

Mouse in the House!

By Ven. Thubten Wongmo



My first introduction to having your own personal house-mouse was some time in the '70s when I was visiting Lama Zopa Rinpoche in his tiny room at Kopan. I was sitting at my guru's feet, asking what I thought were terribly important questions, when suddenly Rinpoche turned his head. Something was moving next to him on the stacked up pillows on the bed where he basically sat, meditated, received people, read texts and ... lived. I looked to see what had attracted him – he had such a sweet smile on his face – and lo! There was a tiny dish filled with rice and a tiny mouse munching away. Even though there were two of us so close, it showed no fear and just kept on happily chomping. It was clear that Rinpoche had been feeding his friend for a while; the little dish was carefully placed right where Rinpoche could observe, and where its mind could be blessed by hearing prayers, mantras and so on. I'm quite sure this is how I have the great good fortune to be one of Rinpoche's disciples in this life – from having been a mouse or flea in his cave.

Now, more than thirty years later, the mouse issue has resurfaced. The log houses here at Amithaba Buddha Pure Land in Washington aren't well sealed, so plenty of mice find their way in. At first I caught them in live traps and released them down the road. I noticed that the poor little things would tremble and look terrified once in the traps, and if they had to stay for hours in their tiny jails, they'd freeze in

fright. I'd put water in bottle caps for them and pieces of bread for them to enjoy while in captivity, but still they didn't look at all happy or relaxed. But what else to do? They left mouse poop on my altar, kitchen shelves and counter tops, in the kitchen sink, all over the floor – everywhere. And the mouse population seemed to be increasing; sometimes I'd catch a few each day.

I even found traps that hold more than one mouse at a time, so my mouse-catching skills were becoming professional. But I still wasn't comfortable seeing them so frightened. I knew that wherever I released them outside they would most likely become meals for birds, snakes and cats, or find their way into another household that didn't use live traps.

The last time Rinpoche was on the land our conversation turned to mice. I explained how we catch them in the live traps. Rinpoche then told me a story I had heard before, but this time I paid close attention. Again, while living in his tiny room at Kopan, someone had offered Rinpoche a *zen* (shawl) made out of nice material, so Rinpoche kept it carefully folded and ready to use for special occasions. One day, when Rinpoche took it out, a mouse had eaten through it, so when the *zen* was opened, there were holes in each folded section. It turns out that Lama Yeshe had removed a mouse from Rinpoche's room some time before, trying to make Rinpoche's tiny space more comfortable. Rinpoche explained that this mouse, due to the karma of having been thrown out, ate Rinpoche's special *zen*. Rinpoche said, "If the mice eat your food and clothes, this is due to your having a karmic debt with them. You owe them from past lives. If you harm the mice, they'll harm you more, so it's better to leave them alone."

I asked if it's OK to catch them in live traps. Rinpoche said, "When they're caught in those traps, it shocks and frightens them. The best is to put some food out for them in a special place in a corner of your house, and then ask them not to disturb you. This becomes the bodhisattva practice of charity and in the Six Session prayer, part of the

three types of morality, that is one of the samayas of Amoghasiddhi. So your tantric commitment practice gets done. When you finish your karmic debt with them they won't come to disturb you any more, even if you *want* them to come! Once I put out food for the ants where I was living, but they didn't go near the food. They went all around it instead and didn't eat any. There was no karma for them to eat my food."

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So off I went to what we call here, good ol' Wal-Mart (the only superstore in this tiny town), looking for a "mouse bowl" which obviously doesn't exist, but I did find a cute little red cat-feeding dish. That very first evening "my" mouse was happily munching away. It was a weird feeling to be encouraging a creature that just a while ago I had been definitely discouraging, but soon I was projecting "my mouse" and "pet" onto it rather than "that darn mouse!" I was looking forward to its nightly visits to the little red dish.

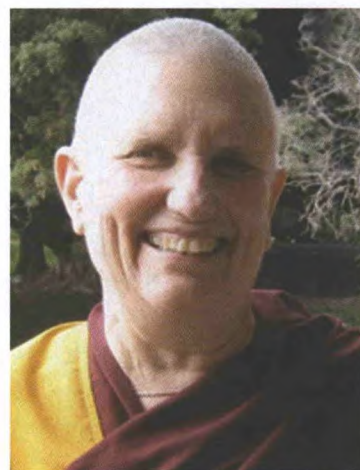
People warned me that "now hordes of mice will invade your house," but actually the opposite has happened. I'd be happy to see more frightened little mommy sentient beings enjoying meals in a safe place. At the most I've seen two mice at the dish at one time. Somehow now I have fewer mice than before they were being fed. It seems like my mouse karma is being purified just as Rinpoche said would happen.

What's more, I no longer find mouse poop all over the house. I do find a few black sunflower husks on the floor right by the feeding dish. This makes me wonder where my mouse eats the seeds, and where are all the rest of the husks? And where does it live? Probably right under my bed, which is OK! So far there are no hordes, flocks, herds, gaggles or packs of mice suddenly in the house because of the food.

Karma finishing, as the lamas would say. The mice are happy and I'm happy. It's a total win-win situation.

Every evening I hear the little red dish being moved around on the floor and, sure enough, it's my mouse reminding me, "Hey, it's time for dinner!" I'm quite convinced that it moves the dish on purpose, knowing that I'll get up soon and fill it. When I hear the dish moving it puts a smile on my face. I have one pet to take care of which is better than nothing!

My next project is working with my packrats. They come onto my porch and make a nest in the corner with leaves, orange peels – the strangest things. Two summers ago I left for a couple of months, and returned to find one had gotten inside the house and made a good mess. So having a pet packrat is definitely a challenge. I know what people will say when I tell them about this plan – "They smell so bad and are destructive! You need to get rid of them!" But I'm sure it will become another win-win situation since it would be following my guru's advice. ☸



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