

As FPMT grows, there is a greater need for clear criteria regarding who is considered qualified to teach and at what level. Completing a course of study through FPMT will become an essential qualification to ensure that FPMT teachers have well developed their academic learning, internal practice and a good hearted attitude of service to others. Furthermore, teachers will need to demonstrate good proficiency in practice by having engaged in serious meditation retreat and have excellent ethical conduct. Above all, however, an FPMT-registered teacher should exhibit kindness and a good heart, qualities that move a student to trust the transformative power of the Dharma. In the words of Lama Zopa Rinpoche:

“Even if it is a lay teacher, if it is clear that they are trying to lead a moral life, using the teachings to subdue their mind and being kind, this will touch the hearts of their students, and their teachings will be more effective. It’s not just study to produce material, like a factory, but to subdue the mind.”

Currently, FPMT has 64 resident and touring teachers (although there are many more registered for general teachings). Of these 64, more than half have Geshe degrees, indicating their completion of a rigorous doctorate-level program of Buddhist philosophical studies from one of the

great Tibetan monastic universities.

It can be easy, particularly if one is new to Tibetan Buddhism, to overlook just how rare and precious such teachers with Geshe degrees are. The Geshe degree programs at Sera, Ganden and Drepung monasteries are incredibly intensive (a curriculum of approximately 20 years), and graduates must have remarkable memorization and debating skills, which enable them to help students master the most basic up to the most advanced Buddhist concepts.

Of the four levels of Geshe degree, most FPMT geshees have been awarded the highest-level (lharampa). Many have sacrificed life-long careers within their monastic university as teachers of young monks in order to teach in FPMT centers. However, because of their dedication to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the vast vision of FPMT, and because of their confidence that Tibetan Buddhism can be successfully established outside of Asia, these teachers have allowed themselves to be thrust into foreign cultures and far from other Sangha.

All FPMT teachers help fulfill the mission of the organization by representing the wishes of our Founder and Spiritual Director and communicating that vision and inspirational energy to the centers in which they visit and live.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION AT MAITRIPA COLLEGE: A MAP TO THE INNER TREASURE

By Namdrol Miranda Adams

*In general we should think of Buddhist higher education as something like an inner treasure.
It is the internal lamp that illuminates ignorance.*

—Yangsi Rinpoche

Maitripa College in Portland, Oregon was founded by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Yangsi Rinpoche in response to the need for integrated Buddhist education programs. Its mission is twofold: to provide integrated education – reliant on learning methods that engage the intellect, the heart, and the conscience – and to produce integrated human beings who are well-studied, grounded in the understanding of meditative practice, embody positive qualities and are actively committed to making positive change in the world.

In general, higher education in Western culture functions to offer adults a focused environment in which to develop intellectually, personally and professionally, and to acquire knowledge that will help them navigate and contribute positively to their world. The goals of Buddhist education are no different. For this reason Maitripa was developed as a college, and, in the long term, will develop into a full-fledged university providing graduate and undergraduate education.



Yangsi Rinpoche and Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Photo courtesy of Marc Sakamoto



The educational philosophy of the college revolves around three “pillars”: scholarship, meditation and community service. These pillars embody the extrinsic study of Buddhist thought, the internal exploration of Buddhist practice and the activity that results from the integration of these, respectively.

The **scholarship** component focuses on a broad study of the traditional texts of Buddhist thought from both a contemporary and traditional perspective. Classes are a hybrid of lecture style and discussion, and include exams, written papers and research projects. Students are exposed to the core texts of the tradition and their commentaries, all presented within the framework of the stages of the path to enlightenment, or the lam-rim.

The **meditation** component of education at Maitripa focuses on the internalization of the intellectual knowledge acquired in the classes. Students are guided through analysis and contemplation of the textual material, and encouraged to develop personal meditation practices to deepen their understanding. They are trained in traditional meditative techniques common to Buddhist thought, and become familiar with methods of effectively guiding others.

The third component, the **service** learning program, emphasizes community engagement. This program is unique to the college, and close to the heart of Maitripa’s President, Yangsi Rinpoche.

“There is a stereotype that Buddhists run out from society, and just meditate,” says Yangsi Rinpoche. “Meditating is good, excellent – but when you are by yourself and doing meditation, anybody can be peaceful and gentle. Once you start integrating practice into the path, into service, you see very clearly – is your bodhichitta unconditional? Is your compassion unconditional? Is your patience? Service learning is the mirror of your meditation. It is not so much about discovering new things, it is self-reflection in relation to your intention and meditation.”

In accordance with the learning objectives of the coursework, students who complete the service learning program at Maitripa will have skills in assessing community needs, developing strategies to meet those needs, and training in integrating Buddhist concepts into social service environments that may not necessarily be Buddhist.

Maitripa College welcomed its first class of Buddhist Studies program students in January of 2006, and graduated this class in early 2009 with Master of Arts degrees. The graduates of Maitripa College represent a wide demographic, but most of all, according to Yangsi Rinpoche, “They are humble, well-educated, confident, well-integrated, socially conscious. They are spiritually genuine. They are integrated Buddhists and integrated people.”

As the Buddhist Studies program continues to take root at Maitripa, the College will launch its online certificate program toward the end of 2009. Plans are in the works to develop graduate degree programs in Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, World Religions and Buddhist Theology (a Master of Divinity degree) beginning in 2010. Along the way, Yangsi Rinpoche and the Maitripa board and staff continue to work to develop the infrastructure of the organization to fulfill requirements for the lengthy and intensive regional accreditation process.

On the whole, the focus on integration at Maitripa has been and will continue to be representative of the underlying mission of the college – not only to produce persons educated in Buddhist thought, but also to produce persons who encompass the qualities of an enlightened being. Maitripa also seeks to close the gap that has arisen between Dharma centers and Buddhist Studies programs in existing colleges and universities.

“Higher education in the mainstream and higher education in Buddhist Studies centers have not been communicating with each other,” says Yangsi Rinpoche. “Communication is dependent on an organization that is respected by both sides – not one about which some people say ‘they don’t practice,’ or one about which some people say ‘they don’t study.’ We are trying to close that gap with Maitripa, and in so doing, integrate Buddhist higher education into the mainstream. In general we should think of Buddhist higher education as something like an inner treasure. It is the internal lamp that illuminates ignorance. In today’s world, we need politicians, lawyers, businesspeople and environmentalists who are also educated in Dharma and are meditators. We need great legislators like this, and ultimately we need a great Dharma king or queen like this, too. So we need to work to create the structures to educate these individuals. This will ensure the longevity of Buddhism in the West.”