

# INTEGRATING WHAT YOU'VE HEARD

BY LAMA THUBTEN YESHE

In the early 1970s, Lama Yeshe gave Sunday afternoon lectures to foreigners at Kopan Monastery in Nepal. These mostly young people would come from where they were staying in the immediate vicinity (very few people were able to stay at Kopan at the time) or Kathmandu to hear Lama, as he was called.

This issue's teaching by Lama Yeshe comes from one of these Sunday afternoon sessions, captured in the earliest existent recording of Lama Yeshe. We share this teaching, which took place on January 2, 1972, as an example of how early Western students experienced Lama Yeshe, who was 36 years old at the time, and his remarkable ability to connected with them.

Lama Yeshe's story is detailed in the forthcoming authorized biography, *Big Love*, from which the accompanying photographs are taken. (See page 27 for more on *Big Love*.)

You've spent quite a lot of time with me now, listening to my explanations of Lama Tsongkhapa's approach to both the fundamental human problem and your individual ones. After all these months, you need to come to a conclusion from what you've read and heard; you need to integrate the teachings within yourself.

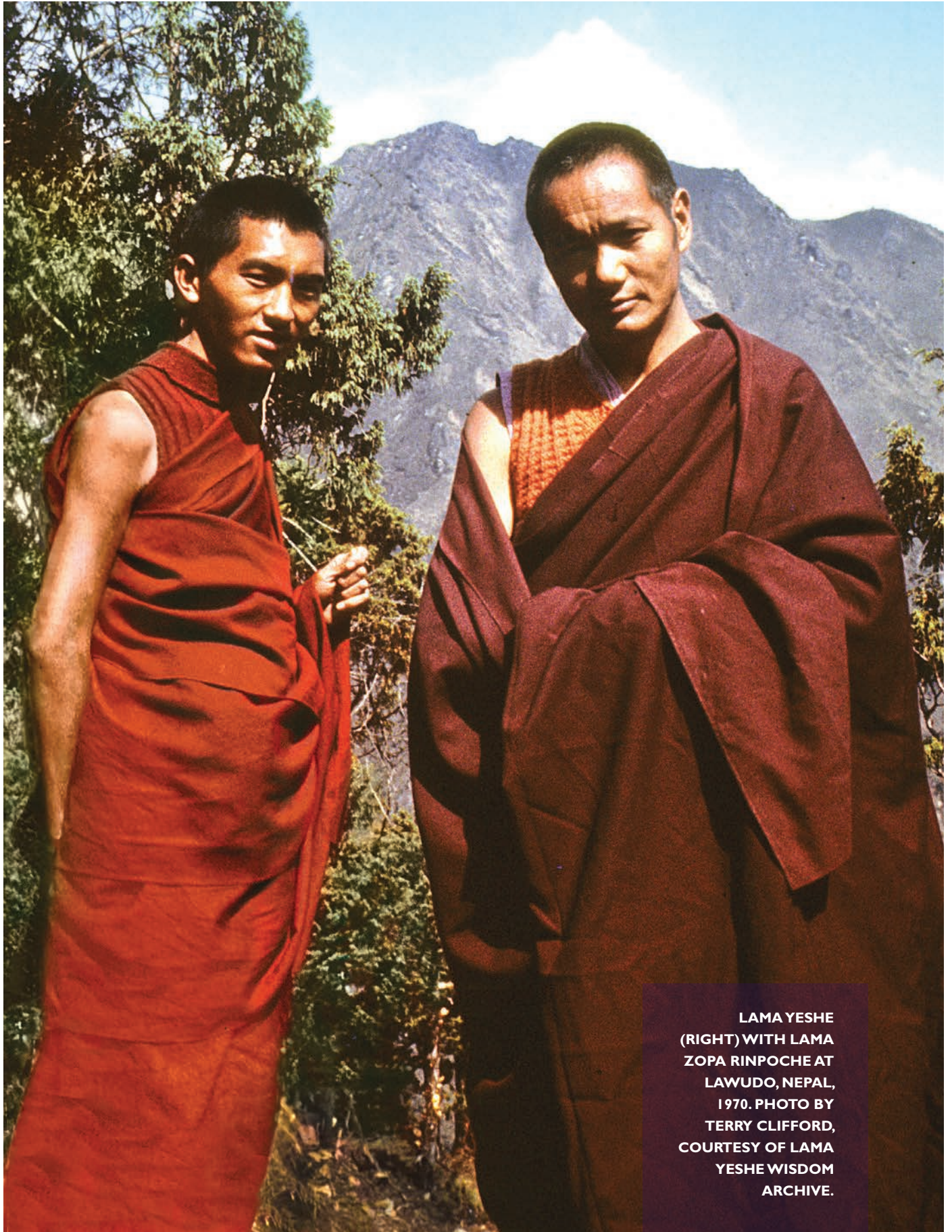
Listening to my words you might think, "Yes, what he's saying is true," but experience and actualization are very different from mere intellectual understanding. Therefore, to experiment with what your intellectual knowledge-wisdom has understood from what I've said, to see if it exists in reality or not, is very important.

Otherwise, what happens is that, while we understand intellectually that happiness, unhappiness, and so forth do not depend on outside conditions but on the interpretations of our wrong conception mind, we still believe what our ego tells us; we don't realize the meaning of our words; we don't follow our

intellectual understanding wisdom. Although our intellectual knowledge-wisdom agrees that external phenomena are not the main thing, that the objects our senses perceive depend on the interpretation of our own mind, we don't actually understand this; we have not yet realized it. To arrive at this deeper wisdom you have to experiment within yourself, without listening, without reading.

That's the reason retreat is very important. Whereas modern science conducts experiments on external phenomena, we experiment internally, examining mental phenomena introspectively and penetratingly.

So I think you people have gained enough intellectual understanding but have not yet actualized the teachings to the point of gaining realizations. Therefore, at this stage you need to say, "I understand that I've been following my old habits for countless lives. I no longer want to go on like this; I want to stop



LAMA YESHE  
(RIGHT) WITH LAMA  
ZOPA RINPOCHE AT  
LAWUDO, NEPAL,  
1970. PHOTO BY  
TERRY CLIFFORD,  
COURTESY OF LAMA  
YESHE WISDOM  
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following the interpretations of my wrong conceptions.” If you begin to experiment and act in accordance with your intellectual understanding, then you’ll really affect your mind.

Otherwise, you might know all the words, but when real trouble comes you go berserk, the same as you always have. If you don’t change your mind, you will continue to react in the same old way, no matter who you are—a lama, a yogi, a meditator in a cave—arrogantly thinking, “I’m special.” If you get down and depressed when difficulties arise, that shows you have no understanding.

The ancient Mahayana practitioners of India and Tibet would first listen to teachings and study deeply. When they felt they had gained enough knowledge, they would go into solitude and, avoiding all contact with other people, look completely within and experiment with inner realizations. It’s now necessary for you people to do the same thing.

What’s the point of listening, listening, listening to teachings, collecting words, but then not integrating what you’ve heard with your mind or gaining realizations? You’re not here to learn language from me! Your English is much better than mine. You’re not here just to listen and collect words; don’t believe that it’s only through listening to words that you can gain realizations. That’s a wrong conception.

You have to integrate into experience whatever you understand. Once you have gained experience and realization of one topic you need to go on to the next, which takes you further down the path. Without moving forward step by step, it’s impossible to progress; you can’t simply collect high-sounding words while leaving your actions down here on the ground. Collecting words that talk of flying to the moon doesn’t mean you fly to the moon; with words alone you remain earthbound. It’s the same if you think arrogantly that you can get higher realizations simply by listening to Lama’s words. Without actualizing that which you understand and integrating it within you, you can’t.

We think we learn from people: “I spent a long time with him and learned a lot.” What did you learn? I don’t think you learn from somebody by spending time with that person. You learn from yourself, from what your own mind says—everything’s in there. For example, the thoughts of everybody in the universe are already within you, so you can learn from your own mind; others’ expressions are already within your mind; if you listen to yourself, to your mind, you’ll find others’ expressions are there. So you might say, “I’m learning from him,” but I don’t think you are. Listen to your own mind; check yourself—that’s the way to learn and solve your own inner problems. I don’t think it’s so beneficial to always be looking, listening, and searching outside. That’s just externalism.

Check up, for example, why you can’t stay alone for a week without seeing or talking to anybody. Why can’t you? What makes it difficult? The difficulty comes from your own mind.

You should realize that all such experiences—happiness, peace, good, bad—completely depend on the interpretation of the individual wrong conception mind. If you realize the teachings beyond words, you’ll really be able to solve your inner problems.

So from this Sunday until February 28, there’ll be no more of these classes. At that time Lama Zopa will begin a one-month meditation course. But if it’s beneficial, from two to three next Sunday afternoon you should come together for a one-hour practical Mahayana philosophical discussion without me present. If any unresolved issues remain or complications arise, if it’s useful, I can come for an hour on Monday afternoon to answer questions.

Why am I stopping these Sunday afternoon talks? You’re beautiful people; I like spending time with you. One thing is that I have duties around the center; during the day I need to keep an eye on how things are going around here. [The first Kopan gompa was being built around this time.] These can interrupt the class, and that might disappoint you. Also, for the next couple of months I want to retreat in the mornings and evenings. So there are several reasons I want to stop for now. I hope you won’t be angry!

Next Sunday’s discussion should cover subjects such as: What is Dharma? What is samsara? Where do samsaric beings come from and why are we born on this earth? Why do we die? What causes death? How do the twelve links come and go? Those things are necessary to understand. None of this is talking about external phenomena; this is all about their inner expression. Without knowing how these things express themselves within you, you can’t go beyond the wrong conception mind.

If you’re going to come to these discussion groups, read and think about these topics and then question each other with compassion. Discussion, or debate, doesn’t mean, “I understand; you don’t.” It’s not like that. Compassion between Dharma friends means, if I don’t know the answer to a question I’m given, I think about it and try to reply as best I can; if my answer is unsatisfactory, you kindly explain the right answer to me so that my understanding will become more definite and not like a yo-yo. Most of the time our knowledge is like a yo-yo: today I say yes; tomorrow somebody contradicts me, and I say no. This really is a problem.

The Mahayana Buddhist philosophical doctrine is like a diamond, indestructible, but our inner doctrine, our understanding, is like a yo-yo. Doctrine means inner understanding, not words in a book. Therefore, if you really understand doctrine, things make much more sense within you.

What I mean when I say “yo-yo” is the situation where somebody tells you something and you think, “Oh, that’s nice,” then somebody else tells you something contradictory and again you think, “Oh, that’s nice.” Accepting every interesting thing



**LAMA YESHE DURING THE FIRST MEDITATION COURSE AT KOPAN MONASTERY, NEPAL, 1971. PHOTO BY FRED VON ALLMEN, COURTESY OF LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE.**

you hear just makes you confused. Somebody persuasive tells you one thing and you accept it; somebody gives you good reasons for something contradictory, and you accept that too. Two opposite things cannot both be correct, but because your discriminating knowledge-wisdom is weak, you have no ability to discern what's right. So, like a yo-yo, your understanding goes up and down according to what people say.

You're never sure of anything. You think that Dharma is interesting, but when you encounter a few difficulties you think Dharma is complicated and give it up. That means you don't really understand.

Dharma philosophy is not just ideas. Practical Mahayana Dharma philosophy is within you. It's about your consciousness, your conceptions, not trees and plants. Biology doesn't affect your mind but understanding practical Mahayana Buddhism does; it makes your understanding better and stronger.

## Listen to your own mind; check yourself—that's the way to learn and solve your own inner problems.

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In the past, religious doctrine and expression were widespread in many countries, but because such things are inner phenomena, people didn't really understand them. What they understood much more easily is the doctrine of materiality—people understand objects of the five senses without being taught. They see others get jobs, work, make money, and buy things. It's obvious; nobody has to explain it.

Because material philosophy is so much easier to grasp than spiritual philosophy, nowadays many more people are interested in material things than in religion. This is simply the way the human mind evolves. It's so simple: you work, you get material; you make something, you get material. You don't need anybody to teach you this. It would be silly to teach this in school—everybody knows it automatically: if you work, you get things; if you sell something, you get money. This is the philosophy, doctrine, or conception of materialism.

Check within yourself—don't look outside. How strong is your material philosophy? Don't think, "I have no philosophy or doctrine." Everybody does. Your concepts are your doctrine. The idea you have that it's better to go out for dinner than to cook at home—that, in a small way, is your doctrine, your philosophy. Don't think doctrine and philosophy can only be grand ideas.

I know you people understand something, but you haven't realized it; you haven't actualized what you know intellectually. But if you engage in philosophical discussion—how, why, reason, enumerate, look, think—and go deeper in a skillful way, you will develop great understanding.

A simple example: go home and check out your mother's philosophy. It's reflected in the way she arranges things in her house: "I want this here; I don't want it there. Don't tell me to change it." This is her philosophy, her doctrine.

Now, say somebody says to you, "I don't believe in the spiritual life any more. I don't think that happiness and unhappiness depend on the interpretation of your own mind." What are you going to say? What sort of rational, logical refutation can you come up with? Saying, "I believe in



LAMA YESHE AT  
KOPAN MONASTERY,  
NEPAL, 1974. PHOTO  
BY ROBBIE SOLICK,  
COURTESY OF LAMA  
YESHE WISDOM  
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the Dharma because Lama said so,” means nothing. You have to come up with the why and how.

“Happiness and suffering are externally caused. The shape and color of phenomena do not depend on the mind. Things exist in and of themselves, out there. You can make them; you can see them.” If somebody tells you that, how do you reply? If you have truly realized the way in which things exist you can calmly, slowly, refute these statements without emotion and make the other person understand. But if you have a yo-yo mind, you might actually come around to that person’s point of view and that can be the end of your spiritual path. It doesn’t take much to change a weak person’s mind.

When the Chinese tortured the Tibetans, they’d lock them in a cell without food or clothing and say, “You believe in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Let them feed and clothe you.” Those with little understanding might think that since the Buddha didn’t bring them food or clothing in prison, the Buddha doesn’t exist. But the Dharma teachings don’t say that Buddha gives you food. People who think that Buddha gives food or Buddha causes problems misunderstand Buddhist doctrine; when you tell them,

“When you were in prison and asked Buddha for food he didn’t give you any; therefore there’s no Buddha,” they might accept that as true. And even though it’s false logic, it can be enough to destroy the faith of somebody with no understanding.

The same thing can happen to you. You come here to Kopan for teachings with certain expectations and when the conditions change you make some excuse and leave. This shows that you don’t have a rational, logical understanding of the diamond philosophy of Buddhism. Don’t believe the Western view that philosophy simply means conversation. It’s deeper than that; it’s about how things affect the mind: what causes bring what results and what can stop them.

Deep understanding is very, very important. And Mahayana philosophy is also very practical; it doesn’t simply describe external phenomena. Everything is linked to better understanding.

I’m not telling you what to do. I don’t care. But I am saying that if you’re interested, make sure that what you do becomes real. I know you understand something; I know you’ve discovered something. But much of what you’ve understood is simply

intellectual and not yet at the level of realization. Therefore you need something more.

So the topics for next Sunday are what I mentioned. We'll decide those for the following week next Sunday.

That's all, thank you so much. If you have any questions, please ask.

**OLIVIA:** Isn't understanding also very much dependent on good karma?

**LAMA:** Of course. Good karma means that you have to work for understanding. Without your putting in the effort, there's no understanding. Understanding doesn't just fall out of the sky, like that. You have to put much effort into meditating. That's what makes Olivia a smiling, happy person. Without Olivia's effort there's no relaxed, happy Olivia. The deeper your understanding the more you're relaxed, the greater your happiness. Definitely.

**OLIVIA:** I think my understanding has more to do with Buddha than me.

**LAMA:** Yes, when you understand Buddha's qualities within yourself, you become peaceful. So of course it has something to do with Buddha, because you discover these things through his teachings. But that doesn't mean Buddha gives it to you *bam!* just like that.

The many beings who solved their own problems and attained everlasting peaceful realizations did so by practicing the

Buddha's teachings; to the extent that they were practicing his teaching, it has something to do with him. Although he passed away over 2,600 years ago, the power of his mind still permeates the world. We're enjoying it here even now. But we have to make an effort. For example, if you want that delicious Kathmandu cake, you don't get it up here at Kopan just by thinking about it. You have to be practical: get your money, go buy it, and bring it back.

Look at how you live here in Nepal. The houses are cold; the toilets are not what you're used to. You can live much more comfortably than you do here, but you still enjoy yourself here: "I'm much happier here; I have everything I need." It all depends on your mind. That's what you've discovered. Your mind does not need luxury accommodations to be peaceful and happy. Nobody told you this is good; you discovered it for yourself. Even if somebody told you it would be good here, without understanding you wouldn't be interested. You can't just put anybody into this situation. But with understanding, you enjoy your Nepalese house, Dharma friends, and simple food.

Excerpted from *The Enlightened Experience: Collected Teachings* by Lama Yeshe, published as an ebook by the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive. The ebook, which is the first of two volumes, is a compilation of teachings given by Lama Yeshe in the 1970s and 1980s, when he traveled the world extensively with Lama Zopa Rinpoche and taught at many courses, seminars, and public talks.

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