late 1960s. At that time I was based at the Tibetan refugee camp of Buxa [Duar], West Bengal, India, where I’d lived since 1959, following the Chinese invasion of Tibet. Lama Zopa Rinpoche was one of my students there and from his time in Tibet had a connection with the monks of Samten Chöling Monastery at Ghoom, near Darjeeling. They invited us to come there for a holiday, which was the first one I’d had since arriving at the Buxa [Duar] “concentration camp.”

So there we were, and one morning a monk knocked at our door and said, “Lama Zopa’s friend has come to see him.” It was Zina Rachevsky, a Russian American woman, who was supposed to be a princess or something.

She said that she’d come to the East seeking peace and liberation, and asked me how they could be found. I was kind of shocked because I’d never expected Westerners to be interested in liberation or enlightenment. For me, that was a first. I thought, “This is something strange but very special.” Of course, I did have some idea of what Westerners were, but obviously it was a Tibetan projection! So, despite my surprise I thought I should check to see if she was really sincere or not.

I started to answer her questions as best I could, according to my ability, but after an hour she said she had to go back to where she was staying in Darjeeling, about thirty minutes away by jeep. However, as she was leaving she asked, “Can I come back tomorrow?” I said, “All right.”



So she came back at the same time the next day and again asked various questions, which I tried to answer. Somehow she got some kind of message from the teachings I gave her, became very enthusiastic, and again asked if she could come back the following day.

In this way she came for teachings every day for a week or more. Finally she said, “It’s very expensive for me to come here every day by jeep. Could you please come to stay at my place and give teachings there?”

At first I was a little bit scared; I didn’t quite know what to make of this Western lady. But her sincerity made me believe in her and encouraged me to go, so I said OK and Lama Zopa and I moved to her house. She lived in the main cottage and we stayed in a small hut outside, in the garden, quite separate from where she lived.

We gave her lessons every day, from about nine or ten o’clock until midday, which she liked very much, and finished up spending about nine months there; quite a long time. Then she had visa problems and got into trouble with the Indian police.

She was a very strong character, an unusually strong woman, and told the police that they were pigs and should stay away from her place. This rather annoyed them and they tried to hassle her but there wasn’t much they could do until they decided to label her a Russian spy. Then they put a lot of pressure on her and kicked her out of Darjeeling.



She finished up having to leave India and went to Ceylon. She wanted Lama Zopa and me to go with her to continue teaching her Dharma and meditation, but in order to travel we needed His Holiness the Dalai Lama's permission and some kind of refugee document from the Indian government. It took about a year to organize all that, but we finally got His Holiness' permission and an Identity Certificate through the Tibetan Bureau in New Delhi and we were ready to go.

Zina came up from Ceylon to meet us in New Delhi but in the meantime had decided to become a nun. I thought that was a good idea but since according to the vinaya, novice ordination requires the participation of at least four monks in addition to the preceptor, Lama Zopa and I couldn't do it ourselves, so we went to Dharamsala to ask His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He couldn't do it either but arranged for some other lamas to ordain her and in that way Zina became a nun.

For some reason I felt uneasy about going to Ceylon so I suggested to Zina that we go to Nepal instead. It was close to Tibet and beautiful, peaceful and quiet. Environment is very important and I thought that since Zina was now a nun she needed to be where she could lead a simple life. Taking ordination alone is not enough; after leaving life in the big samsara

you need time to adjust to life as a monk or nun and your surroundings are very important in this.

Zina agreed, so the three of us went to Nepal. After a while her friends started coming to us for teachings and after we'd been in Nepal for a couple of years, we moved to Kopan. She kept requesting that we give a group meditation course, so in March 1971 Lama Zopa finally gave the first Kopan course and that was really the beginning of our involvement in the Western world.

So you can see that we started off slowly. We thought teaching Dharma to Westerners would be beneficial but we didn't hurriedly push; it was a gradual evolution. We took our time observing and checking intensively whether Buddhism worked for the Western mind or not. When we were confident that it did, we offered our first course. About twenty people attended the first couple of courses and then the numbers kept doubling until about two hundred and fifty people came to the sixth. After that it leveled out at around two hundred.

So that's how we started teaching Dharma to Westerners.

This interview, along with a second interview with Lama Yeshe on the origins of FPMT centers, Bringing Dharma to the West, is available on DVD from Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive: www.lamayeshe.com.

How the Kopan Courses Began *By Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

You may not have heard of the great lama Kachen Yeshe Gyaltzen [1713–93, tutor of the Eighth Dalai Lama] but like the sun illuminating the world, he was well known in Tibet and offered unbelievable benefit to sentient beings and the Buddhadharmas. Even now his teachings benefit the world. I have spoken before about how the Kopan meditation courses started but actually, it was Kachen Yeshe Gyaltzen's teachings that inspired them.

The Kopan courses also came from Lama Yeshe, who was kinder than the numberless buddhas of the past, present and future. Why was Lama kinder than the buddhas, whose only purpose in achieving enlightenment was to liberate us sentient beings from the ocean of samsaric suffering and its cause, delusion and karma, and bring us to enlightenment?

Even though all these buddhas exist, we don't have the karma to see them. For example, from my side, I can't see the numberless past, present and future buddhas or deities in their pure aspect because my mind is blanketed by impure karma. Therefore I can't receive direct guidance from them. However, by

their manifesting according to my level of mind in human form as Lama Yeshe, in an ordinary aspect showing mistakes and faults that my obscured mind can perceive, I can receive their guidance directly.

One highly attained Tibetan geshe practitioner mentioned in his lam-rim teachings that one way to meditate on guru devotion is to imagine having fallen into a deep pit full of red-hot coals and desperately wanting to get out. The people above have thrown down a rope; if you hang onto it with total trust and complete reliance, you'll be able to get out. In this analogy, the pit is samsara, the people throwing down the rope are the three-time buddhas, and the rope is the guru in ordinary aspect.

When we do this meditation we should consider our gurus as the rope and single-pointedly put our complete trust in them. If we do that we can get out. If we don't hold the rope firmly, if we don't devote to the guru with complete reliance, but instead have doubt and keep examining him with a superstitious mind, then even though numberless buddhas are trying to help us, we can't

be guided. Even though all the buddhas have compassion and loving-kindness for us and constantly want to liberate us from samsara, if we don't have devotion for our guru there's no way they can help us out. So that's a great way to practice guru devotion meditation.

However, I should finish the story of the Kopan courses. It seems that Lama Yeshe and I had very strong karma with teaching Dharma to Westerners. We taught them for many years and then our connections gradually extended to Hong Kong and Singapore. Taiwan and Malaysia came much later. All this started with our first Western student, Zina Rachevsky.

People called her Princess Rachevsky because her father was somehow connected with Russian royalty but he fled the revolution for Paris, where Zina was born [in 1931]. She led a varied life all over the world, sometimes rich, sometimes poor; for a while she was a model, perhaps in Hollywood, although I'm not sure about that.

In the early 1960s the hippie era exploded into existence and Zina came across the writings of the German author, Lama Govinda, who in Tibet had met the great yogi Domo Geshe Rinpoche, the former life of the one who passed away in the United States in 2001. The former Domo Geshe Rinpoche built the Domo Dungkar Gumpa in southern Tibet, where I became a monk; I didn't become a monk in Solu Khumbu. This great yogi lived in forests and caves until a wealthy family invited him to come and live in their shrine room. After a year he asked the family if they would build a monastery, and that's how the Domo Gumpa began. That monastery also had many branches in India and Tibet, especially in the Darjeeling area.

Lama Govinda wrote several books, including *The Way of the White Clouds*, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* and books on Buddhist psychology. In those early hippie days there were very few Tibetan Buddhist books in Western languages. In English there were [Evans-Wentz's] *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa* and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, for example, and later there was a very good book by an English writer who lived in Thailand [John Blofeld's *The Wheel of Life: The Autobiography of a Western Buddhist*]. Zina read about Domo Geshe Rinpoche in *The Way of the White Clouds*.

The hippies were rebelling against Western society and searching for alternatives, a new way of life, something more spiritual, you might even say the truth, the Dharma, and many came to India and Nepal. However, what happens and whom you meet when you come to the East is totally up to your karma. You might be looking for something meaningful but what you find is up to karma.

Many of those people were taking drugs, but in some cases drugs could have been the Buddha's skillful means to help break those people's concepts. They had such unbelievably fixed minds, fixed ideas – strong, unchangeable beliefs that there was just this one life; no understanding that the mind can exist without the body. Their thinking was unbelievably gross. People like this needed something external to break their concepts and enable them to see things more deeply. Drugs gave them many experiences such as the mind being able to travel without the body, which shocked and surprised them, because it was completely opposite to what was taught and believed in the West.

This led many people to come to the East, looking for something to give meaning to their lives. They gave up ideas of wealth and a materialistic life and went to India. First they were more likely to meet Hindu gurus, and if they had no karma to meet Buddhism they either stayed with them or drifted into something else. But if they did have the karma, they would eventually come into contact with Buddhadharmas, and of course, some actually met the Buddhadharmas from the beginning.

Roger [Kunsang, FPMT's CEO], for example, first went to Rishikesh. He stayed there for a while but met a sadhu who told him to go to Kopan. It's interesting how individuals' karma plays out. Roger's swami told him to go to Kopan, which is very unusual – most teachers try to get people to follow their own tradition, not send them somewhere else. Of course, we don't know who that swami really was!

Buxa [Duar], where many of the Tibetan refugee monks stayed when they first came out of Tibet, used to be a prison when the British ruled India. Gandhi-ji and Nehru were held there for a while. At one time there were 1,500 monks at Buxa [Duar]. Some of them stayed ten or eleven years; I was there for eight. Monks who wanted to study went to Buxa [Duar]; those who wanted to work were sent out to build roads near the Tibetan border or other places.

Because I had TB, I often had to go to Darjeeling for treatment and I used to stay in Domo Geshe's monastery in Ghoom, near the Ghoom railway station. I also lived there for a long time with Lama and the monk who took care of me in Tibet, who was originally from Domo Dungkar Gumpa.

One day one of the young monks saw Zina outside and, thinking she might be my friend, brought her to our room. He opened the door and said, "Here's your friend," and in came the blond-haired Zina, wearing a Tibetan dress and a sweater that she'd probably bought at the Darjeeling railway station.

She asked Lama some questions, he answered, and I tried to translate as best I could with my broken English –



THE EARLY DAYS OF FPMT



First Kopan course, 1971



Zina Rachevsky with the Lamas in Darjeeling, 1967



1971

Kopan, 1973



well, it's still broken! For the next month she came for teachings by car from Darjeeling every morning at nine or ten, with her baby daughter and a Nepalese nanny in tow, and then asked us to move to her house.

We stayed there for nine months and every morning Zina came for teachings. She'd get up early looking like a sixty-year-old woman, spend a couple of hours in the bathroom, and come out looking like a sixteen-year-old girl! Although she came for teachings she'd spend much of the time telling us stories of her adventures in various parts of the world.

Then she went to Sri Lanka for a year and came back with the idea of starting a Mahayana center there. She wanted us to go back with her, but to do that we needed travel documents and permission from the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government. We went from Buxa [Duar] to Calcutta to meet her and stayed at the Theravada guesthouse there. At that time relations between India and the Soviet Union were not good and although Zina was not a spy, she acted like one. Wherever we went we were trailed by Indian agents!

In Dharamsala we requested His Holiness to ordain Zina but he didn't have time so he asked Lati Rinpoche to do it, which he did at what is now Tushita Meditation Centre. Just before that time, our root guru, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, who had lived there seven years, had moved down near the Tibetan Library and the place was a bit empty, like a haunted house. Then we went to Delhi to go to Sri Lanka, but some difficulties arose and Lama decided that we should go to Nepal instead.

We stayed at Chini Lama's place for the next year or so. I think he was Chinese but the story I heard was that he had been sent by the Tibetan government to take care of the Boudha stupa because of its strong connection with Tibet. Many years ago a woman had undertaken the task of building

this stupa but passed away when it was only about half done; however, her four sons undertook the job of completing it. One prayed to become a Dharma king to spread the teachings in Tibet; another to become a minister to help the king; the next to become an abbot to pass on the lineage of the vows; and the fourth prayed to become a powerful yogi to pacify any obstacles that arose in the dissemination of Dharma throughout Tibet. What happened? In their next lives their prayers came true.

When the first monastery was being built at Samye in southern Tibet, whatever the people built by day, spirits tore down at night. This happened many times. So the king, Trisong Detsen, invited the powerful yogi Padmasambhava from India to subdue these spirits. He manifested as a deity, hooked and subdued the spirits, and made them vow not to harm but to protect the Buddhadharma in Tibet. He did this not only around Samye but wherever they were in Tibet.

As a result, Buddhism was sustained in Tibet for many centuries. The main goal of the government and the people was always to preserve and spread the Dharma. Consequently Tibet gave rise to many bodhisattvas and enlightened beings. And when the communist Chinese colonized Tibet, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many great, learned lamas were able to leave Tibet, reestablish monasteries, educate thousands of monks and produce many qualified teachers. Every year, those qualified teachers go to different countries, especially the West, to teach the Dharma to hundreds of thousands of people all over the world. Even in the FPMT, there are many people who can teach Dharma and introduce it to others. So this benefit received by everybody, including us, is due to the kindness of Padmasambhava, who purified Tibet, allowing the Dharma to be established and last such a long time, and the power of the Boudha stupa and the prayers made to it.

So, Zina read Lama Govinda, came to India looking for Domo Geshe Rinpoche, was directed to the Ghoom Monastery and met a monk who thought she was my friend and brought her to us. Thus we started teaching Dharma to Westerners. So in one way you can say that all this started – Kopan courses, our spreading Dharma in the West, the FPMT – because of Zina and our having met her.

Ang Nyima gave me Kachen Yeshe Gyaltzen's great lojong text, Lojong Chenmo [also called Losang Gongyen], which is basically a lam-rim text but greatly elaborated in the lojong section. He also offered Lama Yeshe the Heruka Body Mandala commentary written by Dagpo Rinpoche, Pabongka Rinpoche's root guru, and ever since then Lama was always reading the completion stage of that practice.

Before being given this book I'd been memorizing texts, usually the ones we studied for debate, but I hadn't received

Kopan grows while other centers begin ...

In addition to hosting the yearly November meditation courses, Kopan Monastery served as the winter residence of the young monks from Mount Everest Center for Buddhist Studies, a monastic school officially opened in 1972 for the local Sherpa boys in Lawudo. During that same year, Tushita Retreat Centre (now, Tushita Meditation Centre) opened in response to the growing demand from Western students for teachings. Opened as the sister center to Kopan Monastery, it was intended to be used for retreats and was located in McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala, home to many of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachers.

Since 1971, the yearly November course has welcomed students from around the world and opened countless hearts to the Dharma.

teachings on or studied the lam-rim. The first lam-rim teaching I received was *Liberation In the Palm of Your Hand* from my root guru, HH Trijang Rinpoche. After that I was very inspired to teach Dharma.

Around 1970 we went to Bodhgaya to receive a Yamantaka commentary from His Holiness the Dalai Lama's senior tutor, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche. At that time there was a Scottish Zen monk there giving a one-week meditation course, so we went along with Zina. She liked to see lots of lamas to ask them questions or just talk, so because of her we got to meet several lamas of other traditions, like Kalu Rinpoche, Chetsang Rinpoche, the Karmapa and others. Lama would tell her what to ask and she would then ask them that question.

At this point Zina asked Lama at least twice to conduct a meditation course at Kopan but Lama refused. However, I had the inspiration to do it. Later on she asked me and I asked Lama what he thought. Lama said that if I thought it beneficial I should go ahead. So I led a five-day course [March 1971] and several Western people came.

An Organization is Born

In 1975, during an eight-and-a-half month tour of nine countries – the most extensive Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche would ever make – four new centers were created bringing the total number up to twelve. Back at Kopan, reflecting on the success of the tour, Lama Yeshe said, “We need an organization to keep this together.”

But organizing this motley group of Western non-traditionalists now running his centers wouldn't be an easy task.

“Some hippies reject organizing themselves; they reject. They are stupid. They don't understand. They are not organized themselves in their own lives, besides so many people benefit.... We have not landed on the moon; we are living on Earth in the twentieth century. Everybody lives in a certain environment with a certain structure. We should too, otherwise we'll get confused. Therefore I have put forward guidelines to show how our centers should be. In a place where hundreds of people are involved, we are responsible for using their lives in a worthwhile way instead of wasting their time. So we have to organize....”

Thus Lama Yeshe summoned together nine of his senior students to discuss the coordination of this rapidly growing Dharma network. He called this group the Council for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (CPMT). The council would constitute the

There was a two-page handout outlining the meditation subjects: one or two lines on the perfect human rebirth, five lines on the suffering of the lower realms, a few lines on karma ... something to serve as a basis for the teaching. On the fifth day, out of the kindness of Lama Yeshe and Kachen Yeshe Gyaltzen, I talked about bodhichitta.

One English guy who was there didn't want me to stop teachings so he took the clock off my table. After teaching Zina and I would go to eat in Lama's room. I think that very first course was the only one Zina attended. She was completely astonished at the teachings. I can't imitate the way she expressed herself but she was very happy, sort of completely amazed. As a result, the second course happened [March 1972]. Actually, it all came from Kachen Yeshe Gyaltzen's teachings, the *Lojong Chenmo*, *The Great Thought Transformation* text.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave this teaching in Singapore, January, 2009. Edited from the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive by Nicholas Ribush. Further edited here for space.

executive body of the organization and through regular meetings could deliberate on issues and developments within the individual centers which collectively became known as the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). As Lama Yeshe explained:

“It is a good idea to come together, to meet together at the same job, directing our energy towards the same goal. Thus it is important that we meet each other. We must be harmonious, and understand and respect each other's jobs. Then we are unified: one mandala, one job, harmony. If our center directors are disharmonious and do not respect each other they serve as bad examples; mutual disrespect among our directors becomes the source of bad vibrations, which emanate around the world. Our aim is to spread good vibrations. The only reason we have established centers is for us to give our body, speech and mind to others. Therefore it is really important that center directors regard each other as brothers and sisters and help each other. If one center is experiencing problems, the others must help. We have to share with each other, learn from each other. Until we open our hearts to each other we'll never learn.”

The first international meeting of the CPMT was held at Manjushri Institute in 1978 and attended by about twenty-five delegates from around the world.

For a more detailed account of Lama Yeshe's early comments on the structure of CPMT and FPMT, please see Wisdom Magazine 2, 1984.



Beginnings of the FPMT Sangha, IMI

For 2,500 years, the Buddhist Sangha (ordained monks and nuns) has been the heart of Buddhist communities around the world. As Lama Yeshe's and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's influence spread to more and more students and deepened among their existing students, ordination rose for some as a compelling path to deep and sustained practice. In December 1973, Lama Yeshe gathered into his room ten prospective monks and nuns, together with five students who had already ordained, and, for the first time, offered advice to his Sangha community as a group:

"I think we should create a community specifically for Western Sangha. But don't think I am just talking about the fifteen of you in this room. You can imagine what's going to happen. Now we have this Sangha; after the next meditation course there will be more. Then after the next one, more again. After some time we might become 100,000 strong! It's possible. I mean, Dharma wisdom is there, isn't it? It's possible. Therefore, we need somehow to develop strong togetherness, and in that way we'll be able to practice Dharma easily, without

being overwhelmed by agitated worldly conditions."¹

In 1974, Lama Yeshe established the International Mahayana Institute (IMI) in order to develop a community empowered to respond to, and take care of, the needs of its family of monks and nuns.

Though some of the early ordained students did eventually give back their robes, their dedication to Buddhism remained strong. FPMT owes a debt of gratitude to many of these early students who still serve in critical roles today within the organization, as teachers, directors, scholars and translators, among many other paths of service.

IMI has endured and its current mission is to support the community of FPMT monks and nuns through the development of quality education programs, harmonious monastic communities, effective communications, financial support and advocacy.

Please see: imisangha.org for more information

¹ Quoted from *Advice for Monks and Nuns*, by Lama Thubten Yeshe, available for free at: www.lamayeshe.com/index.php?sect=article&cid=252&chid=502

Highlights from the Early History of the FPMT Sangha

1968 Zina Rachevsky becomes the first Western woman to be ordained in the Gelug lineage.

1971 Kopan Monastery becomes the first monastic community established by Lama Thubten Yeshe.

1974 A group of ten Western students take ordination in Bodhgaya, India, in January. These new monastics join the five previously ordained Western monks and nuns at Kopan Monastery forming the first Western community. A program of study and meditation is offered. Lama Yeshe names the community International Mahayana Institute.

1976 An IMI branch is established in Dharamsala, India where monks and nuns undertake study and retreat. Lama Yeshe offers rabjung ordination to seven people at Chenrezig Institute, the first time the ceremony had ever been performed in Australia. One year later, the first getsul ordination was performed in Australia by Lama Yeshe, Geshe Loden, Zasep Tulku, and Jhampa Zangpo.

1978 The IMI Council is established to oversee finances, personal records, education, monastic conduct and membership, and the first IMI bulletin is produced. Lama Yeshe moves many of his activities to Manjushri Institute in the UK, including IMI. Twenty-five monks and nuns study in the Geshe Training Program and the first financial assistance plan is offered by IMI to help those in the program.

1979 In a revolutionary proposal, Lama Yeshe invites a Tibetan nun, Ven. Tsenla, to join Kopan Monastery and study with the monks. There were Western nuns then at Kopan, but Ven. Tsenla was the first local nun.

1981 Ven. Elizabeth Drukier, director of Institut Vajra Yogini in France, buys an old manor farmhouse in the countryside, in Marzens, near the institute, in response to Lama Yeshe's appeal for a place for the IMI Sangha.

1982 Lama Yeshe establishes the farmhouse Ven. Elisabeth purchased the year prior as Nalanda Monastery, the first Western monastery. Initially meant for nuns, Lama decides to offer it to monks.

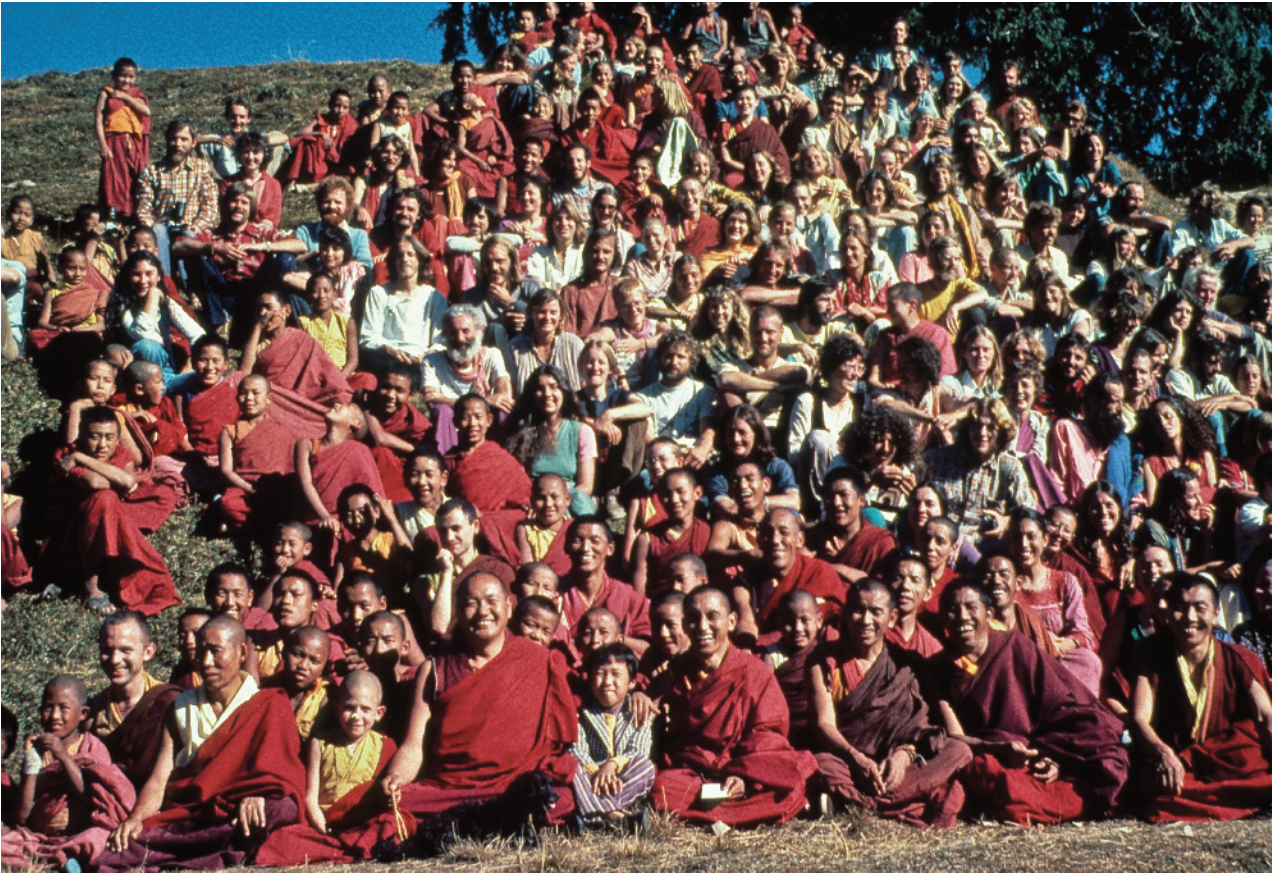
Lama Yeshe organizes the first Enlightened Experience Celebration in India, with his monks and nuns in mind. Over one hundred IMI Sangha attended, along with up to 700 laypeople. The five-month series of teachings, initiations and retreats were given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Song Rinpoche, Ling Rinpoche, Serkong Rinpoche, as well as Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

By **1983** the International Mahayana Institute had over one hundred ordained Sangha members.

Today, there are approximately 1,000 monks and nuns in the FPMT family.



THE EARLY DAYS OF FPMT



Kopan, 1980



1974 ordination

Puja, Lama Style

In 1982 Lama Yeshe visited his family in Tibet. His Australian citizenship was the key to actualizing plans he had before leaving the country. He knew the Chinese had banned religious displays and gatherings of Tibetans. "But I am foreigner, so they can't say too much to me."

On August 23, 1982, Lama Yeshe held a Heruka Lama Chöpa Puja in the forecourt of the Jokhang Temple in the heart of Lhasa, with the Chinese standing by.

"I wore my robes this day and we made 1,300 tsong offerings in my friend's house – as much tsampa, butter and yak cheese as we can buy. We brought them to the temple by Chinese tractor. I asked the temple manager to arrange things, which he did, even though gathering is criminal. I invited all my Western friends in Lhasa and one Indian girl from Bombay who speaks English very well. Afterwards they shake my hand and say: "Today we had the best time in Tibet. You are the person who brings the world together."

"The Tibetans were very impressed the *Injies* were there. Me, I am totally satisfied and grateful that I have opportunity to offer puja. I told my family they should come as I will be doing my death puja, also for my parents who died and for so many others. So they all came. I told them that when I am dead, they should not offer even one candle, that this is my final death puja, now.

"It was the first time since 1959 they are having Lama Chöpa at the Jokhang. They put it in the newspaper. More than five hundred people came, just by hearing about it. I make them all sit down because otherwise they push and rush. They don't need paper, they remember how to chant puja, but are too scared to organize something by themselves. Ten lamas came and the puja was maybe three, four hours long. One boy, Jampa Trinley's son, acted as attendant to me. He told me Chinese came and took photos. I don't care, I'm not hiding anything. In puja tears coming to me because in Tibet so much knowledge wisdom has disappeared."

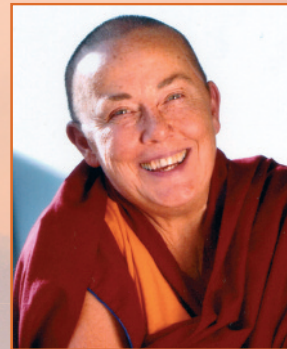
Lama Yeshe flew out of Lhasa the day after the puja. From *Big Love*, the forthcoming biography of Lama Yeshe.

Chasing Buddha Pilgrimage

Ninth ANNUAL Pilgrimage to INDIA and NEPAL

Sunday, November 1 to Tuesday, November 24 from Kathmandu

- Visit the holy places of Lord Buddha in INDIA: Sravasti, Kushinagar, Nalanda, Vulture Peak, Bodhgaya and Sarnath. AND NEPAL: Boudhanath, Swayambunath, Parping and Lumbini • Daily practices and teachings
- Begin with a four-day retreat at Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu
- Land cost from US\$3800 plus air to Kathmandu.



Venerable Robina Courtin



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*The people on the trip were all kind,
 helpful and wonderful traveling companions.*

I miss them already!

JEAN KASOTA,
 2008 India Pilgrimage

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Lama Yeshe’s Vision for Universal Education

“To completely understand one’s own physics and psychology, I call this Universal Education.”

– Lama Yeshe

Lama Yeshe first began discussing the concept of Universal Education in the early 1970s (although he didn’t call it that yet) with Ven. Max Mathews (Mummy Max), a schoolteacher who worked at the American International School in Kathmandu. In 1974 Max was even offered funding to draw up guidelines and a program, but Kopan Monastery was now home to so many young Sherpa monks that Max decided their financial support was more important at the time.

In October 1981, Ven. Connie Miller, whom Lama Yeshe had already recognized as someone with an interest and aptitude for organized education, requested a meeting with Lama to discuss future plans for an education program. Lama Yeshe explained his vision for education:

“If you present education as religion it is not good. But the essential character of the teachings is very logical, very scientific and psychologically feasible in the modern world, which is hungry for good education. Why don’t we call our name for this *Universal Education*. What do you think?”

Children need both discipline and letting go. Creativity does not mean no discipline. World education now is terrible. I think if we make some good education people will appreciate that. I think they are ready. Especially America is ready. For something natural to arise you have to provide logically understandable guidelines and some psychological and philosophical framework as well. In this way the totality becomes profound. These three aspects have to exist simultaneously, so the person becomes integrated.

“Now in the world the religious person and the unreligious person have become separated, but in actuality you cannot separate them. The totality of existence containing all reality is everybody – you, me, all human beings. Education should be about everything coming together, not partial, not separating. In my opinion, the bad in the world comes from religion separated from life, from science. These two should go together.

“To completely understand one’s own physics and psychology, I call this Universal Education. I have always thought about this. In Buddhism we have an incredible education structure from birth to death. I feel these things can be put into universal language. My aim is we give up religion, give up Buddhism, go beyond Buddhism. Universal Education should be universal

people without culture games. Every country, every culture, religion and philosophy already has wisdom and we should bring that wisdom into Universal Education. Without dogma we can have common understanding.

“We can produce better human beings. Bad education is like a prison. We must learn to open the prison and psychologically liberate human beings.”

Ven. Connie went to work. By the following October, she had led a team in unveiling the First International Conference on Universal Education with His Holiness the Dalai Lama featured as the keynote speaker. Held at Lama Tzong Khapa Institute in Italy, the well-attended seven-day program ushered in a new wave of efforts toward establishing Universal Education.

Greenwood Lodge, which later became Land of Medicine Buddha in Soquel, California, was initially purchased with Universal Education in mind. Lama Yeshe wanted Universal Education to have a base from which to develop resources and teacher training. Ven. Connie Miller arrived in California from Italy in 1983 to further the efforts of establishing Universal Education which was now being established in six countries. Lama Yeshe told her to organize another conference to be called: “What Buddhism Has to Offer Universal Education.” After that he wanted a conference called: “What Christianity Has to Offer Universal Education.”

Those conferences didn’t manifest and Ven. Connie went back to Italy to assist in Universal Education efforts there, but one more conference, held in 1984 at Greenwood Lodge, called “The Growing Mind: The Art of Universal Education,” was attended by seventy people and emphasized participation and personal experience through a variety of workshops ranging in topics from storytelling to creative movement, from mythology and symbolism to infant and child development, and from intensive journal writing to psycho-spiritual education.

Successive years brought new faces, new challenges and new inroads to making Lama Yeshe’s vision a reality. Now known as Essential Education and being taken forward by the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom (FDCW) and successfully implemented at Tara Redwood School and the Maitreya Universal Education School, Lama Yeshe’s vision for Universal Education is alive and well. ☸

Ven. Connie currently lives in Colorado and works for Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive as an editor.

See: www.essential-education.org; www.tararedwoodschoool.org; www.maitreyaproject.org/en/education/bodhgaya-school.html