

CPMT Representatives Meet for Six Days at Institut Vajra Yogini, France

Being quarantined as a safety measure at the height of the swine flu drama only increased the family feeling that is CPMT.

From April 26 to May 2, the Council for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (CPMT), the managing body of directors, spiritual program coordinators, teachers and board members of FPMT, gathered under a large tent on the grounds of Institut Vajra Yogini (IVY) in France to discuss the identity, activity and vision of the organization. 188 participants

from twenty-six countries represented eighty of the 154 centers, projects and social service initiatives that make up FPMT.

In 1975, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche held a meeting with nine of their senior students in an effort to coordinate their rapidly growing network of Dharma activity. Thirty-three years later, the council is going strong.

The first two days of CPMT addressed FPMT's identity and the purpose of having the CPMT meeting. After Claire Isitt, CPMT coordinator,

reminded participants that the meeting was explicitly designed to better understand FPMT's vast mandala and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's vision, Rinpoche remarked on the goal of FPMT: "The goal is to actualize the subject of these [FPMT] programs in our hearts. The goal is to become 'the inner scientists' – to discover Lama Tsongkhapa's and Buddha's teachings' truth in our hearts. The goal is to discover for ourselves what they have actualized. The goal is to achieve enlightenment in order to help all sentient beings. Our organization is

2009 CPMT meeting attendees



different from a company, factory or a firm. It is about working for happiness without any mistakes.”

Ven. Roger Kunsang, CEO and President of FPMT, also gave an update on Rinpoche’s health, reporting that Chinese medicine was helping to manage Rinpoche’s diabetes and blood pressure and concluding with a quote from Lama Yeshe that to “practice Dharma and be harmonious is the best long life puja.”

Ven. Roger also mentioned some of Rinpoche’s teaching plans: “[Rinpoche] seems more interested in teaching and finishing his teachings on some major texts. He has a strong interest to teach the *Light of the Path* in the United States in September and is committed to finish this teaching, which might take three to five years. He also wants to finish a commentary on *Lama Chöpa* he had started at Amitabha Buddhist Centre.”

Peter Kedge gave an update on Osel Hita, the reincarnation of Lama Yeshe, who finished film school in Spain last June. “He would have loved to be here but he is filming a documentary this weekend and has courses during the week.” Peter also took some time to stress that Osel prefers not to be called “Lama Osel,” sharing that Osel “wants to be accepted as he is. He is finding who he is and what his path is.”

Ven. Roger additionally described some of FPMT’s organizational history, commenting on the development of centers during and after Lama Yeshe’s life. He explained that the function of Rinpoche’s office, International Office (IOF), is to support centers, work on education programs, find qualified teachers and create the FPMT Handbook, a resource on FPMT guidelines, policies and other information based on

forty years of experience. Ven. Roger also shared that the responsibility of the FPMT Board of Directors is to protect the FPMT as an organization, making sure it stays true to its mission, and remains legally and financially sound.

The board of directors added that, because of International Office’s limited resources, local boards need to take responsibility for their centers and work to develop and strengthen FPMT regionally.

Presentations were also given by Ven. Chokyi, SPC at Vajrayana Institute, who spoke on the Inner Job Description and how it can impact one’s service and daily life, and Ven. Losang Monlam, director of the International Mahayana Institute, who reported that only 10% of the FPMT Sangha are being financially supported, and that the majority live on their own, needing financial stability, retreat opportunities and training.

Ven. Holly Ansett, executive assistant to Ven. Roger, presented on the various charitable projects of FPMT including an ambitious initiative to build 100,000 prayer wheels, stupas and statues; the Puja Fund, which exists to protect and benefit the entire organization; education scholarships; offering nutritious meals to thousands of monks studying at Sera Je Monastery; and supporting the development of the Amdo Eye Clinic, among many others.

The third, fourth, and fifth days focused specifically on FPMT’s tremendous activity. Merry Colony, director of Education Services, outlined four major areas that comprise her work: educational programs, standardized materials, training programs and translations. FPMT’s educational programs, like the *Masters Program* and *Basic Program*, are designed to produce “well integrated teachers” that are knowledgeable, well-



Lama Zopa Rinpoche, 2009 CPMT meeting

practiced, ethical, and service-oriented. In addition to producing teachers with these qualities, Maitripa College’s program director, Namdrol Adams, explained that Buddhist colleges and universities are needed because the familiar degree-program format provided by accredited institutions is particularly valued in contemporary society.

Merry went on to mention that standardized materials create a “family feeling” within the organization and also prevented unnecessary duplication of efforts, allowing all to more easily receive the benefits of Rinpoche’s advice. Additionally, trainings, like Inner Job Description, also contribute to a sense of community by helping to develop a shared understanding of the FPMT mission, and a firm basis to serve effectively and joyfully within the organization.

Translation efforts support other educational programs, such as the *Masters Program* and *Basic Program*, and fulfill the wishes of Lama Zopa Rinpoche by making various important sutras widely available. Ven. Lhundup Chodron, director of the Lotsawa

Rinchen Zangpo Translator Program, spoke on the four-year program, describing how students do two years in the classroom and then two years of training in a center supplemented by a practice component to ensure Tibetan interpreters are qualified to work in a Dharma context. To this effect, Rinpoche also encouraged Westerners to learn Tibetan saying, “If you learn Tibetan language, another eye is open: you can read and study by yourself all the Tibetan texts.”

An update was also given by Nick Ribush, director of Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, who mentioned that in addition to the hundreds of thousands of free books in print, all of Rinpoche’s teaching from Kopan’s courses are on their website as are many other books, audio and video. He shared that one of Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive’s goals is to make Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s entire lam-rim teachings accessible to both serious students and, in an abridged version, to the general public.

Geshe Sherab, director of Kopan

Monastery, spoke about Kopan’s programs and particularly about the successful November course last year, commenting, “Send students to the Kopan course and they will help your centers. Students are much more committed to the center after they have done the November course.”

Lama Zopa Rinpoche expressed that he was very happy with all of the educational programs within FPMT’s mandala and introduced Gomo Rinpoche to talk about his motivation to help young people in the West through music. “We need something different as Buddhists. The world is changing so much. We need to change in the way we communicate as well,” Gomo Rinpoche said. “Movies and music are things we need.”

On the fourth day, participants of CPMT took a break from formal presentations, visiting nearby Nalanda Monastery for a picnic. Later that day, when a participant from Mexico reported feeling a little ill, the French authorities quarantined

the entire gathering for fear of swine flu! Presentations were given in the evening by Amdo Eye Project, which is dedicated to providing free cataract eye surgeries in Tibet; and FPMT Mongolia, where M. K. Sen has accepted to devise and implement a ten-year plan to support the resurgence of Buddhism in Mongolia after it was nearly lost during communist oppression between 1930 and 1990. The ten-year plan includes establishing FPMT centers in all of Mongolia’s major cities, a Nalanda-style Buddhist university, social services, and building three great statues: Guru Padma-sambhava, Lama Tsongkhapa and Maitreya Buddha, each 150 feet [46 meters] tall.

Still under quarantine, discussion of FPMT’s activities continued into the fifth day, with Lama Zopa Rinpoche making pointed comments on spiritual teachers, particularly His Holiness the Dalai Lama: “Offering service to the guru is Dharma. Is the most powerful purification and collects the most extensive merits. So fulfilling His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s wishes is Dharma.” Rinpoche also suggested that organizing a public teaching by His Holiness is the quickest way to achieve happiness and spread Dharma. “You have to keep requesting every year and it might happen,” he said.

Doris Low, director of Center Services, led the discussion on FPMT’s social services. Reports were given by Ven. Yeshe Khadro about Karuna Hospice Service in Australia. Reports were also given about Kasih Hospice and on the addiction program at Mahamudra Center in New Zealand, which was started upon Rinpoche’s advice. The Animal Liberation Sanctuary in Kathmandu, which rescues animals from death and exposes them to

CPMT representatives on IVY grounds





Dharma, explained why it is difficult to find land for the animals. Tara Redwood School in California is using Montessori methods and their biggest obstacle is finding the right teachers, those who embody compassion and can act as a role model. Shyla Bauer gave a presentation on Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth, an international peace organization for young people.

Alison Murdoch and others working in the field of Essential Education spoke about their aims to help people of all ages develop compassion and wisdom, and contribute to peace in the world by providing resources, training and connections that are presented in a universal style, free from belief-specific jargon. Lama Zopa Rinpoche later reflected on the need for a universal method like Essential Education to bring peace in the world, discussing the 16 Guidelines from Songtsen Gampo as something to follow. "The main thing is to transform the heart into a good heart. Each child that follows this becomes the root of happiness for all sentient beings."

Rinpoche also spoke on the importance of rejoicing. "You see any

good thing happening to another, it keeps your mind in a state of happiness. No up and down of mind. It is happiness, Dharma. It brings so much happiness to yourself, it is an antidote to jealousy. Think, 'Oh, so wonderful you have success.' So all the time you create good karma and all your wishes for yourself and others get fulfilled." And on courage: "Think, 'I can do.'"

Ven. Joan Nicell later revisited translation work within FPMT. She reported on the vision of the Buddhist Literary Heritage Project to translate the entire Kangyur in 25 years and all Buddhists texts in 100 years. She discussed how FPMT seeks to contribute to this work with the understanding that it took 500 years to translate the texts into Tibetan. "It's a big job," Joan said. "We have to check with the Sanskrit because His Holiness the Dalai Lama said there are some mistakes in the Tibetan."

On the last day of formal meeting, Doris Low suggested that the vision of FPMT impelled participants to think globally and act locally. "As the organization grows, we need to reinforce regionalization."

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As entertainment, and in line with his wish to communicate with youth audiences, Gomo Rinpoche entertained the group with some of his music. He wishes to support Rinpoche's vision through his hip-hop music by making money and helping to build the Maitreya statue.

After two long days, François Lecointre, director of IVY, finally announced the quarantine had been lifted. At this point, there was then discussion about Rinpoche's vast, long-term visions including the construction of hundreds of thousands of holy objects around the world; increasing FPMT's ability to support lay and ordained community members with retreat options, retirement funds and practice; supporting members of the community to engage in 100 million mani retreats, extensive nyung nä retreats and recitations of the *Golden Light Sutra*; offering social services back to the community; preserving the Mahayana tradition through scholarship programs; and supporting His Holiness the Dalai Lama by inviting him to teach and fulfilling his wishes.

Rinpoche advised the group to use compassion quotes for things like t-shirts and mugs saying, "If you want to help others, this is the message."

"This is a really unique organization, really unique, one of a kind," Ven. Roger said. "It gives each of us the opportunity to do something useful with our lives. So we should pray for the future, to be part of FPMT. Then I think if we do the right thing we will have two lamas guiding us through the centuries. So we can't lose!"

Participants left recharged, inspired by the activities and efforts of the



Kopan Monastery Principal, Geshe Sherab; Ven. Sonam, Center Director of Jangsem Ling Retreat Center, Malaysia; Nettie Leung representing Cham Tse Ling, Hong Kong; and Pik Pin Goh director of Kasih Hospice, Malaysia.



Mani Retreat Leader and senior FPMT monk, Ven. Dondrub; and Liberation Prison Project board member, Ven. Katy Cole.

greater organization. Many commented on the "family feeling" they experienced by spending quality time with colleagues and friends working together toward the same goals.

Rinpoche concluded by commenting on CPMT meeting: "I didn't come to every session, but I think that everyone who presented was fascinat-

ing. I think it's extremely encouraging, extremely blissing out – blissing out or blissing in, I am not sure! The meeting has given a lot of wisdom and courage to everybody. It shows the organization is extremely worthwhile and that whatever we are doing, we can definitely achieve. I think that's a very good sign!" ☺