

Lama Yeshe's Legacy: Taking a Broad View

More than 50 centers and projects constituted the international FPMT mandala in January 1983 when the Council for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (CPMT) met at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa in Italy. Discussions focused on the recent registration of FPMT as a charitable organization and the formulation of its bylaws. Representatives from FPMT centers and projects greatly valued the communication and sharing that took place at the meeting. During the week-long meeting, Lama Yeshe gave a talk on FPMT's objectives, structure and function, which was later published in Mandala's predecessor, Wisdom No. 2, 1984. We've extracted the following from Lama Yeshe's talk as a reminder of Lama Yeshe's vision and to create an opportunity to reflect on how we are carrying it forward.

Why have we established the FPMT? Why are we establishing these facilities all over the world? I think we are clean clear as to our aim – we want to lead all sentient beings to higher education. We are an organization that gives people the chance to receive higher education.

We offer people what we have – the combined knowledge of Buddha's teachings and the modern way of life. Our purpose is to share our experience of this.

We know that people are dissatisfied with worldly life, with the education system and everything else. It is in the nature of our dualistic mind to be dissatisfied. So what we are trying to do is to help people discover their own totality and thus perfect satisfaction.

Now, the way we have evolved is not through you or me having said we want to do these things but through a natural

education. And it is not only we lamas who are working for this. The centers' resident geshe and the students are working too. Actually, it is you students who are instrumental in creating the facilities for Dharma to exist in the Western world. True. Of course, teachers help, but the most important thing is for the students to be well educated. That is why we exist.

When we started establishing centers there was no overall plan – they just popped up randomly all over the world like mushrooms, because of the evolutionary process I've just mentioned and the cooperative conditions. Now that all these centers do exist, we have to facilitate their development in a constructive, clean clear way; otherwise everything will just get confused. We have to develop properly both internally and in accordance with our 20th-century environment. That's why I've already put forward guidelines for how our centers should be –

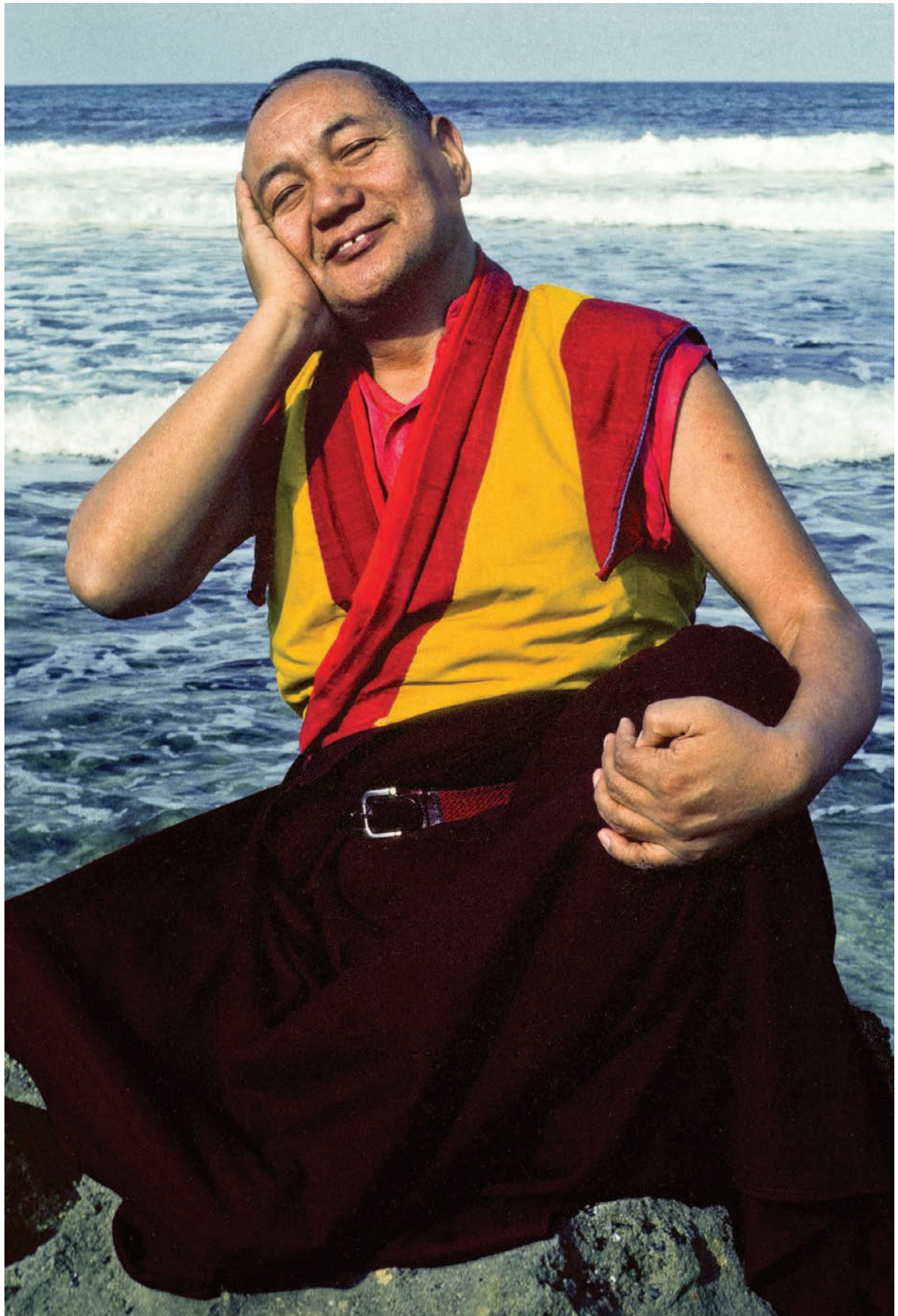
Our organization has grown naturally, organically. It is not "Lama Yeshe wanted to do it." I've never said that I want centers all over the world. Rather, I came into contact with students who then wanted to do something, who expressed the wish to share their experience with others, and put together groups in various countries to share and grow with others.

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Personally, I think that's fine. We should work for that. We are human beings; Buddhism helps us grow. Therefore, it is logical that we should work together to facilitate this kind of

residential country communities, city centers, monasteries and so forth. ...

Now, the way to bring Dharma to the Western world is to bring the nuclear, the essential aspect of Dharma. Of course, you cannot separate the essence from the Eastern cultural trappings immediately: "This is culture; that isn't." However, what you should do is take the practical points of Dharma and shape them according to your own culture. In my opinion, you should be making a new kind of Dharma dependent on each different place and its social customs. Since we are Mahayanists, we have a broad



Lama Yeshe, Sicily, 1983. Photos by Jacie Keeley.

TEACHINGS AND ADVICE



Participants in the 1983 CPMT meeting. Standing, left to right, front to back: Garth Spiers, Michael van Walt van Praag, Ven. Connie Miller, Harvey Horrocks, Ven. Max Redlich, Nick Ribush, Ven. Thubten Gyatso, Dharmawati Brechbuhl, Paul Bourke, Philippe Penot, Roy Tyson, Margot Kool, Denis Huet; Seated: Alnis Grants, Lama Yeshe, Sylvia Wetzel; Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, January 1983, Pomaia, Italy. Photo courtesy of Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

view and don't mind if Dharma takes different shapes. To bring Dharma to the West we should have a broad view.

Because we have so many centers, I can no longer direct them. Of course, at the beginning I had to direct the centers because the students were always asking, "Lama, what to do?" and we were small enough for me to always be in direct communication with them. But, eventually, we reached a point where I had to ask myself the question, "Am I a businessman, a Dharma teacher or what?" Hundreds of letters were coming in from all over the world; I had to say, "What is this? Should I spend my life answering letters and running centers?" I thought it was wrong for me to spend my life in business because this was not the best way to serve my students. I thought that the most realistic thing to do to benefit them and make my life worthwhile was to go the middle way instead.

So I began to cut down on administrative work. I even wrote to all the centers telling them that they were responsible to make certain decisions; that I could not decide everything and that it is too complicated and far too slow to have all the correspondence coming through Nepal. Therefore, I said we

should have a central office as the center's business point. Of course, I could still be consulted on important matters and could still make decisions on anything. I'm part of the Central Office; I can give my opinion. But it was not necessary to rely on me for everything. That's why I established the Central Office [now the FPMT International Office, based in Portland, Oregon, USA].

... Quite apart from the fact that I do not have time to do all this administrative work, there are many things to do with running a center that you can do far better than I. You can communicate with people from your own cultural background much better than can a simple Himalayan monk. All the legal and financial work – I can't do that either. Also, there are many positions to be filled in a center; the right people have to be selected for the right job. You students should do these things yourselves.

So, because all this administrative work was taking me so long, I passed many things on to the Central Office. There is a huge amount of this kind of work to do, that's why the Central Office is important. It facilitates communication both between the centers and me and among the centers themselves. You see, we do have the

human tendency to shut off from each other: “I don’t want you looking at me; I can see my own point of view, I don’t want to share it with you.” Each center has its own egocentric orientation: “We’re good enough; we don’t need to take the best of other cultures.” This is wrong. We have reached our present state of existence through a process of evolution. Some older centers have had good experiences and have learned how to do things well. Doing things well is not simply an intellectual exercise but something that comes from acting every day and learning how to do things until you can do them automatically. Thus it is good that the Central Office has a pool of collective experience so that all our centers can share in it and help reinforce each other.

We have to be able to focus and integrate our energy and store information in a clean clear way so that it can be readily accessed. We should make a structure so that we all know what information is there and how to get it. Without a proper structure, we’d go bananas! Even a couple living together needs to be organized so that their house is clean, there is the food they need and so on. In the centers, we are involved in hundreds of people’s lives; for some reason Dharma has brought all these people together. We are responsible to ensure that we do not waste people’s energy; therefore, we have to get ourselves together. This is why organization is very important.

Let’s say, for example, that one of the older students and I have started a center. We are impermanent; we are going to die. What happens when we are dead? We established the center; it has never been organized properly; should it die too? No, of course not. Even though our very bones have disappeared, the center should continue to function. But for people to be able to carry on in its work there should be clean clear directions as to what it was established for. If things are set up right, religious philosophies can carry on for generations and generations. We know this to be an historical fact.

If you think about it, from the point of view of culture, Buddhism is completely culture oriented; it is a complete culture, or way of life, from birth to death. Therefore, we are dealing with a very serious thing; we are giving people something that they should take very seriously in their lives. It is not just a one-week or one-month trip. We are offering something that utilizes Buddha’s method and wisdom in the achievement of everlasting satisfaction. That everlasting peace and happiness is what we are working for.

So we have a very important job; it is not just one person’s thing. For that reason I have to say openly to all our center directors that they should not feel they are working for Lama Yeshe – that’s too small. I am just a simple monk; you are working for me? One atom? No – you are working for something much bigger than just one man. You are working for all mother sentient beings. That is important. You should think, “Even if I die, I am doing all of these things for the sake and benefit of all other mother sentient beings.” That is why it is so important to us to have a clean clear structure and direction.

For me, this is very important. I don’t believe I am the principal worker and doing everything. No. I believe what Lama Je Tsongkhapa says in his lam-rim: All your success comes from other sentient beings. Thus, other sentient beings are capable of continuing our work, and what will enable them to do so will be having a clean clear direction – not a temporary, Mickey Mouse direction, but a clean clear one. Our aim then is to have a perfectly delineated structure so that even when we are all dead, still, as we wished, our Dharma centers will be able to carry on their work. I believe that human beings are very special. They are intelligent. If we write an intelligent constitution, record an intelligent system of direction, other human beings will be able to keep it going. That is why we have to have a structure.

... Our aim is clear; it is to educate people. Each center should have strong emphasis on education. The education system and program are essential for us to be successful. Why are we building communities? Because we have no home? No! We are not refugees; we have not started centers to house refugees. Thus it is important for each center to have a strong educational program and a spiritual director to conduct it. This is an essential part of our structure and must be there.

But I am not going to keep telling you things that you know already. Still, it is important that I clarify the reason for our existence and what we are doing. It is important work; we are not joking. We are real. Also, we are confident. I have great confidence in my involvement with Western people; I believe in it. I think that there are things that we can understand in common. We understand each other; therefore, we can work together.

Also, it is important for directors to have a great vision; they should not neglect their center’s growth. They should have a very broad view in order to be open to people. In many of our centers we find that already the facilities are too small. Of course, to build adequate facilities takes time and energy; but we should have a broad open view: “We would like to have things this way, without limitations.” Having a broad view is not forcing any issue but simply saying that if we have the opportunity to do various things, we’ll do them. You never know when somebody might come up to you and say, “I’d like to do something beneficial with my money.” At that time you can reply, “Well we have this project ready to develop,” and show that person your plans. If, however, you feel suffocated with what you already have and don’t have any vision of how to expand, you can’t show potential benefactors anything. Therefore, you should plan ahead with great vision and have everything ready to show people how you want to expand and improve your facilities. ... Remember – to bring Dharma to the West, we have to have a broad view.

From Lama Yeshe’s address to the CPMT meeting at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, Italy, January 1983. Edited by Nicholas Ribush and excerpted by *Mandala* for inclusion in this issue. To read the entire address, visit Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive (lamayeshe.com), Archive #337.