



Reaching out to the Young

Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Tara Institute with Jenny Molloy (far right), Clive (a parent) and some of the Dharma Club children.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has shown great concern about the violence and disillusion expressed by some young people in these degenerate times, believing that the answer lies in teaching the basic principles of loving-kindness or “the good heart”, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama puts it.

Many FPMT centers around the world are reaching out to the young. Some are visiting schools to explain Buddhism. Some organize special youth-oriented events at their centers. Tara Institute in Melbourne, for example, has been running a monthly Dharma Club at the Institute for school-aged children for many years. “We have fun learning about the Buddha’s life and teachings and hope that the children will be inspired to practice a healthy way of life,” says the coordinator, Jenny Molloy. There are two age groups, 5-8 and 9-14 years. For the younger group, time is given to a Dharma-inspired craft, i.e., painting rocks, making flower offerings, hats and kites, etc. A shared lunch is included.

Tara Institute has also been offering “Introduction to Buddhism” classes in primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions for about twenty years. Some schools have stayed connected with the program for years.

The classes comprise Tara Institute’s story, its place in the Gelug and FPMT lineage including the history of its founders, the story of the Buddha, an explanation of the four noble truths, and open and often very challenging discussions about Buddhism and the modern world. The sessions end with a breathing meditation.

The feedback is usually very positive. Coordinator Allys Andrews shares a letter that she received from a Melbourne inner-city high school:

“I am writing to thank you for the wonderful contribution you made to our students’ learning experiences last year. It was very kind of you to arrange our visit to Tara Institute and to give us so much of your time. I know several of our students wrote letters of appreciation on their return to school and I hope you received them.

“Our students write a 5000-word reflective piece at the end of the year and a short self-evaluation for their reports. A very large number of them mentioned their visit with you as one of their most important learning experiences of the year. Also, I know from conversation with our students at the time that many of them found the experience enlightening and stimulating. Some of our students are more thoughtful and understanding people because of the experience. There were a number (and they weren’t the ones that I would have expected) that were strongly moved by some of the wisdom and power of Buddhism – I put that down to your wonderful presentation to the group. (One boy’s mother reported back to me that he went home that evening and made her a cup of tea for the first time in his life – citing something he had learned from the day about the importance of elders).

“I am enormously grateful that our students had the opportunity to hear from you and learn from you. I am also grateful for your willingness (and the willingness of your colleagues) to allow us to visit a place of such importance to so many people.”

In this issue we have tried to capture the spirit of the young, to foster hope, and to create that “good heart”. Because a happy life comes from a good mind and good actions, and the young are our hope and our future. ☸