

THANKSGIVING REPORT FROM LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE'S RESIDENCE, KACHOE DECHEN LING, APTOS, CALIFORNIA, NOVEMBER 2007

*Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

I was thinking about the forty-five million turkeys that are killed for Thanksgiving Day. I felt I *must* do something for them—not have a dinner party at which we serve dead turkey but something beneficial. At first I thought they might all be killed on that day itself but later I found out that they'd been killed some time before that.

I made a divination as to what would be the most beneficial thing to do for the turkeys and found that Medicine Buddha puja came out best, so the sangha at Kachoe Dechen Ling, Fabrizio Pallotti and I did an extensive Medicine Buddha Puja for them.

Another possibility could have been for us to do prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas, reciting these buddhas' names with prostrations, to purify the negative karma of the turkeys and all other sentient beings, including the people who killed the turkeys, but in this case it came out better to do Medicine Buddha puja.

Therefore, on Kachoe Dechen Ling's 2007 Thanksgiving Day, vast skies of merit were collected with each seven-limb practice done with each of the Seven Medicine Buddhas and the Three Jewels of Refuge: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We concluded with making extensive offerings and extensive rejoicing as well, dedicating our prayers and merit to the many millions of turkeys who died this year.

Probably, in previous lives, many millions of these turkeys were humans who killed turkeys for Thanksgiving. This means that unless they change their mind, the people who killed this year's turkeys will be reborn as turkeys in future and killed under similar circumstances. Perhaps as soon as next Thanksgiving, some of them will be eaten.

It's just like fish caught by fishermen; those fish are trapped in a similar cycle. They were fishermen in previous lives, were reborn as fish this time, and then got caught by another fisherman, who killed them and sliced them up.

Turkeys are so powerless. If they could, I'm certain they'd demonstrate strongly against the humans who kill them. But if they did they'd probably get killed for that as well.

This is not the news from CNN or the BBC; this is the news from Kachoe Dechen Ling.

*Ven. Roger Kunsang*

When, at about 8:00 p.m., Rinpoche realized it was Thanksgiving Day, he immediately asked if the turkeys had already been killed. I told him that they would all be dead by now. Then Rinpoche said the following:

“Since God has compassion for all beings—the thought of the needs of all sentient beings—this would include our brother and sister turkeys, and all other sentient beings, including all the insects, as well—all sentient beings who suffer in order to support us and our happiness.

“If the animals could speak they would express themselves in many ways; they would demonstrate. We’d see them protesting on TV and on the cover of *Time Magazine*, demanding the right to live, to continue living, and be protected from being slaughtered in such huge numbers.

“If turkeys could, they would demonstrate against the slaughter of such vast numbers of their kind, demanding the freedom to live. Perhaps they would go to the United Nations and make strong requests for the freedom to live and not be killed for food.

“How would we feel if that many human beings were about to be killed? How terrifying it would be. If we put ourselves in the turkeys’ situation, if we think about it for a little while, if we reverse the situation, how would we feel if we were in the situation that they are in?”

Then Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the house Sangha and Fabrizio did an extensive, six-hour Medicine Buddha puja for the turkeys that have been killed. Then Rinpoche asked Fabrizio to describe it.

*Fabrizio Pallotti*

I remember getting to the house at about 4:00 p.m., and shortly after I was in the presence of Rinpoche, in his room, with Vens. Kunsang, Khedrup, Tsering, Anet and Nyima. Rinpoche’s dog, Om Mani Padme Hum, was also there. I thought, “Great! That dog is so lucky. I wonder how all these imprints will ripen for her.”

Anyway, Rinpoche inquired about the killing of turkey for Thanksgiving and was told that they are all killed in advance, since all the supermarkets are packed with frozen birds, all piled up like a mountain.

Rinpoche put great emphasis on the seven-limb practice. During the first three rounds he gave a lot of guided meditation; after that he guided less but still left long pauses for meditation. I understood that because he had already explained the details of how to meditate, we were supposed to bring those details to mind. Anyway, I always find new ways of thinking and sources of inspiration during pujas with Rinpoche. He is so kind to show to us how we are supposed to think during the various steps—this time, during the offering section, Rinpoche started to add in visualizations all the offerings made in the houses of some of his students around the world.

Then, during the confession limb, we went really deep, with long, single-pointed moments thinking, “Now all my negative karma has been totally purified, gone; not a trace of my beginningless negative karma is left.” These periods were so long that the first couple of times I had trouble keeping focus, especially because of the various degree of pain arising in different parts of my body.

The rejoicing limb was also done very systematically, with emphasis on different objects each round, such as one’s own merits the first round, the merits of other sentient beings the next, and so forth. For the buddhas’ and bodhisattvas’ merits, Rinpoche specifically mentioned three things: their merits, their qualities and their beneficial activities for sentient beings. I can’t speak for the others but for me it was a particular powerful meditation. In fact, the whole puja was extremely powerful.

After the first hour and a half of pain, trying to focus and fighting sleep, it suddenly became very easy and blissful to follow Rinpoche's meditation. Right then I thought it was really very effective. I even mentioned to Rinpoche at the end that the confession was so thorough that after some time it was difficult even to think about any leftover negativities, like they really were all gone. But as Ven. Nyima rightly remarked, "Yes, and now you can start accumulating them all over again!"

However, Rinpoche told me, "You see how powerful the seven limbs are; you can accomplish so much just by doing that practice." I went back home thinking that something had changed inside, what a beneficial the Medicine Buddha practice is, and how unbelievable my Guru is. All it takes is to just open up, like in the confession practice, to the Guru's face and all it just comes together. Right then it actually seemed quite easy, the solution.

*Ven. Holly Ansett on extensive offerings*

Over three hundred water bowls with perfect saffron and clean sparkling water are offered each day at Rinpoche's house. More than seven thousand Christmas lights are offered around the house and on the stupa. There are lotus lights, tiny sparkling lights, and ropes of lights surrounding the whole house. The garden is filled with as many flowers as possible and inside are flowers, candles, incense and crystal offerings.

During the extensive offering practice Rinpoche offers all these materials multiplied countless times. He also offers the extensive offerings that are at Buddha Amitabha Pure land, his retreat place in Washington state, where there are also three hundred water bowls and about fifteen hundred light offerings. Rinpoche also offers the extensive offerings that are made in all the centers, especially Kopan Monastery, Nepal, and Golden Light Sutra Center, Mongolia, as well as all the those offered daily at certain students' houses, especially those of Derek Goh and Tara Melwani in Singapore, Lillian Too in Malaysia, and Ven. Yangchen in New York.

In pujas, during the offering limb, Rinpoche plays cymbals, other sangha play drums, conch and bell, and we play a CD of Kopan monks on the *gyaling*. Incense is brought in and all the lights are turned on (including those in the bathroom, which are very bright).

*The news from Kachoe Dechen Ling, 22 November 2007. Lama Zopa Rinpoche with Ven. Roger Kunsang, Fabrizio Pallotti and Ven. Holly Ansett. Edited by Nicholas Ribush.*