

# LIKE NECTAR ON FLOWERS: THE SELFLESS SERVICE OF FPMT-REGISTERED TEACHERS

By 1974, many students of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche had been studying solidly for at least two years at the biannual lam-rim courses held at Kopan Monastery in Nepal. As a result, Lama Yeshe began holding public examinations of his students in December of 1974 to help ensure their thorough Dharma education was being retained.

Prior to the first examinations, Lama Yeshe gave a talk to the Sangha of FPMT, known by then as IMI (International Mahayana Institute), in order to prepare them for the first public examinations:

*I think it is necessary that you know why we are going to hold examinations of IMI Sangha.*

*Since you took ordination, your life, your body and speech, do not belong to you, nor do they belong to Lama. They belong to all universal living beings. It was because of your understanding that you decided to live in the thirty-six vows, to renounce samsara. Lama did not push you. Therefore your duty is to integrate your body, speech and mind as much as possible into Dharma knowledge-wisdom and to give that light to all mother sentient beings. To do this it is not enough to spend all your life sitting on the mountain, doing a “Milarepa trip.” Nor is it enough to receive teachings on just one particular book – for example, the Vajrasattva text – and then spend your life studying that small information just for your own knowledge. To think that work such as this is the purpose of your life is a wrong conception.*

*You need to be able to explain the basic psychological Dharma wisdom terms that are found in the prajñāparamita texts of Lord Buddha and in the commentaries written by Nagarjuna, Maitreya and Atisha. Those teachings have been integrated into the graduated path to liberation, the lam-rim. So the IMI Sangha have to at least know Lama Zopa’s lam-rim teaching completely.*

*The aim of establishing the Institute was to make sure you had the opportunity to study those teachings. You have to know and be able to explain these subjects at least intellectually. If you cannot even answer questions on an intellectual level, how can your actions become practice? First comes hearing, then intellectual understanding, then the experience, the realization.*

*So in order to have a clean-clear understanding you have to be able to express your thoughts and engage in debate. Many times*



Harvey Horrocks giving his public examination at Manjushri Institute, Cumbria, England 1976.

*you may think that you know the answers, you may even think you are Buddha. But when someone questions or contradicts you, then your words are nothingness, because of your limited mind. That can be very dangerous because you are thereby making Dharma wisdom tasteless, even making it smell like ka-ka. So by having deep understanding you have to be able to meditate and also to express yourself within the Sangha. In that way you keep your intellectual understanding and realizations together. You keep both your heart and your speech clean and working simultaneously.\**



Frances Holmes, an English student who had lived at Kopan in 1971 when the monastery and lam-rim courses were first established, remembers this development. “I hadn’t seen him [Lama Yeshe] for three years,” she recalls. “Now he had this real organization and all these people who had just taken vows. I was amazed! He was so happy and proudly showed me a group photo from the last course. ‘Look, this is my big family,’ he said, pointing out various people as if they were as dear to him as the sisters and brother he had left behind in Tibet. I noticed that it was not such a hippie trip anymore, that he was quite tough on the students, very much the boss and concerned that they support themselves financially. We had just been crazy hippies, but now they really were Buddhists.

“He invited me to come and listen to his students holding a debate. ‘I’m training these people,’ he said. ‘I want them to be able to teach in the future. They

“I had to give a ten-day commentary on the *Thirty-seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* in Sydney, April 1975,” remembers Nick Ribush. “As far as I recall, Lama told me I was going to do it and then left me to my own devices.”

“Those public examinations were terrifying,” recalls Ven. Thubten Pemo, who gave her public examination in 1975. “Sometimes we were not told in advance what the topic would be or who was going to be examined. I remember speaking about impermanence and Rinpoche interrupting with questions. Dr. Nick [Ribush] called out and asked me something like, ‘Where does the ignorance go when we realize emptiness?’ and I replied, ‘Where does the darkness go when we turn on the light in the room?’ And everyone laughed.”\*

In 1978, Lama Yeshe unveiled the revolutionary Geshe Studies Program at Manjushri Institute with

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need very clear knowledge because Westerners like to ask questions. They have to be able to answer them, not vaguely but with clear exact Buddha knowledge.’ I was impressed,” Frances remembered.\*

The process for this training was simple enough. Each person was given a lam-rim subject, often not until the exam was about to begin. The student would have to give a talk on the particular topic in front of all the other students and then would have to debate with Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Harvey Horrocks, who gave his examination in 1976 at Manjushri Institute in Cumbria, England, remembers the process well. “This was an example of the power and compassion of Lama,” Harvey remembers. “It was scary to be in the seat, but at the same time, you knew you were fully protected by Lama. Lama would invite questions from the audience and you had to answer. The exam brought my full energy and attention to the subject at hand. I was happy with the result of the process. When Lama commented on my answer, he confirmed an important understanding that I had about the path that was being challenged by members of the audience.”

the help of Geshe Jampa Gyatso. As FPMT activity began to spread around the world and the demand for quality teachers became apparent, Lama Yeshe hoped to ensure that his own students could obtain an



Nick Ribush giving his public examination at Kopan Monastery, 1975.

excellent education, qualifying them as legitimate sources for Buddhist teachings.

Lama Yeshe wanted the program open to women and men, lay and ordained, and to lead to a true Geshe degree, one recognized commonly by other Gelugpas.

The initial class on mind and mental factors was taught by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso until Geshe Jampa Tegchok arrived from India to become the program's principal teacher. In 1982, Geshe Jampa Tegchok agreed to become the abbot of Nalanda Monastery and a Geshe Studies Program was initiated there as well.

However, neither program survived. The program was scheduled for twelve years and required students to support themselves; this proved very difficult. To address this and other issues, Lama Yeshe asked Geshe Jampa Gyatso to create a hybrid of the Geshe Studies Program at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa called the Masters Program in Buddhist Studies which is alive and well today. To date, the Masters Program has produced 19 graduates, and serves as the main FPMT Education program specifically designed for producing teachers.

All FPMT standard programs offer completion certificates, intended as a means for establishing clear criteria for future FPMT-registered teachers. To receive a certificate from any FPMT program requires not only showing an understanding of the material via exams or

assessments, but having also spent time meditating and reflecting on what has been studied. Receiving a completion certificate from an FPMT program also requires having followed an ethical component, and engaging in some form of service to others. Given that completion certificates are a relatively new phenomenon within the organization, many of FPMT's current registered teachers have not gone through this process, with the exception of our Masters Program graduates. It is envisioned that, in time, for anyone to be considered qualified to teach an FPMT program in a center, they must have a completion certificate from that program.

FPMT-registered teachers offer service as resident teachers, touring teachers, and teachers of specific FPMT education program modules. Resident teachers are those who reside at a particular center and offer ongoing teachings and counsel. Touring teachers do not reside at a particular center but are generally available to teach in FPMT centers worldwide. Teachers of *Discovering Buddhism* and the *Basic Program* are teachers qualified to teach modules of these FPMT programs or are the main teachers for particular modules.



## THE INTERNATIONAL MERIT BOX PROJECT

### WE ALL HAVE A WORD FOR GENEROSITY:

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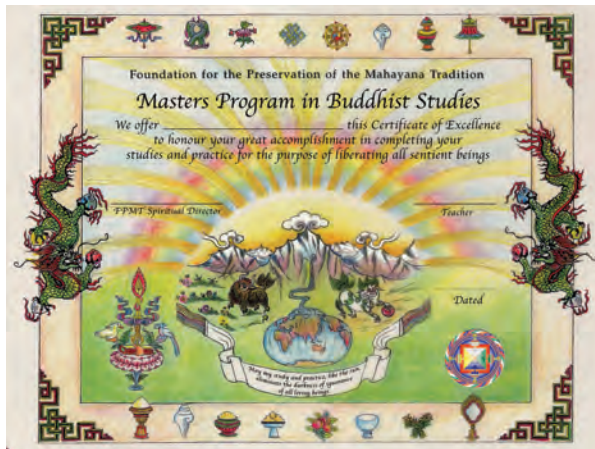


The Buddha taught 84,000 methods for subduing the minds of students. The multitude of different approaches to enlightenment reflects Buddhism's common-sense understanding that, especially in the context of spirituality, one size does not necessarily fit all. FPMT is an international community comprising the cultures of students in 56 different countries and as such, will always strive to serve as many students as possible by providing access to qualified teachers who are as diverse as the people they serve. Currently, FPMT-registered teachers represent about 10 nationalities, speak at least 11 languages, range in age from 35 to 83 and reside (or spend most of their time) in 16 countries.

1949-1959 marks an important decade in FPMT's (pre)-history. As Lama Yeshe explained, 1959 was the year when "the Chinese kindly told us that it was time to leave Tibet and meet the outside world." The devastation of the 1949 Chinese invasion of Tibet cannot possibly be measured. However, it



Ven. Connie Miller receiving a certificate of completion from Geshe Jampa Tegchok for the first Geshe Studies Program class. Photo courtesy of Brian Beresford.



Masters Program completion certificate designed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

seems, from reading the following biographies of some of our precious FPMT geshe, that the Chinese occupation of Tibet did provide a condition through which qualified Tibetan scholars (who mostly fled Tibet for India around 1959 following the brutal suppression of the Tibetan national uprising in Lhasa by Chinese troops) made connections with Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Further, the kindness of the Indian government, through offering asylum to Tibetan refugees in Missamari and Buxa Duar, proved invaluable to the spread of the Dharma in the West. In fact, it was at Buxa Duar where Lama Zopa Rinpoche came to Lama Yeshe in 1962 as a disciple.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama expressed gratitude in his 2009 letter to his Indian "brothers and sisters" on the occasion of 50 years of Tibetan exile: "The generous way in which the Indian government bestowed aid in the form of food, clothing, blankets and medical facilities brought Tibetans tremendous relief. In due course, monks and nuns were provided opportunities to resume their spiritual studies, children were provided with education, the elderly were provided with homes and suitable employment was found for others. In short, because Tibetans' material needs were addressed, we were able to dedicate ourselves to preserving our religion, culture and our very Tibetan identity."<sup>1</sup>

Here we highlight just a few of FPMT's current registered teachers, to say nothing of the teachers past and present who are not with us, the many lineage lamas and teachers whose guidance serves the organization in

<sup>1</sup> [www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=90&articletype=press&rmenuid=morepress&tab=2](http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=90&articletype=press&rmenuid=morepress&tab=2)





Chinese troops beneath the Potala Palace, 1951. Courtesy of Tibet Images.

limitless ways, and the multitude of teachers who teach, or assist teaching classes in FPMT centers worldwide.

Please visit the FPMT website for more extensive information on the teachers of FPMT, or visit a local center's website to see the full array of teachings being offered. More of FPMT's teachers will be featured (including audio and video) in the next *Mandala eZine*, published in August, so please stay tuned.

*\* Originally quoted in Adele Hulse's Big Love, forthcoming from Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.*

## THE GESHES OF FPMT

It can be easy, particularly if one is new to Tibetan Buddhism, to miss just how rare and valuable teachers with Geshe degrees are. The degree is incredibly intensive (the curriculum can last up to 20 years), and graduates must have remarkable memorization and debating skills, making geshes fully qualified to help students master the most basic and advanced Buddhist concepts.

Of the four levels of Geshe degree, most FPMT geshes have been awarded the highest-level (lharampa). Many have sacrificed promising careers within their own monastic universities as the teachers of young monks in order to teach in various centers outside of India.

However, because of their dedication to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and FPMT's vision, and because of their confidence that Dharma can be successfully established outside of Asia, these teachers have allowed themselves to be thrust into foreign cultures, often far from other Sangha.

An FPMT geshe is a qualified geshe requested by Lama Zopa Rinpoche to serve in one of his centers when that center has a stable, committed community that can support a residence and salary for the geshe, and the students of that

center are ready to go deeper into Buddhist philosophy and practice. The geshe's responsibilities at the center are far-ranging. As resident teacher, he is there to teach, to provide spiritual guidance, to inspire each student on their path to enlightenment, and serve as a significant

object of merit, particularly if he is ordained. He may be faced with a student who walks through the door unaware of even the basics of Buddhism, as well as the veteran student who has been practicing for 30 years and seeks in-depth study and initiation. He becomes the heart of a center on Lama Zopa Rinpoche's behalf, an invaluable member of the FPMT community,

and critical to the training of quality Buddhist teachers for future generations.

Additionally, FPMT has four geshes who serve as touring teachers for the organization, giving teachings, initiations and commentaries in FPMT centers worldwide.

Here we meet just a few FPMT geshes, all of whom have amazing personal stories of struggle and perseverance, all of whom have served tirelessly by teaching in FPMT centers around the world.

The director is like the flower, the geshe is like the nectar, the students are like the bees.

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE