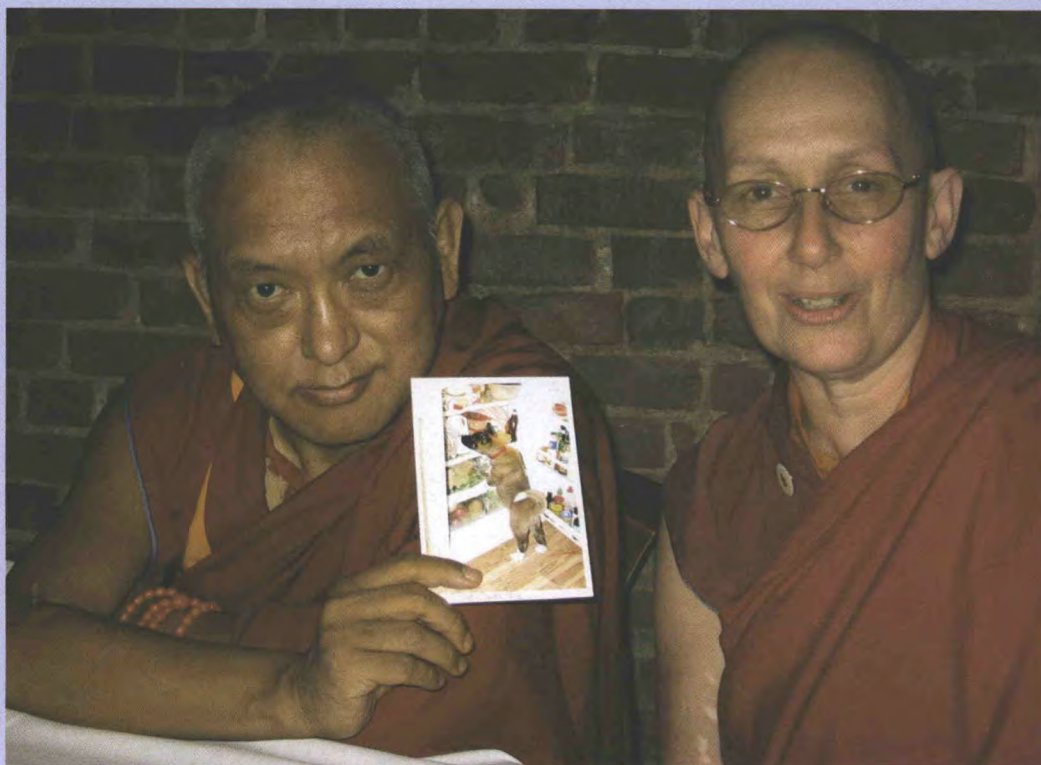


My Root Guru: Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment

By Ani Thubten Munsel



Ani Thubten Munsel with her root guru Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Back in 2000, I had a rare opportunity to enter into a year-and-a-half long deity retreat at Vajrapani Institute in Boulder Creek, California.

I was living in the retreat cabin directly above the Geshe House. I had earlier learned that Ven. Choden Rinpoche would be leading a group retreat at Vajrapani, and that my root guru, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, would be attending.

There had been some visa obstacles in bringing Ven. Choden Rinpoche and his attendant. The FPMT centers were doing prayers to help remove them. One day I was sitting on the porch at my

cabin, and I noticed a large halo hovering low in the sky below the Geshe House. The halo slowly moved up toward the ridge where the cabins are. It hovered over the Geshe House, then continued up to the ridge and passed over my cabin. Shortly thereafter, Ven. Choden Rinpoche came to America to lead the retreat at Vajrapani and give initiations.

Once the retreat began, Lama Zopa Rinpoche would walk Ven. Choden Rinpoche back to the Geshe House each evening after the last session and Dharma talks of the day. There was a small procession of firstly Rinpoche's second attendant at that time, Brian, who was holding the flashlight,

then Rinpoche with incense, followed by Ven. Choden Rinpoche and his attendant.

The path from the gompa to the Geshe House was completely lit up with rope lights standing maybe a foot or two up from the ground. It was breathtaking to behold this beautiful procession of holy beings, quietly walking in the still of the night on this illuminated path.

That first evening I went to see Lama Zopa Rinpoche he had me offer a khata to Ven. Choden Rinpoche, to make that connection. I then followed behind as they walked to the Geshe House. I remained outside the gate, waiting for Rinpoche to return.

I saw Rinpoche walking with Brian, heading back to the gompa. The impact was so great: there was Rinpoche on this glowing path, and it came so clear into my mind that

One day, in retreat, a thought came up – how incredible it is that so many people are able to attend this retreat with these two holy beings, plus they are able to breathe the same air as them. I thought, “Wow, this is really amazing, I rejoice for everyone.”

That evening, I went to present a khata to Rinpoche; He blessed me, and then told me how Ven. Choden Rinpoche had taught the students in the retreat a method for helping out with *lung* (wind problems). Rinpoche then turned sideways, took a deep breath, then bending down at the waist, began exhaling while moving his head right and left. He then turned to see if I “got that” and then headed back to the gompa with Brian while waving his holy left hand at me as he walked away. I stood there in total disbelief. Once again, the guru had blown my mind.

It was breathtaking to behold this beautiful procession
of holy beings, quietly walking in the still of the
night on this illuminated path.

Rinpoche *is* my lamp on the path to enlightenment. He is Lama Atisha. This feeling was so intense. As soon as Rinpoche came up to where I was standing, I immediately dropped to my knees, and offered up the khata. I couldn't stop crying. I kept saying to Rinpoche “Take me with you; take me with you,” and Rinpoche blessed me.

He then removed his zen and flung it on my shoulders. It was so chilly outside, yet Rinpoche wanted me to have his zen. He then headed off with Brian to the gompa. I returned to my cabin. It was late, and I sat on my bed trying to go over what had happened. I felt like Rinpoche had given me a teaching on renunciation in those brief moments with him.

In the following weeks while Rinpoche was at Vajrapani attending the retreat, I went to offer khata to Rinpoche a few more times. I would wait outside the gate of the Geshe House for him.

One evening Rinpoche asked me if, in and out of my sessions in retreat, I was thinking about all sentient beings – was I keeping all sentient beings in my heart, doing the retreat for them? And at that moment, I thought to myself, “Am I doing this?” It was a point of contemplation, reflection, the guru's holy teaching coming straight at me.

Hence was the guru's teaching on bodhichitta.

The last time I went down to offer khata to Rinpoche, I received my last teaching. I had some kind of small lump on my face that was so incredibly painful. I was well aware that it was a karmic ripening, but that didn't help with enduring the pain every day. I mentioned this to Rinpoche.

So there was Brian, standing there in the dark with this tiny flashlight pointed at this lump on my face, while Rinpoche checked it out like he was a doctor, touching it, looking at it. Then Rinpoche said to me, “Empty, it's empty,” laughed, and walked away.

Hence came down the teaching on right view. The teachings on the three principal paths were finished.

Back up in my retreat cabin, in the still of the night, I sat in reflection on how my root guru is truly my lamp on the path to enlightenment: I felt that very strongly. I felt very blessed.

How wonderful it is, how wonderful it is, how incredibly fortunate I am to have such an amazing guru in my life.

May Lama Zopa Rinpoche's holy Dharma body long dwell in the world for the benefit of all sentient beings. ☸

Six months after her retreat, on Saka Dawa, Ani Thubten Munsel moved into Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Aptos house where she has served as housekeeper and also at the Washington house, making water bowl offerings, and making holy tsa-tsas, stupas, and gilding for the guru.