

How the FPMT Organization Started

I would like to talk about the organization, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition. At International Office in Portland when I was giving a teaching on *The Eight Verses*, I couldn't remember the full title of the organization when I was doing the dedications. Since we usually say "FPMT," I couldn't remember the long title. I think Yangsi Rinpoche was shocked!

Any good thing the FPMT organization has been able to offer and the numberless sentient beings have been able to receive—every understanding of Dharma we have and every Dharma practice we have done so far, every purification we have done and every merit we have collected—comes first by the kindness of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and second by the kindness of Lama Yeshe, whose holy name is difficult to express. First, we exist basically by the kindness of His Holiness, the only object of refuge for all sentient beings and the source of all the happiness of sentient beings. Second, Lama Yeshe, who is kinder than all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times, is the founder of this organization. Even though many of you didn't meet Lama or hear teachings directly from him, he started the centers, including Chenrezig Institute. The purification of every single negative karma, the collecting of every single merit, the planting of the seeds of enlightenment, and every understanding of Dharma received from this organization—here at Chenrezig Institute, for example—also came from Lama, from Lama's kindness. This also applies to anyone who has met Dharma in any other center in the FPMT.

The organization has come a very long way. Like a baby growing up with a lot of life experiences and difficulties, it has now reached this high. [Rinpoche indicates a height of a foot or so.] Now there's so much more to go. With much hardship we have come a long way, a very long way, like on a road. It all started with the sincere hearts of the young students who came to Nepal and India looking for a spiritual life and a guru. During those times there was an explosion of Buddha sticks, LSD, and other things that break the fixed concepts of the materialistic mind and give you a chance to see something new and to have a new life. You then learn more about the mind. Rather than looking more at the external world, you look more at the inside world, the mind, which is very extensive. You can only understand external phenomena if you understand the mind. Without understanding the mind you have no way to understand external phenomena.

It was started with the good heart. The students found the lam-rim, the heart of the 84,000 teachings of Buddha, meaningful. I'd just say a few words about lam-rim—not that I know anything about lam-rim. In my case, I would just repeat the few words of lam-rim I knew over and over: impermanence, impermanence, impermanence, lower realms, lower realms, lower realms, attachment, attachment, attachment. I didn't have any realization but I would just repeat the same things about attachment and karma and hell over and over to the people who came to Nepal. This is usually how it is in my case. Anyway, those few words repeated over and over did something for their minds. Somehow those few words benefited them, I think. Because it benefited them, showing them the real meaning of life and what you are supposed to accomplish and what you should abandon to be free from suffering, the students basically wanted to benefit the people in their own countries, so they started the centers. So, it was started with the good heart.

This is how the organization happened. These young people broke their fixed ideas about a materialistic life and about there being just one life. Due to their karma—or maybe it was Buddha's holy action—through these plants they broke their stubborn concepts and then opened their minds to a new life. Seeing that the mind can exist without the body, they opened their hearts and accepted reincarnation and karma and then liberation and enlightenment.

With the good heart, they continued with the organization, even though most of these young people weren't professionals and didn't have any experience of business. Some of them had not completed university. Others might have finished university but didn't have any work experience. However, with the good heart and with patience through many difficulties and hardships, they continued to benefit others. This is how the organization has grown up to now. Only a very few centers have dissolved in emptiness, like a deity and its mandala dissolving in the clear light. It's not sure when they will rise back up....

I think it's very good, because things were done with a pure heart, and that's the most important thing. Whether or not things succeed, everything should be done with as pure a heart as possible. With compassion, you try to help as much as possible. Even though you might have very little experience, I think the most important thing is to do everything with a good heart. Because of limited facilities for people to come to listen to teachings or to do retreats and other practices, it has not been possible to spread the Dharma in a very broad professional way, in the sense of what could be accomplished by a wealthy business. Even though that is not happening and what we're doing is kind of simple, everything is being done with a good heart. We have developed and come a very long way and learned a lot during these many, many years. So, I think it's very good.

Sometimes an organization might look very wealthy, but then you ask, Where did the money come from? If you check, you find much harm was given to other sentient beings and many negative karmas were committed to get the money. It appears as if everything is going well, with lots of money, but if you check how the money is earned, you find there's a lot of negative karma involved. That's not good, because if you get wealthy by creating a lot of negative karma, there's no Dharma, and you will have to experience all the resultant sufferings.

We don't need the kind of success that comes by creating negative karma. It is better to try to do everything purely and then gradually have success. This is the safe way of developing. Many organizations look very good financially, but if you really analyzed what they are doing, you would be shocked. I never mentioned that before, but I just thought to mention it now.

I remember I also mentioned here [at Chenrezig Institute] last time at a long-life puja that I see there has been development in terms of the Dharma. There has also been external development. We have come a long way. Many centers are now functioning more easily and people have much more experience of how to do things. Anyway, the most important developments are having more devotion to the Triple Gem and more compassion for sentient beings. Those two are very, very important and what make this life very meaningful. They are important for your own development, for you to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings, as well as for numberless sentient beings not to receive harm from you and to receive peace and happiness, including both temporary happiness and the ultimate happiness of enlightenment, from you. Generally speaking, I see these two things developing more and more, and I think it's the best thing.

Of course, being able to serve sentient beings in many different ways through the organization and the centers is also an excellent thing. It really gives meaning to your own life and to the lives of the many other people in the center and of the many other people who come to the center. It's a really wonderful thing. So, I think that we're able to do many, many things because there has been the development of more capacity, more compassion, more knowledge, wider thinking, and the taking of more responsibility. I just eat, go to the toilet, and sleep, but I think the people in the organization, Lama's students, have developed more compassion, more devotion, more knowledge, and more experience to benefit others. That's why we're able to benefit others in all these many ways, even people in prison. In the prisons there are so many people who are taking

the Eight Mahayana Precepts and have done many hundreds of thousands of Vajrasattva mantras and other preliminary practices. Many people have done unbelievable practice in prison. It's a great thing to be able to benefit them. Another big project is Essential Education, which is helping young people to develop loving kindness and peace. We are now also trying to make more materials available for them. We can really rejoice in being able to bring such great benefit to sentient beings in this world through this organization.

As I normally mention, by coming to a center, people come to know about karma, cause and effect; they come to know about negative karma, the cause of suffering, and merit, the cause of happiness. They come to learn the real cause of happiness. For example, reciting the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas even one time has the power to purify many eons of various negative karmas that we always engage in. Not just many lifetimes but many eons of negative karma get purified. Reciting the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas even once purifies not just all the negative karmas of this life, of past lives, or of many hundreds of lifetimes but many thousands of eons of various negative karmas. Sentient beings get unbelievable benefit just from this one practice: liberation from the lower realms and from samsara, and enlightenment. Even meditating on the meaning of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer, *sang gyä chhö dang tshog kyi chhog nam la...*, plants the seed of enlightenment, bringing you closer to enlightenment, closer to liberation from samsara. This comes from just meditating on the meaning of this prayer, before you begin any actual practice. What the center can offer sentient beings is unbelievable.

Since this prayer brings incredible benefit to sentient beings, there's no doubt about the benefit from the whole of the lam-rim teachings, Vajrasattva meditation, and the various other practices. We are offering deep benefit to sentient beings from the centers and from the organization.

In Africa and many other places in the world, when there's drought and no food, other countries try to help by sending food, but the people who are suffering actually get very little because it's taken by the leaders of the country and so forth. One time drinking water was brought from another country by airplane. The minute the plane landed there the water became filthy, totally spoiled. That means that those people didn't have the karma to receive clean water. It means something was missing from their side. They need to create the merit to get clean water. They need to create the karma, the inner cause, to receive food or clean water. The inner cause is missing.

Giving people food, medicine, and shelter is very good and something we must do, but if we don't help them to change their mind, if we don't educate them about removing their negative karma and delusions, they will engage in the same negative karmas again and again. They will then again be born in the same place and experience all the same poverty and fighting again and again. Even if they are born as a human being in their next life due to another good karma, they will experience the same problems again and again. Helping such people materially is a good thing to do, but it doesn't really remove the cause of their suffering.

Now, a Dharma organization like ours, especially a center like this, which offers not only extensive lam-rim teachings but extensive teachings on philosophy, brings unbelievable benefit. There is unbelievable benefit in just the lam-rim itself. It causes sentient beings to actualize the three principles of the path, true cessation, and so forth. Just the graduated paths of the lower and middle capable being, just talking about the four noble truths, help them to remove the cause of suffering, their karma and delusions, especially the root delusion, ignorance, and to achieve liberation. They're able to learn and to leave imprints, and then able to achieve that in the future.

We are able to offer sentient beings unbelievable benefit, limitless skies of benefit. Therefore, we must rejoice all the time. All the staff of the general FPMT organization and of each center should remember this deep and extensive benefit that we are offering to sentient beings. We should remember this every day. You will then enjoy your life and see that your life is most meaningful there. As I usually say, there is a big difference between working in a factory and working at a center. Of course, you can get plenty of money working in a factory, but it doesn't spread Dharma. It doesn't teach Dharma to others; it doesn't educate others about how to get out of samsara and achieve enlightenment. Without talking about the extensive philosophical teachings, even the lam-rim offers this. There is a huge difference, like the difference between the earth and the sky, between working in a factory and offering service at a center. There's a huge difference when you think about the benefits that sentient beings receive, and it makes so much difference to your own life.

We have to do this together. As I often say, one person cannot do everything. One person cannot teach Dharma, translate, be the director, be the secretary, and so forth. To do everything you need the help of all the staff: the resident teacher, the translator, and all the rest of the staff. Together you can benefit other sentient beings in an extensive way.

Therefore, we must rejoice. Don't think only about the problems of the center. If you think only of the problems and don't think of all the benefits, you will then see only problems. If you think only of the problems, you will see only problems. If you don't think of all the good qualities you have but only think of your faults, you then see yourself as totally black and become very depressed. It is the same with a center if you think only of the problems and don't think of the skies of benefits that come from it.

The next point is that some other centers even of the Tibetan tradition don't have much teaching because it's difficult for their monasteries to produce qualified teachers. Even though there might be many centers, they have programs with more rituals, pujas, or simple meditation. There's not really much education happening. It's very difficult for them to have even lam-rim teachings, the essence of the path to enlightenment. Due to the kindness of His Holiness and Lama Yeshe, here and in other FPMT centers, there's some merit to be able to receive many qualified teachers. It is also due to Lama Tsongkhapa's kindness. Lama Tsongkhapa and his disciples established monasteries with an incredible system for studying all of the extensive Buddhadharma. Lama Tsongkhapa set up the system in such a way that these monasteries are able to produce many qualified teachers. And in the FPMT we have some merit to receive many qualified teachers. Whether or not there's a resident teacher, there are generally a lot of teachings in the centers in our organization. Some people might say, "Oh, maybe there's too much teaching and we need more meditation." However, I think one great development here and in the organization is the learning of philosophy. Understanding the philosophical teachings makes the understanding of lam-rim very deep and very vast.

Here at Chenrezig Institute the very first teacher was Geshe Loden, who was here for three years, I think. I remember I heard during that time that Geshe Loden taught the Madhyamaka subject, Abhisamaya-alamkara, and other teachings, and I'm sure that he must have taught lam-rim. Geshe Lekden was then here for a few years and also gave many teachings. Geshe Lama Konchog also taught when he was here. Geshe-la was supposed to be here one year. I tried to make him happy by telling him that His Holiness was coming to Australia, blah, blah, blah, but Geshe-la is very smart. He didn't say anything, but he stayed only six months. However, he completed teaching *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* from his own experience. Geshe Thinley also lived here for a long time and taught many, many teachings here. Our resident teacher, Geshe Tashi Tsering, has been here now for sixteen years. I requested Geshe-la to come here to

teach. Of course, I knew Geshe-la from the old days in Buxa, but even though I had known Geshe-la for a long time, it was Thondrup Trulku who suggested that I invite Geshe-la. Thondrup Trulku reminded me about it a couple of times. Geshe-la kindly accepted my invitation and has now been here sixteen years. I remember that Geshe Lama Konchog told me during Geshe Thinley's time that the next teacher who came to Chenrezig Institute would be very beneficial. That's what Geshe Lama Konchog said.

In those sixteen years, Geshe-la has been able to establish the Basic Program. Even though so many teachings were given by different teachers for so many years, it's not sure whether or not the students, from their side, studied and learnt. Now there are examinations with a certificate given at the end, like getting a degree in a university or school. The students' qualifications are recognized within the FPMT organization, and if they're recognized within the organization, it will also be recognized outside the FPMT that the students are qualified to teach the subjects that they have learned. All this has been able to happen because of Geshe-la's qualities. Not only is Geshe-la a great scholar but he is also patient, good-hearted and pure. Despite the difficulties here, with limitation in terms of external facilities, Geshe-la has continually been patient and good-hearted.

In a few months, the complete Basic Program will have been taught two times. That is a great accomplishment. To be able to do this is a great accomplishment in the organization and here at Chenrezig Institute. Many teachings were given before, but no one really ensured that the students learned. Geshe-la has made sure that the students learn and don't waste their time. You really have the understanding for your own practice and realization and to be able to teach the world, to enlighten the world. Not only that, but Geshe-la has also given general teachings here at Chenrezig Institute, at Langri Tangpa Centre, and all around Australia.

On behalf of His Holiness and Lama Yeshe and the whole organization, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation and to thank Geshe-la from the bottom of my heart for his many years of giving Dharma education and especially for taking care of the Sangha. Whether the teaching of Buddha exists in a country is defined by the existence of the vinaya, the lineage of the vows, so Sangha are extremely important. Having Sangha, those who are preserving the lineage of the vows, in this country means that people born in Australia receive a perfect human body. We have getsuls and getsulmas, the male and female novices, and gelongs, the fully ordained monks—though there are not yet gelong-mas. Anyway, there are gelong-pas, getsuls and getsulmas, so that much of the lineage of the vinaya is existing. Having the lineage in this country helps the people born in Australia and here in the area to receive a perfect human body.

Because there is now so much teaching to do, we now also have Geshe Jamyang, and I would like to thank him. I'm very happy that Geshe-la is here to do the general program. I think it's very, very good. I want to thank Geshe Tashi Tsering for having invited Geshe-la here to do the general program. I'm very happy to meet Geshe-la and to know that there is another teacher here to do the general program. I think Geshe Jamyang is somebody who has studied well and who is living in the practice. We need the example of a strong and stable spiritual teacher. Western countries are not like Solu Khumbu, Bhutan, Tibet, and other primitive places with caves and monasteries. The West is a shopping center of delusions. Therefore, since we need very strong, stable teachers, we're very lucky to have Geshe Tashi Tsering and Geshe Jamyang. I would like to thank you both very much. We should actually offer billions of dollars in order to thank you, but unfortunately this isn't billions of dollars. You'll have to visualize that.

I would also like to thank the director here at Chenrezig Institute. Chenrezig Institute was the very first center in Australia, and it's now a very old center. It's like the mother hen, and then there were the chickens and then the chickens of chickens. This was the very first center, started after the Diamond Valley course, and then Tara House started a little bit later.

Actually, the very first people who started Chenrezig Institute were Tom and Kathy Vichta and Dr. Nick Ribush, who started Wisdom Publications and is now the director of Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, and Yeshe Khadro. This place belonged to them. It was their investment. After they bought this land, they then decided to circumambulate the whole world, to find happiness. Anyway, Chenrezig Institute happened due to their generosity. The four of them, the four friends, offered the land for the center.

Lama Yeshe asked Anila Ann to start the center here. She stayed for a few years at the back of Tom and Kathy's house in Diamond Valley. During the Diamond Valley course, Lama and I stayed in a small house on a hill. They had built the house of logs, with bark on the outside and lined inside with Styrofoam, which made everything very neat and clean. There was Lama's room, my room, and a tiny verandah outside where the cooking was also done. Anila Ann lived in a similar house at the back of Tom and Kathy's house. She had a very old car that somebody had offered, called Elephant. She would use it to bring two or three boards all the way up from there to here. After some time she would again bring up a few planks. It took time, because there was no money. Different students, from their good heart, would make a small offering, and one, two, or three boards would be brought here. This gompa at Chenrezig Institute was built with donations in this way. The first time Lama and I stayed here we stayed in a caravan. Then this gompa was actualized. After that the geshe's house and various rooms happened.

Anila Ann lived here for many years, teaching courses and building. Of course, she had the help of Tom and Kathy and many other students. There were then many different directors. I would like to thank all the directors, up to now, who have offered many years of service. If I try to mention everybody, I might leave out somebody's name as my memory for names is not very good. Therefore, to all the directors, past and present, I would like to say thank you very, very much for your many years of service, for your dedication and sacrifice. It is because of that that Chenrezig Institute has been able to continue up to now and has been more and more beneficial. And now we can expand more and more our benefit to sentient beings.

There was always the intention to help the centers. There have been huge debts because the complete funding for the Maitreya Project hasn't come yet. It has taken many years. The idea is that when the money comes to fund the entire project, the first thing will be to help the centers. We won't be taking money from the Maitreya Project, though it might sound like that. When that funding comes, there will also be a fund to help the centers with financial difficulties; some centers have bought the center but still have debts. To help the centers is first on the list when the funding comes. So, I wanted to express that. A lot of help is definitely needed here to develop and expand the facilities, and especially for the Sangha.

For the time being, there's \$US5,000 from International Office to support the Basic Program here. This is just for the time being.

I would then like to thank all the people from all the other centers here—Langri Tangpa Centre, Karuna Hospice, and Cittamani Hospice—all the directors and other staff, all the students who have been studying, and all those who have been doing voluntary work. From the bottom of my heart I would like to thank you very much. I would also like to thank the directors of the other FPMT centers in Australia for their service. Thank you all very much.

I think that's about it. I don't have the qualities mentioned in the requesting letter. My qualities are like the rabbit's horn. Since you've been studying the Basic Program, you now know about the rabbit's horn. In Tibet there was a human being who had a horn, Lang Dharma, so maybe sometimes it's possible for a rabbit to have horns. There's not much benefit that I can offer, but I will offer whatever small benefit I can. As I mentioned before, I can repeat over and over the few words of Dharma that I know.

Earlier Venerable Jamyang read this request for me to come to Chenrezig Institute, then she bribed me with a money offering! I will think about a one-month retreat or something like that in the future. If it's beneficial, we will do it. If it's not beneficial, we'll leave it. There's no use doing it if it's not beneficial.

So, I think that's all. Thank you very much. Thank you so much.

***Colophon:** A talk given by Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche at the end of the long-life puja at Chenrezig Institute, Australia, on June 21, 2006. Transcribed and edited by Ven. Ailsa Cameron. Further light editing by Claire Isitt, FPMT International Office, August 2006.*