

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION WITH YOUNG FPMT NOTABLES

We asked four notable young individuals, who all have ties with FPMT, some questions about being reincarnated “lamas,” about the future of Buddhism and about how FPMT can best appeal to the younger generation. In response we received some wise advice and insightful commentary from four distinct, but complementary, impressive young men.



From left: Ling Rinpoche. Photo courtesy of Drepung Loseling Monastery. Cherek Lama. Photo by John Berthold. Osel Hita. Photo courtesy of Dionne Wilson. Gomo Tulku. Photo courtesy of Gomo Tulku.

LING CHOKTRUL RINPOCHE

Recognized as the 8th Ling Rinpoche, his predecessor was senior tutor for His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. Rinpoche currently studies at Drepung Loseling Monastery in India and is twenty-five years old.

CHEROK LAMA

Cherok Lama is the reincarnation of Kusho Mangden, also known by the local Sherpa as Gaga Mangden, from Cherok cave near Lawudo in the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal. At the age of two he was discovered by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and recognized by His Eminence Trulshik Rinpoche. Cherok Lama then entered Kopan Monastery and studied there until he was eight when, upon the advice of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, he joined

Sera Je Monastery where he is now studying under the guidance of Jangtse Chöje Lobsang Tenzin Rinpoche, second in line to the Gaden Tripa the highest rank in Gelug tradition. Cherok Lama is sixteen years old.



OSEL HITA

Osel, recognized as the reincarnation of Lama Thubten Yeshe by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, has received traditional monastic training and a contemporary Western education. Interested in music, film and audio-visual techniques, Osel's current plans are to establish an ecological village with meditation and yoga classes in Spain and continue studying the Dharma. Osel is twenty-five years old.

GOMO TULKU

Born in Montreal, Canada, Gomo Tulku was recognized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama as the 23rd Gomo Tulku. Gomo Tulku has lived in North America and Europe, and received traditional training in Sera Je Monastery in India. After attending high school for a year in the United States, he became deeply interested in performance and rap, and composed in secret despite monastery rules. In 2008, Gomo Tulku decided to leave the monastery and pursue a career in music but stresses that “he doesn't see his future as limited to just a single field. He sees himself in every field.” Follow Gomo Tulku on Facebook, Myspace, Twitter and FPMT Young Dharma for news about the upcoming release of his single and album. Gomo Tulku is twenty-two years old.



HOW SHOULD A STUDENT RELATE TO THEIR GURU WHO'S A TULKU? OR THE "REINCARNATION" OF A PAST LAMA?

OSEL: Well, as all of us are reincarnations of past beings, we are each unique. We all come from somewhere and are going someplace. We are always in this present moment traveling, being. I think everybody deserves the same respect which is normally demonstrated externally onto a "holy" person, politician, or businessman. But inside we should keep that respect the same for everyone.

LING RINPOCHE: [For example,] those people who have received teachings and initiations from my predecessor, the previous Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, those people can have great faith and devotion to me, but they do not need to see me as the previous Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, as the guru. But, when the day comes that they get teachings and, especially, from this incarnation, any initiation and any commentaries, then they have to relate with that guru devotion which is spoken about in *Lam-rim*. So in short, you can regard the reincarnation of your guru as your guru, if you have devotion, but traditionally it is not necessary.

GOMO TULKU: In my experience in this 19 years of being a person recognized as the reincarnation of a lama called Gomo Tulku, if someone's a Buddhist he or she would not only respect you as a lama, but might also have devotion for you. But, the million dollar question is if someone's not a Buddhist, then what? Well, there's two ways in which he or she could see this so-called reincarnated person: either "he's interesting" or "he's weird." For those non-Buddhists, I don't know about how other reincarnated lamas would want y'all to look at them but I'll say it clear: I would prefer to be looked at as a 22-year-old kid (as this August 8, I turned 22) and as a recording artist. But if you're a Buddhist and not the lama's disciple, you should still have respect for him as a lama no matter what he does and never criticize nor think negative about him or her, whoever the reincarnated person is, not because he's a lama, but because he's a human being. And if this reincarnated person happens to be your lama, then you know what to do

... What I feel is important is that people should know that a reincarnated lama is a human being, and a human being has his or her own view and way to communicate.

CHEROK LAMA: It is not necessary to look for one's teacher as it's all about whether one has the karma to see the teacher again or not. If one has the karma, then the teacher will find you in whatever way he may appear or manifest. It's about the conditions coming together – the conditions of the teacher seeing that there is help or benefit to provide or disperse and the student having the karma, and the external conditions of birth coming together.

One also shouldn't have any expectations of how, or as what, the guru will again manifest. If the guru manifests in a very different form than he did in his previous life, the student should accept this. As we all know, the Buddha took birth in many different forms to benefit beings. Whatever form the guru takes is the right form to benefit beings and the form that will help others the most. For the guru to take birth it is ONLY to benefit, nothing else.

So really, what it comes down to is the merit. With merit, one will see the teacher again. Without the merit, even if the teacher is standing in front of you, you will not see them.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF BUDDHISM IN THE WEST?

LING RINPOCHE: Of course it's very difficult to predict the future. But there are a lot of positive signs. More people are interested in Buddhism and more people like it very much, more people are aware of it, more people are practicing, more people come to the centers. There are a lot of positive reasons that Buddhism will flourish more and Buddhism will flourish and spread in the West and the East. There are a lot of positive signs. Of course, as Buddhists, we believe in cause and effect – what will happen in future depends very much on what we do now. If we practice well, if we study well now, then in the future it will show its result. I think we have to practice and study well.

CHEROK LAMA: Everything changes: cultures, people and mind. We call this impermanence. For

example, it is impossible to find nowadays the Buddhism that existed 2,500 years ago. In the same way, we would not be able to find the expression and form of Buddhism we see today 2,500 years ago.

Buddhism of the Himalayan region is steeped very much in cultures of the past. The Buddhism we will see in the future, in the West, will be necessarily mixed with science. There will be, and has been, a modernization of Buddhism that fits with the Western world and Western mindset. Buddhism did not form the cultures of the West the way it formed the cultures of the East. As Buddhism grew in India, it was very much mixed with Muslim and Hindu traditions, and because of this we see such things as fire pujas and other rituals that were prevalent in ancient India. When it grew up in Tibet, it was very much mixed with the Bön traditions and culture of that place in that time. Where Buddhism moves, it adapts to the culture of that native place. The culture of the West is not so rigid and uniform as it is in the East as science plays a bigger role.

Buddhism and science can very easily merge in the field of the mind. Mind cannot be dismissed in the scientific field, and the continuation of mind (when one looks from a scientific perspective at energy or atoms in space) cannot be refuted. So there will be a merging of Buddhism's understanding of the mind with science. The West will pick up what makes sense for daily life. Cause and effect will be part of this, as again from science people can understand that every cause must have an effect and every effect must have a cause.

From this, slowly over time, people will accept past and future lives and this view will be adopted. Buddhism will be approached in a different way. It will not have the ritual and meditation aspects of the East, but it will have to incorporate the view of cause and effect.

The problem now with Buddhism in the West is that it lacks debate. It lacks the strong emphasis on proof through analysis. There is a great tendency in the West for Buddhist practitioners to accept things simply because their teacher said so. In fact, Buddhism today in the West is very faith-based. In the future, because of the merging of science, it will become much more about proving truth through analysis, just as the Eastern tradition of debate does. The Sera monks debate

regularly. You could say that debate is using scientific methods of analysis to prove or disprove what is commonly accepted as truth in scriptures. At the moment Western Buddhism is only about reciting "one plus one equals two," but not about HOW one plus one equals two. This is what will be developed in the future.

OSEL: Well, I don't know. Everything evolves slowly but steadily. People too. Religion is moved *by* the people, it is the connection between the unknown and known universes within and outside of us. Like many other religions, Buddhism is one more way of understanding and growing closer to our true essence. Many of us are lucky to have contact with Buddhism, and those who will have contact in the future are quite lucky as well.

GOMO TULKU: Maitreya Buddha ... and his project (ha-ha!). Speaking seriously, the future of Buddhism is that it will be heard and seen in 3D movies, music, fashion, bedtime stories, comic books, on air, radio stations, cartoon networks, social sites like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and who knows what's more to come? Then we got this new FPMT Young Dharma site which is really cool for a young Buddhist. Of course we will always need traditional teachers. Buddhism will be in universities and schools, people will graduate and become professors of the Mahayana school. That's the future. We need more Buddhism, Buddhism has to be everywhere. It's not like Buddhism is meant for people who've renounced everything. In the future I'd like to see Buddhism being cool and find all kinds of kids on the street saying that they're Buddhists (this being an indicator of just how much Buddhism has spread). I want people saying: "Buddha is in me. I just gotta find him."

HOW CAN FPMT APPEAL TO FUTURE GENERATIONS AND THE YOUTH?

GOMO TULKU: The words to use are: "Be kind without being stupid," "Be open-minded and consider everyone's point of view because you can be 24/7 wrong," "Accept challenges cuz that'll only make you stronger," "Don't even try to talk to me about race cuz equality's my pillow and empathy's the bed on which I sleep," "Ladies first" (but at the same time there's too many men





in the world, you know? LOL), “Change might be President Obama’s slogan, but in reality, it’s the universal law,” “Time is life. Don’t waste it,” “Like and love whatever you want, but don’t get hung up on it,” “Look good. Be good,” and “Remember the dog you love most is also an animal.” Yea!

OSHEL: FPMT is changing very fast, as is everything else. We are in a very intense moment of change. It is normal that there is some chaos, the whole planet can feel it. Everything, including Buddhism, can be adapted to any individual, as we all are part of the same source. Each person has to be very selective about the path they choose, as there is so much information out there. We should really work hard on putting the theory into practice, in everyday life. We can find meditation in every moment, and a moment to help someone all the time. The important part is to love oneself, so we can love everyone else in turn. Slowly but steadily. We’ve got to work as individuals, not only as an organization. It is the only possible way to advance and evolve. Living the moment, being the self.

LING RINPOCHE: I think when we present Buddhism, when we teach Buddhism, it is important to teach the young people that the essence of the Buddhadharma which is based on reality and in terms of getting rid of suffering and achieving true happiness. Buddhism is not a mere system of rituals. Of course, there are rituals in Buddhist tantra, however these have profound meaning which is based on the understanding of actual truth.

But the essence of Buddhism is practice and especially the practice of how to relate Buddhism to daily life. How it can benefit your daily life and how a person can develop *his or her mind*. Developed in the sense of making the mind and one’s heart pure. How we can make the mind/the heart pure so that one day we achieve buddhahood, in that way we have to attract people.

Some people like meditation, some people study, some people like to be around the center and attend the monthly prayers; I think we should teach Buddhism according to one’s wish. But it’s good to make the basics, the foundation very good and study well. At the same time, it’s most important to teach how to relate these studies into the daily life of the person and not “counting” the four noble truths and make it a mental exercise – how many divisions does

the noble truth have – but how to apply the four noble truth in one’s daily life and how the four noble truths can lead you to buddhahood.

Put it into practice means also, how to deal with your emotions, how to deal with your stress or your depression and to transform your mind.

We should present Buddhism so that the younger generation can realize that Buddhism relates to your daily life and how one can develop the mind and the heart and reach buddhahood.

CHEROK LAMA: First, I would like to say that FPMT and Lama Zopa Rinpoche have been and are doing a great job in helping Buddhism to flourish in the world! Now the main way to appeal to the youth is that you have to understand them. It is hard to understand youth today, but if you want to interest them, you have to know what their interests are and then, on the basis of this, you can talk to them. You need to know how to talk in order to capture their mind. You need to appeal to their interests.

Lama Yeshe was very skillful in using methods that worked for the generation he worked with. It is not that the hippies of that time wanted to hear Buddhism necessarily, but Lama skillfully brought them into Buddhism, he had those skillful methods. So based on the place and the people, Buddhism will take the shape required. When we talk about the future of Buddhism and how FPMT can appeal to young people, really it all comes down to the skillful teacher. With skillful teachers, Buddhism can last forever and in any culture. Because the Buddha was so skillful, Buddhism is still alive 2,500 years later. When you combine a skillful teacher with students having the karma and the external conditions needed to receive the teachings, then you have a perfect setup for the future.

Buddhism is not easy. It is very profound and difficult to understand. Therefore there will be a lack of interest, because people don’t understand it, and people will more easily be attracted to money and the things of this life. Often it is only those who have suffered a lot or are desperately seeking peace who really look into Buddhism. Buddhism may sound easy at first, but as you go along, you start to see it is very difficult. At that point most people will walk away. The mind is just like that, it walks away from things that are difficult. So only those who really, really want the fruit will achieve it. You could use the analogy that Buddhism is like a crime scene and to get to the root of it requires a lot of investigation and many will give up along



the way as the investigation gets harder and the leads become more subtle. Just like a crime scene that at first you don't understand at all, only with investigation can you get somewhere. Or it is like a very difficult board game that only some will have the perseverance and stamina to finish and others will give up before finishing. Most of us have the tendency to

give up. But then there are the exceptional beings, like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who don't give up. I see a lot of tendency in the young generation to give up. Things have come very easily for many of the younger generation, so they may not have the habit or the tendency to try what is difficult. Therein lies the difference.

I'M A BUDDHIST AND HAVE A MUSLIM SHEIKH IN MY GURU TREE

By Ven. Freeman Trebilcock

A few years ago I visited Chicago to speak at a gathering of interfaith youth. Of the 500 participants, there were only a handful of Buddhists. I was pretty easy to spot in bright maroon & yellow. For the final evening program a respected Muslim scholar, Sheikh Hamza Yuseft, was set to talk. I wasn't quite sure what to expect, but what followed was one of the most profound and eye-opening experiences of my life. The Sheikh spoke about compassion, the nature of mind and yes, emptiness. He used the language of Islam to communicate a message that resonated with my own understanding of Buddhism. I turned to my friend Anna and we shared a look, as if to say "are you hearing this? He sounds like a Buddhist!" But deeper than his words, it was the feeling that hit me most powerfully. He had a powerful presence and listening to him was like receiving a teaching from a high lama.

Three years on I now find myself working with Muslims, Christians and Hindus every day. Creating greater understanding and harmony between faiths is something which His Holiness strives tirelessly for. I feel a strong commitment to do my small part in carrying forward this vision.

Our teacher at Chenrezig Institute, Geshe Lobsang Jamyang, puts it quite beautifully. He says that the world's religions are like the different items on the menu at a restaurant. Naturally we choose something off the menu that's going to be tasty and nutritious for us. But at the moment, with the current conflicts over religion it is as if we are all sitting around arguing about which is the best thing on the menu



Image by Cesca Hampton

and not getting to taste anything. How ridiculous! Instead, it's entirely possible for people of different religions to share the same table, eat our different dishes, and come away feeling mutually nourished by the experience.

If there is a future for Buddhism it doesn't lie in narrow sectarianism. Buddha said that all vehicles based upon Dharma are valid – and that includes those vehicles taught by Jesus or Mohammed or Zoroaster for that matter. This doesn't mean we go all new-agey and lose the plot. It just means opening up a bit. The kind of openness that allows me to look you in the face and tell you, "I'm a Tibetan Buddhist and I have a Muslim Sheikh in my guru tree."

Ven. Freeman Trebilcock (Thubten Gyaltzen) was ordained at the age of 12 at Chenrezig Institute, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Now 22, he is a founding member of Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth. Freeman has been actively engaged in interfaith work for the past three years with InterAction multifaith youth network, promoting daily interfaith cooperation through common action for the common good.