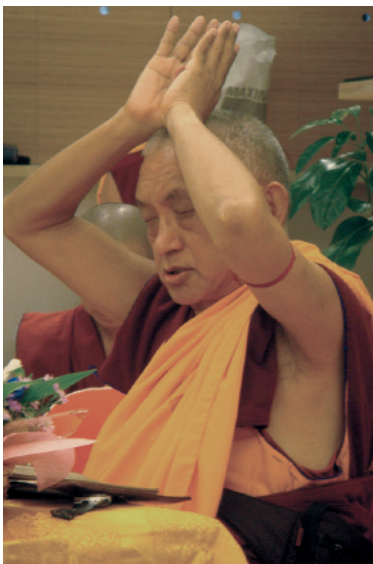


Tears of Joy in Tokyo

By Tim Burress



Rinpoche offering tsog at Do Ngak
Sung Juk Centre

They say you should expect the unexpected. In September Lama Zopa Rinpoche arrived in Japan for a one-week visit, the first in fourteen years, and it is no exaggeration to say that he has given new life to both our center and our ability to offer Dharma to the people here. The official program was packed, with no rest days at all, and even when there were no official teachings to do, the hours and minutes were filled with practice and teachings and blessings behind the scenes.

Rinpoche, Ven. Roger, Ven. Kunsang and Ven. Sangpo arrived from Mongolia and were greeted at Narita airport by students old and new. Since homes in Tokyo are extremely small, they stayed at an apartment near the center of the city and ventured out from there. The first day's public talk, *You Should be Happy*, given in English at the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai with warm and lively interpretation into Japanese, was well-attended and set the tone for much of the remaining visit which focused on the very essence of Buddhist practice: happiness. Although Japan is a Buddhist country, sometimes it seems that the foundations can get lost amid the demands and set patterns of daily life. The audience seemed to appreciate Rinpoche's approach, as well as his obvious kindness. Guests and Sangha members came from all over Japan, as well as Australia, Singapore and Taiwan. The number of attendees and volunteer helpers grew day by day.

On the next evening there was a meeting with the center members, during which Rinpoche's inspiration and commitment to our small group, and through us, to Japan, left many in tears. Due to various factors, maintaining a center in Japan has been a real struggle over the years. But thanks to a nucleus of Japanese and long-term foreign residents, the group's continuity has never been broken, and it seems that this slow-growing lotus is about to bloom. Maybe we needed the time to establish strong roots?

During the next two days there were further teachings which focused again on the foundations, the three principal paths, but the teaching was experiential rather than textual, and Rinpoche returned over and over to his theme that the essence of the teachings is happiness, what all of us want, yet somehow always look for in the wrong place. Many people spontaneously reported that it seemed as if Rinpoche was reading their minds, answering questions they had inside, yet had never articulated. It was as though each of us was receiving a private teaching, aimed directly at our deepest questions.

The teaching series culminated in a final, full day of teaching at Shōmanji, a Jōdo Shinshū temple that has been active in support of justice and human rights for Tibet. It was here that perhaps the most extraordinary teachings occurred. The first of these was

Top: Rinpoche's public talk at Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai.

Bottom: Rinpoche signing copies of *How to be Happy* for DNSJ center members. Living beings in the picture are (from left) Takiko Ohtome, long-time member and fearless Japanese interpreter, Ven. Roger Kunsang and Rinpoche. The skeleton in the background is known as "Henry". Center members meet at Jeremy Chance's Alexander Technique studio, where the skeleton is a teaching aid. And of course Henry serves as a pretty good teacher of impermanence himself!

when Rinpoche explained the nature of the many Buddhist relics he had brought with him, and which were set up on a round table so that the participants could view and circumambulate them during the break. This seemed to take most people by surprise, especially when Rinpoche explained their origin and power. For a while it was like being in a Tibetan community, with people walking clockwise around the table with hands folded, reciting mantras under their breath.

Then after a break, the second surprise began with a simple call for "one question" before what we thought would be a two- to three-hour Medicine Buddha initiation. But when the question was, "How do we meditate on emptiness?" Rinpoche smiled, paused, and then offered a two-hour reply of stunning clarity which, as I write this, it seems words alone cannot convey. It felt more like a transmission, and we will have to wait until the video work is completed to find out what the camera received. But the essence, I think, comes down to a refrain that Rinpoche used every time he sat down to a meal, when he would dedicate the merits while meditating on the fact that the subject, the action and the object *do exist*, but not in the slightest bit from their own side. Familiar words, but somehow that evening he made them real. There is no other way to describe it.

Eventually we received the initiation, too, going at lightning speed into the evening, but nothing could compare to the impact of those teachings.

Then at eight o'clock the next morning, they were on their way to the airport, seen off, once again, by students old and new. We look forward to Rinpoche's next visit and to the growth that the power of his visit and generosity has made possible. Come back to teach us again, soon, Rinpoche. ☸

