



Mexican Dharma Celebration

In April, the Mexican Buddhist community enjoyed a very special Dharma Festival, which included a retreat with Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Mandala presents this joyous event with a true Mexican flavour!

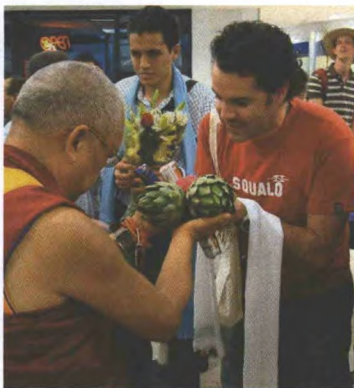
A warm welcome at the airport included precious – and unusually large – artichoke offerings to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who thought they were special Mexican flowers, until Lobsang Tonden explained how to cook and eat them.

Rinpoche's tour began with a public talk in Guadalajara: "*A Warm Heart as the Source of Lasting Happiness*," attended by five hundred people. Three hundred students then joined Rinpoche for a ten-day retreat in a Jesuit monastery just outside Guadalajara. On arrival, Rinpoche was greeted by an eleven-piece mariachi band. Its members were so happy to receive his blessings, and they enthusiastically played Mexican songs outside his window for a long time. Rinpoche asked if they were part of the monastery, and if the women in the mariachi band were nuns wearing local robes.

Basing his teachings on Lama Tsongkhapa's text, *Hymns of Experience*, Rinpoche's perfect explanations showed how these teachings on emptiness have a universal relevance and can be practiced by anyone in any culture. "We were reminded that the actual source of happiness lies within the mind, rather than in external objects," Lobsang Tonden said.

Ven. Paloma skilfully translated Rinpoche's English into Spanish, and reviews and meditations were led by Ven. Rene and Ven. Pende. Many senior members of the Sangha were present – Venerables Wongmo, Gloria, Yarphe (John Jackson), Yeshe Chodron and others who led discussion groups after lunch. At the end of the retreat Rinpoche gave the Great Medicine Buddha initiation, along with refuge and many other oral transmissions. About sixty people took refuge for the first time.

The local priests invited Rinpoche and some of the Sangha to an interfaith meeting, where Rinpoche talked about the things we share as human beings, and as spiritual practitioners. When the elderly caretaker said that he



would like to meet “the maestro,” he was given a headset so he could listen to the teachings – on emptiness – in Spanish. After the teaching, Rinpoche held the old man’s head in blessing for a long time, which totally blissed him out! All the cooks, gardeners and workers gathered to say thank you and good bye to Rinpoche, and they all asked for Rinpoche’s blessings.

Rinpoche also gave a public talk in Mexico City at the National University of Mexico, attended by more than eight

hundred people. The next day he gave a teaching on *The Eight Verses*. He also visited two large prisons – Puente Grande in Guadalajara and another in Mexico City where he gave teachings and blessed the inmates and officers with a holy relic of Shakyamuni Buddha. About four hundred inmates attended these events.

FPMT has a growing presence in eight Mexican cities, and Rinpoche’s visit and interaction with so many of his students was an inspiration for everyone. ❁

“I feel fortunate to have had the chance to organize Rinpoche’s visit with the other FPMT Mexico members. I especially admire the harmony between the organizers.”

SERGIO GRIMALDO

“Lama Zopa Rinpoche touched the hearts of all of us, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist.”

EDGARDO MOLINA

“Apart from the early Kopan courses I attended in the 1980s, this is the course with Rinpoche that I liked the best. I think partly due to the Mexican students – their minds and hearts are so open, which creates a very special atmosphere.”

VEN. YESHE CHODRON

“It’s difficult to express fully my appreciation and gratitude for what was one of the most memorable retreats I’ve ever had the

privilege of attending. I had a wonderful time. I’m moving into my retreat cabin tomorrow and will take the love and inspiration from this retreat with me.”

VEN. YARPHEL

“Many people told me that after many years in Buddhism, this was the first time they heard pure Dharma, so now they know what Dharma is. Everywhere people tried to get near Rinpoche for blessings, so our guru looked like a rock star!”

VEN. PALOMA

“This was maybe the most powerful teaching event I’ve ever experienced with Rinpoche. Many other older students seem to agree. For one thing it was mainly on emptiness, which is unusual for such an extended course with Rinpoche. Plus the generosity, devotion and warm hearts of the Mexican students created a blissful, sweet atmosphere for all of us.”

VEN. WONGMO

