

Dharma in My Life

Three Young Buddhists Tell Their Stories...



Rinchen Khadro Norbu, 25, Australia

Being born into a Tibetan Buddhist family, I have been fortunately exposed to Dharma teachings throughout my life, attending talks given by various great teachers including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama

Zopa Rinpoche and Ven. Tenzin Palmo.

Born in Dharamsala India, I came to Australia, my mother's home country, at a very young age. I was raised in Melbourne, attending Tara Institute where Geshe Doga is the resident teacher. Through the teachings, my own reading and experience, and through my parents' guidance, the Dharma has had a valuable and positive influence on my life. From my experience, when I have tried to be mindful to practice qualities such as patience and loving-kindness, I have felt a lot more peaceful than when I have not been mindful. I have also noticed the effect my positive and negative states of mind have on others. This gives me hope and encourages me to keep on practicing.

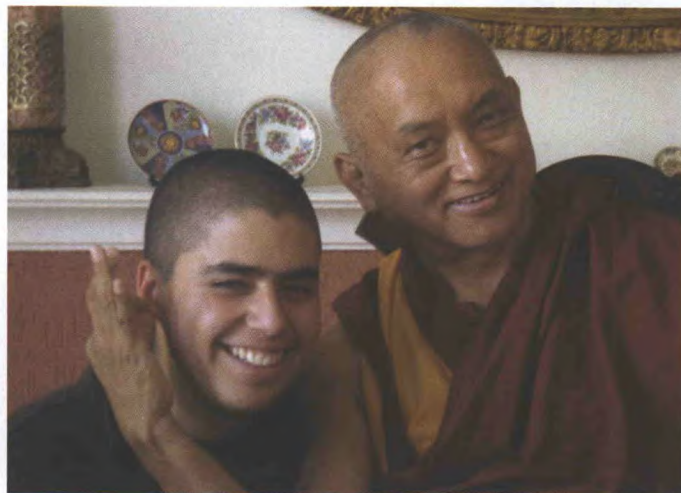
I also find that the Dharma helps me to make sense of my experience of life, which as a young person in this day and age can often be disheartening and confusing. Although I only have a limited understanding of the Dharma, I try to put into action the little I do know in my day-to-day life. I am currently involved in interfaith dialogue and friendship building between young people of various faiths, both locally and internationally. I am also completing a double degree in Environmental Science and Environmental Social Science and am involved in various campaigns to generate greater environmental understanding, including participating as a Youth Patron of the Parliament of the World's Religions, Melbourne 2009.

Although as young people we must rely on our elder and more knowledgeable teachers in our life for wisdom and guidance, we still have an important role and responsibility in building a better society. In my experience, there are many elders who are very supportive and encouraging in helping us young people engage meaningfully and actualize our roles and responsibilities to achieve this end.

Daniel Carranza, 16, Mexico

When I found the Dharma, my life began to change. As I got more involved in my practice and studies, I noticed that my mind was changing, which wasn't just interesting – but also wonderful! Now I am more aware of my mind, and before engaging in an action, I take some time to think about it. This has been a great way for me to prevent experimenting with alcohol, drugs or cigarettes, which many of my friends at school are attracted to and have problems with.

My first encounter with the Dharma was when I was eight years old, due to my relationship with my brother Ven. Lobsang Tonden, who is a monk. At that age, I didn't have problems related with addictions, but as I started to grow up, there were many temptations. Some friends would offer me intoxicants and so on, but in my mind I was clear that if I wanted to stop my suffering, Dharma is the best way to do it rather than in the ways my friends tried to find happiness.



When I practice Dharma, my mind is more peaceful and I can help others in a better way. That is the best part. For me, Dharma is not only about being aware of my actions, but also about making an effort every day to change my mind. Now I am at high school and I have been thinking about ordination. When I asked Lama Zopa Rinpoche for permission to become a monk, Rinpoche gave his blessings and permission, but asked me to wait until I finish my studies. So I am on my way!

Alexander Chen, 17, Taiwan

Just 18 months ago, I was a 15-year-old navigating through the violent, stormy seas of confusion. I was falling. It wasn't like falling off a tree, a bike or anything physical. My peers in school tormented me, and I soon began to perceive myself as a hopeless, worthless being. My life was shifting towards the darkness of depression. I lost interest in carrying on conversations with others. Schoolwork became a burden. My grades dropped significantly. Life was endless sufferings. I even went to the point of thinking that life wasn't worth living at all.

All this delusional thinking came to a screeching halt when I met Lama Zopa Rinpoche in an invited, private interview. Before I met him, I thought "He's just an ordinary Buddhist monk. Why bother meeting him? Monks sit and chant all day long, and they must have faith in some sort of superstition that contradicts modern science!" However, such thoughts changed after I received Rinpoche's private lesson. His tremendous kindness and compassion awakened me from my delusions. After numerous times of contemplating on his written advice – "The purpose of life is to bring happiness to all living beings through education and through compassion and Dharma wisdom" – I aspired to realize that goal of my life. Thus, I decided to explore Buddhism.

That very summer, I attended a "Discovering Buddhism" course, taught by Ven. Namgyel at Kopan Monastery in Nepal. His humorous and sensitive Dharma teachings made the course very enjoyable, effortlessly teaching Dharma through jokes, turning a dry-sounding course into a sea of laughter. If he were a high school teacher, he would definitely be adored by the student body.

During the entire course, I practiced Buddhist meditation, which deepened my understanding of the workings of the mind and the benefits of being mindful. In the end, I came to realize that the true causes of happiness do not come from external objects. They come from within. One can even transform problems into happiness. It all depends on our mind.

Half a year later, I had an opportunity to go to Bodhgaya for another retreat led by Ven. Dondrub and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Outside Root Institute, very young children in ragged clothes holding infants in their arms



tagged alongside me, begging for money. It is difficult to imagine the uncountable number of people without adequate food, clothing, shelter, etc., let alone all the beggars in India. Compared to the beggars, I know how incredibly fortunate I am to live in a safe, comfortable environment. The trip to India gave me an opportunity to develop compassion towards the poor.

Now, while being peer-pressured at school, I apply Buddhism in dealing with negative influences. Even though I am surrounded by those who would idly compare brands, gossip, recklessly speed on the roads, or sneak themselves into dubious places like pubs and bars at night, I no longer suffer from their harsh comments. I'm not that easy to be manipulated or upset anymore. It's perfectly okay to be different. I hold my own ethics and values. I have taken what used to be problems and use them as precious learning opportunities to purify my mind and generate compassion towards those who attack me.

I am very grateful that I encountered Buddhism at an early age. Lama Zopa Rinpoche, thank you so *very* much for devoting your precious time to me on the evening of March 4, 2007 at the Shakyamuni Center in Taichung, Taiwan to help me understand the ultimate meaning of life. Ven. Roger, thank you for discussing the difficulties I had gone through. Ven. Sarah, Ven. Sophia, Ven. Gyalten, my parents, and lastly, to all the virtuous friends who showed your genuine support, I must say a very big "thank you." 🌀