



LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE BLESSING ALL THE BEINGS IN THE OCEAN,
ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA, 2018. PHOTO BY VEN. LOBSANG SHERAB.

CREATING HARMONY THROUGH OUR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

FPMT COMMUNITY MEMBERS SHARE IDEAS ON HOW TO CREATE AND SUPPORT HARMONY

The importance of getting along with others permeates our lives. We begin learning at a young age how play and friendship depend on our ability to cooperate and resonate with each other. As we grow, we understand how classrooms and workplaces benefit from people who value kindness and understanding. Perhaps because harmony in relationships is so integral to being human, we might not fully appreciate how necessary it is for the success of our Dharma practice.

The ability to be in accord and at peace with our Dharma brothers and sisters has several beneficial results. Foremost, it is the essential practice for creating the cause for the guru's long life. It also underpins our ability to be successful in our efforts to create Dharma communities and spread the teachings of the Buddha.

"The most important thing is harmony, unity in the organization. That is what has brought success so far—unity," FPMT spiritual director Lama Zopa Rinpoche said about the accomplishments of FPMT during a teaching at Land of Medicine Buddha in 2001.

"The most important quality is to have the nature of compassion towards others, to be kind-hearted, next is to be intelligent, understanding the Dharma, and then to be responsible. It is particularly due to the harmony, the unity, that there has been success and that we have been able to offer this much service."

We have invited FPMT community members to weigh in on the value of harmony. Here they discuss how to create and maintain it, and how to repair it when it has fallen apart. They draw their inspiration from their own experiences as directors and spiritual program coordinators, Foundation Service Seminar facilitators, regional and national coordinators, and FPMT registered teachers. They call to mind their teachers and the Dharma teachings they have received, as well as deities and texts that are important to them.

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE DHARMA CULTURE

Andy Wistreich has been practicing Buddhism since 1980 and has served in the FPMT organization in many capacities, including his current role as FPMT UK Dharma education coordinator and FPMT touring teacher. Based on his years of experience, Andy provides an overview of how we should work to create harmony in our centers and study groups.

This is a very important issue, so we all need to think about it. Centers and study groups should address the issue before disharmony breaks out, by reflecting on their culture, procedures and policies, and creating a friendly inclusive culture. We are all studying and practicing Dharma, and we should apply this right here in our own community, to make sure it is healthy and sustainable.

Many causes of disharmony and many ways to create harmony exist. In our Dharma community—centers, study groups, services, projects, the international FPMT organization, and so forth—knowing what are causes of disharmony, so we avoid them, and knowing how to create harmony are essential. Otherwise degeneration is likely, because this is samsara and we aren't all enlightened yet. The world is full of unresolved conflict, and this will sometimes contaminate our Dharma community.

I have friends in quite a lot of centers and study groups in FPMT and have heard quite a few disharmony stories from them. I think it's important not to feel bad about it. It's normal because we are in samsara. Because it is karmic, it is more useful to do something about it than to get upset or depressed. Once a situation has ripened, although we can't stop it, we can take steps to transform it, learn from it, and create positive causes for a better future.

Conflict itself doesn't cause disharmony. This arises from unresolved issues. To resolve conflicts, a community needs channels, forums, and a culture of community-building, not just study and meditation. It is apparent when we enter a community freshly, whether it is a welcoming, joyful environment.

The root of all problems is self-grasping and self-cherishing. These inner demons can cause jealousy and pride, which are often the sources of disharmony. Blaming the other and not observing one's own mind fan the flames. The teachings contain solutions, and if we can practice thought transformation, we can create harmony.

In an organization such as FPMT, where many students follow the same guru, such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, we can understand the disharmonious conduct of students as "disturbing the mind of the master," thereby weakening our bond. This is damaging to the health and longevity of the lama and should be avoided within our practice of guru devotion.

It is important not to confuse holding critical views, expressing them respectfully, and contributing to constructive

change in the organization, with disharmony. Sometimes it's necessary to speak up and even whistle-blow. The important thing is not to act out of anger and to communicate through appropriate channels. Each center should have a grievance procedure. Moreover, everyone with a role in any FPMT organization has signed the FPMT Ethical Policy, so we have tools for managing conflict in a transparent way. It's important that everyone attending a center or study group gets to know about these policies and procedures, as this helps create a secure and harmonious culture.

There are things each of us can do to help create harmony, especially to practice Dharma purely. Each of us can take responsibility. It is meritorious to do so and helps create a sustainable Dharma culture and community for future generations.

THE PRACTICE OF HARMONY

Geshe Thubten Sherab, who became a monk at Kopan Monastery at age nine, received his geshe degree from Sera Je Monastic University and has taught at FPMT centers around the world. Currently, Geshe Sherab is the resident geshe at Thubten Norbu Ling in the United States.

I believe that harmony is the key for happiness as it is said in the Vinaya by the Buddha: "Harmony in the Sangha is happiness; the practice of harmony is the happiness."

There will be happiness and peace within oneself, family, Sangha, and world only if there is harmony. There is no way of finding peace and happiness when there is division and disharmony in the family, Sangha, and world. It is our direct experience.

I have seen many students stop coming to centers even though they liked the teachings very much when there is disharmony in the Dharma community.

I personally find it helpful to remember that when there are different views and ideas in the community, that everyone is trying their best for the good of the center, and also not to take it too personally when someone expresses an opposite or different view.

Also I think about whether what I am going to say is hurtful or harmful to others or the situation before I say anything. Sometimes it's not about whether what I say is true or untrue, but rather whether it's helpful and beneficial, or not.

I have also found it helpful to apologize, even when I think I am right and did not make a mistake, in order solve a problem and create a more harmonious situation.

Putting oneself in the other person's shoes before saying something is also helpful. It is so easy for us to believe and say things when we are not in a certain position, but our view might change when we are in that position, and we might act differently than what we'd originally thought.

SUPPORTING HARMONY WITH FPMT

When we come together at Dharma centers with the intention to transform ourselves, we hope to find ourselves in an environment that supports our studies and practice.

In order to help facilitate harmonious conditions, FPMT has developed the FPMT Ethical Policy, which is signed by all people in positions of authority within the FPMT organization. The FPMT Ethical Policy is displayed at all FPMT centers, projects, and services, and is included in staff and volunteer training materials.

FPMT centers, projects, and services also have their own specific grievance procedures, which outline steps for resolving problems when informal methods don't work.

More information on the FPMT Ethical Policy and guidelines on grievance procedures are in the Affiliates Area of the FPMT website.

In addition, FPMT's Foundation Service Seminar provides guidance and training to those offering service within FPMT. Among other topics, this seminar covers the Ethical Policy and grievance guidelines, as well as provides opportunities for participants to develop their skills to address problems and create harmony.

To learn more about FPMT's Service Seminars, visit fpmt.org/education/training/.



LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE MAKING DINNER FOR SOME STUDENTS FROM BUDDHA HOUSE, ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA, 2018. PHOTO BY VEN. LOBSANG SHERAB.

WE'RE ORDINARY HUMAN BEINGS DOING OUR BEST

Peter Stickels is the national coordinator for FPMT Australia. He reminds us to be mindful of our expectations.

Harmony doesn't just happen because we are Buddhist centers. Harmony has to be worked at by ordinary human beings with failings.

Center harmony, like the harmony of any organization, is the result of many factors such as leadership, openness, respect, and a sense of shared purpose.

However, I think there is another layer we need to consider when we think about center harmony.

We understandably have higher expectations for the level of harmony at a Buddhist center compared with other organizations or work places. We expect a center to be a place of harmony, and perhaps are all the more upset when this expectation isn't met.

I think we need to remember that our centers are made up of ordinary human beings—ordained or lay—doing their best to improve themselves and help others. We are all fallible. We all make mistakes. We can all say the wrong things sometimes. Or say things that can be misinterpreted. We are Buddhists, not Buddhas!

Our centers are not automatically places of harmony—even if new members have that expectation. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we need to work at creating center harmony, and constantly ask ourselves if what we are saying or doing will promote harmony.

And, when things go wrong—and they will—be quick to resolve the issue, apologize, and move on.

A LESSON FROM RINPOCHE

As an early student of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Ven. Thubten Gyatso (Adrian Feldmann) has offered service in the FPMT organization in myriad ways. He currently is the director of Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery in Bendigo, Australia. He shared this self-implicating story of a lesson offered by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

I am not the right person to write about creating harmony because within FPMT I am the most notorious for creating disharmony. Nevertheless, I can write about how our precious teacher Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche once dealt with a particularly disharmonious situation at an FPMT center.

As usual, the conflict was mostly between the center co-directors, yours truly serving as the spiritual program coordinator, and my assistant. Rinpoche was teaching a one-week



FROM LEFT: VENS. PALOMA ALBA, JOAN NICELL, TENZIN TSOMO, AND TENZIN CHOGKYI, NORTH CAROLINA, US, 2017. PHOTO BY DROLKAR MCCALLUM; PHOTO BY JOAN BRUCET.



course, and when the afternoon came for the big showdown, the two sides gathered with high expectations that Rinpoche would prove them right and the others wrong. Without giving us a chance to present the matters that we felt were so important, Rinpoche bundled us into two cars, and we drove to the beach.

Walking along the water's edge, Rinpoche instructed us to each take a handful of sand, hold it up, recite several malas of OM MANI PADME HUM, blow on the sand, and throw it into the water with compassion to bless all the billions of creatures in the sea. Having done that, we returned to where Rinpoche was residing, and that was the end of the meeting.

The message was so clear: our center's role was to compassionately help others, particularly those who came to the center seeking relief from misery. And our selfish lack of compassion for each other was the obstacle that needed to be overcome. Only then could we do our job properly.

A year later, when I was the director of another FPMT center and experiencing conflict between my understanding of how to actualize Lama Yeshe's vision and the way others thought it should be done, I wrote to that director and apologized for giving him such a hard time.

RELYING ON GREEN TARÁ

Frances Howland has served the FPMT organization for many years from her home in Nepal. Currently she is the South Asian regional coordinator and shared a personal practice for creating harmony.

When I personally experience difficulties with another person and when I am mediating a conflict among others—mediating conflict is usually FPMT-related among people at the centers here in Nepal—I request Green Tara the savioress to come and help me.

Tara made a vow to come into this world to benefit sentient beings. Therefore, when you call upon her, she is obliged to help in any way; she cannot refuse.

I know that when I put my full trust in Tara, I will receive the guidance I need to solve the problem, the guidance to say the right thing at the right moment to diffuse the situation, and the guidance to create harmony among others.

RELYING ON THE GURU

Martha (Mar) Portillo is a Foundation Service Seminar facilitator, a 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life facilitator, and served as center director at Bengungyal Center in Mexico.

Being director of a center has been one of the most incredible experiences for me and the most meaningful job I have ever had, because I always did it inspired by Rinpoche. Whenever I faced a difficult situation and started to feel any of the afflictive emotions, I always tried to think of how Rinpoche would respond in this situation. This was a great way to bring my mind back to equanimity, in order to create harmony. For those of us offering service in a center, I think the most important thing to have in mind is that every moment is an opportunity to create negative karma or to practice Dharma and create merit. Before we open our mouths, we must be aware that we are Rinpoche's representatives. And that through us, people who attend the center will connect with Rinpoche's vast vision.

We must embody not only pure Dharma teachings but FPMT style. As stated in FPMT Foundation Service Seminar materials, that is "giving, speaking kind words, teaching according to the level of the student, and practicing what you teach."

In the most difficult situations I faced as director, I tried to keep in mind that in spite of my frustration or anger, as a director, I was the number one person responsible for keeping harmony. Of course, it was not easy.

Something that helped me a lot was remembering a quote I had heard from a nun who is my friend and a good example of equanimity: "Where there is no harmony, it is like eroded soil where



FROM LEFT: STUDENTS CARRYING WHITE TARA STATUE THAT WAS OFFERED TO LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE DURING A LONG LIFE PUJA, GREAT STUPA OF UNIVERSAL COMPASSION, AUSTRALIA, 2018. PHOTO BY VEN. LOBSANG SHERAB; VEN. THUBTEN GYATSO CLEANED LAMA ZOPA RINOCHE'S SHOES NEARLY EVERY DAY DURING THE SIX-WEEK RETREAT, THUBTEN SHEDRUP LING, AUSTRALIA, 2018. PHOTO BY VEN. ROGER KUNSANG.



nothing can grow.” And most of all in every difficult situation, I tried to remember Lama Zopa Rinpoche talking about the importance of harmony in the centers.

WHAT WOULD RINPOCHE DO?

Drolkar McCallum has been involved with the FPMT organization since 1995. Currently, Drolkar is the North American regional coordinator, a senior Foundation Service Seminar facilitator, and the International Mahayana Institute member services manager. She offers a simple question to ask in moments of disharmony.

A while ago I had ongoing difficulties with a center director in my region. I thought to myself, *what would Rinpoche do?*

As much as I didn't want to, I asked the director to meet with me. I offered her a drink, a compliment, and a very nice present! To make a very difficult situation easier, as I spoke with her about my concerns, I imagined that Rinpoche was sitting next to her smiling, showing the aspect of being pleased with me for making such an effort to try and create a harmonious relationship with this person who I thought of as difficult.

I always try to remain aware—and to mention to others when I can, especially in regional meetings and Foundation Service Seminars—that disharmony among the students shortens the lama's life. Nothing is more important than keeping harmony with others.

PRACTICING TOGETHER AND OFFERING APPRECIATION

Deepthy Chandrashekhar is the India national coordinator. She shared these examples for creating harmony.

Maintaining and working in harmony in our centers is one of the wishes of our Spiritual Director, Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Everyone is happy in a harmonious environment and contributes to the

best of their potential. I heard from one director of a center in India that when they have meetings, especially during times of conflict, they would begin the meetings with prayers and with reciting the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*, (see page 32), which would remind them of the bigger picture.

Another story I heard was of a volunteer who had felt neglected and invisible at their workplace and at the center where they were volunteering. They became unhappy, but still volunteered at a retreat with the intent to help others. When the director at the end of the retreat commended the good work done by all the volunteers, this volunteer felt really motivated again. Harmony comes from getting validation as well.

FINDING INSPIRATION THROUGH OBSERVING TIBETAN MONKS

Ven. Fedor Stracke is the resident teacher at Ayratar Institute in Germany. He has offered service and taught at FPMT centers since 1988.

For me perhaps one of the greatest examples of practicing harmony are the Tibetan monks from Sera Monastery in India, where I studied for ten years. Despite all the hardship and harm received, I have had not one conversation where a monk talks bad about the Chinese. In day to day conversations here in Germany, on the other hand, I think it is very common to constantly complain and talk bad about the real and imagined harm one has received from this or that person.

FINDING GUIDANCE IN TEXTS

Ven. Tenzin Tingyal is an FPMT registered teacher. He points to two texts for supporting the creation of harmony.

I can only say that for myself I think that the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* from Geshe Langri Tangpa and the verses from Shantideva that we find in the morning practice from

Rinpoche, “Method to Transform a Suffering Life into Happiness (Including Enlightenment),” would be most helpful if I could practice them.

REMEMBER DEATH CAN COME AT ANY TIME

Mike Murray served as the spiritual program coordinator at Jamyang Buddhist Centre in London for eight years before taking a break. Now he’s back in that same position and shared his practice for working with disharmony.

I found that trying to keep and promote harmony in the center usually involves trying to catch problems early by facing them head on and getting people to talk about things before they get really riled up.

In my own experience when I start getting angry and dissatisfied with someone (i.e., I am moving towards being disharmonious with people in the center), I remind myself that I could die at any time. And that if I die with that kind of mind, I certainly will not be going to a Dharma friendly and supportive place in my next life. That usually does the trick—though sometimes I have to remind myself a lot over the next few days!

I credit this thinking to my kind teachers Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and the fact that I met Dharma in the eighties when we were constantly being reminded that we could die at any time and only Dharma will help at the time of death. So it is “old school,” and I am enormously grateful that they drummed that way of dealing with my anger into my thick skull through repeating it again and again.

For me at least, it is clear that my anger and irritation come from being attached to things and events, and in the end I need to let go. I am aware that not everybody is comfortable with reminding themselves that they could die at any time, some have said to me “that is a bit extreme,” but generally it works for me.

PRACTICE REJOICING

Rafael Ferrer is the FPMT European regional coordinator and has served in many capacities in the FPMT organization for many years. He applies Rinpoche’s teachings on rejoicing when facing disharmony.

Rejoicing as Rinpoche has advised has been the best way that I use to create harmony. I try to rejoice for myself and for what others are doing for FPMT centers and in general for the Dharma. The guru guides sentient beings to enlightenment, so it’s very important to be happy when this happens.

I also try to apply rejoicing when negative emotions arise such as envy and competitiveness. These create an atmosphere of

distrust and discomfort. I think of how good practitioners rejoice and let go of the negative feelings, and it helps me relax.

In dealing with difficult situations, it’s good to be reminded that Dharma is what works best. Usually when we are in a conflict, we have a narrow perception of the situation. So as a Dharma friend, you can remind those in conflict to trust the good motivation of the other party. When doing this, you also have to trust in their potential to overcome the conflict.

THINK OF HOW DISHARMONY AFFECTS OTHERS

Ven. Chantal Tenzin Dekyi (Chantal Carrerot) is the resident teacher at Institut Vajra Yogini and the project coordinator for Monastère Dorje Pamo, both in France. She has also served as the director of the International Mahayana Institute.

As we are now working to establish a new monastery for nuns, I can see how working together in harmony is important. There are a few of us, and we have to make decisions and choices, but at times we don’t have the same opinion or idea on something. So it is important to accept that we do have different ideas and opinions and to not get into a conflict around it, but make it an opportunity to grow together.

Real strength comes from working together in harmony. As Tibetans say, you achieve more with a broom than with a single twig.

Something that helps is to consider the effect it has on others if we don’t get along. We lose all credibility with people who support us and place hope in us. This is an incentive to work towards a consensus.

Once I asked our resident teacher, “What does Geshe-la do to stay in harmony with people?” He answered, “To be harmonious with others, you have to accept to lose,” which I understand as “don’t cling to your own ideas.”

PAY ATTENTION TO HOW WE TALK ABOUT OTHERS

Sarah Brooks has worn many hats over the more than twenty years that she has been involved with FPMT, including working for Kadampa Center and the Liberation Prison Project in the United States. Currently, Sarah is the spiritual program coordinator at Mahamudra Center in New Zealand and a senior Foundation Service Seminar facilitator.

At the Foundation Service Seminar I attended at Jamyang Buddhist Centre in London in 2013, we were discussing harmony at centers. Ven. Robina Courtin explained that one of the main



ITALY, OCTOBER 2017.
PHOTO BY DROLKAR MCCALLUM.

causes of disharmony, as expressed at all levels of Lord Buddha's teachings, is criticizing others behind their backs. At the time of a schism in a center years ago, she recounted how Rinpoche had said that the schism was a result of breaking the third root tantric vow: speaking the faults of your Vajra brothers and sisters.

CONSIDER HOW YOU SEE THE OTHER

Marina Brucet and Hans Burghardt both completed the *Masters Program* at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa (ILTK) in Italy and are FPMT registered teachers. They are now based at Tushita Retreat Center in Spain, where Marina serves as the center's spiritual program coordinator. Together Marina and Hans shared this reflection on creating harmony.

Being part of a community is challenging, but also an opportunity to grow as a person. We all have our own ideas, points of view, moods, and emotional needs; and we need to live with this fact, which can become a very good practice.

We work in a retreat center, and many different people come here. Some people seem happier than others. When we encounter a person who is not happy or presents some trouble, the most effective way for us to interact is focusing on the way we *see* that person rather than on the way we *act*.

We all want to be happy and not to suffer. We try to do our best, with our ups and downs. We all can and should see the beauty in others. If we can see each other from this point of view, harmony will come easier.

Harmony does not mean being similar or thinking and acting in the same way all the time, but that we understand and accept our diversity. It really helps. After taking some time to do this, the way we act becomes naturally more harmonious.

Besides, in the FPMT centers, if we find ourselves here together, it likely means that we have a common path together from past lives, and thus all kind of things can come up. This perspective helps us understand many things, and it also helps us accept different situations that come up. We can deal with

our differences and also purify some common negative karma, which will smooth things as we walk along together.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING NICE

Ven. Tenzin Legtsok is in his fifteenth year of the geshe studies program at Sera Je Monastic University and is an FPMT registered teacher.

Will Rogers once said, “It’s nice to be important, but it’s more important to be nice.” If you want to build harmony, you have to be kind to people. Anger, the very antithesis of kindness, is by far the most destructive thing to harmony. One moment of anger not only destroys merit accumulated over eons, more immediately it destroys trust, friendship, and mutual respect built up over many years.

In every community of people I’ve lived with—from my four-person nuclear family while growing up to five guys on a fishing boat in Alaska to six or more monks at Sera IMI House—anger has been the biggest obstacle to harmony in the group.

Here at Sera IMI House, where I’ve lived since 2008, the pulse and mood of the community changes with the changing residents. The tensest and most uncomfortable times for everyone in the house are when one or more members are angry at one or more others in the house.

Conversely, when people treat each other with kindness and are forgiving and patient and able to let slights pass or address them even-handedly, then we naturally grow closer.

I think that’s why the deep peace embodied by great saints like Buddha, Saint Francis, and others is symbolized by their friendship with animals like deer, elephants, wolves, birds, and so forth. Profound harmony naturally arises when we totally forsake harm.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Amy Barton-Cayton became a student of Lama Zopa Rinpoche in 1996. She has been working with the FPMT Service Seminars in their various formats since 2001. She has served as the North American regional coordinator and is currently the FPMT Service Seminar coordinator.

Some years ago when Merry Colony and I were training partners in presenting the Foundation Training in Compassionate Service, we became aware of some difficulties in a region where we were presenting the training. We met with all the participants in a large circle, and following the guidelines for speaking kind words and working harmoniously together—two sections from what is now the Foundation Service Seminar Retreat—the participants were able to better hear and listen to each other so that there was an opening for future communication.

When I am in a position where there is some disagreement between people who have asked for help or in situations where

I am in disagreement with someone, I do my best to utilize communication skills like: imagining how I would feel and what I would do if I were in the other person’s position, keeping confidential what I hear, repeating what is said to me to be sure I heard correctly, being gentle with my words and tone of voice, and being aware of my body language.

I also try to keep in mind the instructions for keeping my speech virtuous and I try to be clear about what my intentions are in that situation. Often I ask myself whether I want to be right or I want to be happy, and most importantly, I ask myself what I think Lama Zopa Rinpoche or His Holiness the Dalai Lama would think of both my view as well as my speech and other actions.

SKILLFULLY WORKING WITH CONFLICT

Don Handrick is a graduate of the Masters Program at ILTK and resident teacher at Thubten Norbu Ling in the United States. He shared a wide-ranging essay on creating harmony, which can be read in its entirety with this issue’s online content. Here’s a short excerpt of Don’s practical suggestions.

Most importantly, clearly identify the problem, if there is one. Be sure to see the problem clearly and without any taint of self-centeredness, and be sure that it really is a problem. Some “problems” occur simply because we are all different, and so a problem is in our mind due to our view manifesting in a particular way and thus might be resolved simply by our sitting with it in contemplation or meditation.

Perhaps think about the context of the problem in terms of the community—if there is a benefit for the good of the community, it will be a better gauge for addressing it and will begin to frame how the problem should be presented and discussed. If you plan to address the situation, be sure to check your motivation and set your intention before commencing any dialogue.

Be skillful in terms of the context for addressing the problem. Address the conflict skillfully in terms of time, place, and manner.

Throughout the process, strive for a harmonious solution, which is measured by some form of agreement or compromise among the parties involved. If there is no solution, at least try to have a plan as to how to resolve the conflict with further dialogue or whatever is agreed upon as “next steps.” Clearly set out what has been agreed upon at the conclusion of the conversation. If needed, put it in writing then or shortly after so that it’s clearly communicated. Whether or not you settle your discussion, set a time to meet again, as contact minimizes projected wrong views.

Read Don’s piece in its entirety on FPMT.org/mandala/this-issue/.