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# Buddhist teacher Lama Zopa Rinpoche, co-founder of FPMT, dies at 76

BY ROD MEADE SPERRY | APRIL 13, 2023

Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche was the co-founder of Kopan Monastery, Wisdom Publications, and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT).



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Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. Photo via fpmt.org

Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, the Buddhist teacher and author who co-founded Kopan Monastery, Wisdom Publications, and the international organization of Buddhist sanghas and projects known as the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) with Lama Thubten Yeshe, has died at age 76. A statement from the FPMT reads, in part:

Rinpoche had been up in the mountains in the Tsum Valley since Monday, and had to be brought down urgently as Rinpoche was experiencing altitude sickness.

On arrival back in Kathmandu this morning, Rinpoche stopped breathing. The main doctor at Karuna Hospital tried for some time to revive Rinpoche, but that was not successful.

He passed away at about 9:30am Nepal time, on Thursday April 13th.

A teacher of the Gelug school of Buddhism, Lama Zopa's life was spent in dedication to the dharma. As his FPMT bio states, "Born in the Mount Everest region of Thami in 1946, Rinpoche was recognized soon afterwards by His Holiness Trulshik Rinpoche and five other lamas as the reincarnation of the great yogi Kunsang Yeshe." Leaving Tibet in 1959 for Bhutan after the Chinese occupation, he next traveled to West Bengal, India, where he would meet his teacher and eventual FPMT co-founder, Lama Yeshe.

In the late 1960s, the two built the Kopan and Lawudo Monasteries, and in 1975 co-founded the FPMT; Lama Yeshe would be the organization's first spiritual director, until his death in 1984, which is when Lama Zopa took on the role. (As Buddhist publisher Wisdom Publications notes, it was Lama Yeshe's vision of "publications for wisdom culture" that led to the creation of the book company, for which Lama Zopa served as a co-founder and spiritual director.) The FPMT today comprises 160 dharma centers and projects found across 37 countries.

In a statement to Lion's Roar, Daniel Aitken, CEO of Wisdom Publications, writes:



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Rinpoche is well known for his eloquent teachings on impermanence, and has now left us with this powerful and difficult teaching on impermanence to work with. On this occasion, here at Wisdom we are reminded of Rinpoche's great kindness and vast activities, always imbued with bodhichitta, which remain as a shining example and a light on the path for us all to follow. While it feels as though a huge gap has opened up in the dharma world, we are determined more than ever to diligently work towards fulfilling all of Rinpoche's advice and aspirations. We are sending much love to all of Rinpoche's students and the greater FPMT community.

Venerable Thubten Chodron, the founder and abbess of Sravasti Abbey in Newport, Washington, shared her experience as part of the first cohort of Western students at Kopan Monastery in statement to Lion's Roar:

Although the first cohort of Westerners — a rag-tag bunch of us who met Zopa Rinpoche in the early and mid-70s — wanted to hear about “light, love, and bliss,” Rinpoche told us the truth about the eight worldly concerns and the disadvantages of *saṃsāra*.

*Bodhicitta* wasn't presented as being a nice person, but as looking at the results of our self-centeredness and contrasting that with the benefit of cherishing others. Most of us wanted to find a cave in the mountains, meditate, and attain awakening in this life, but Lama and Rinpoche sent us to work in Dharma centers in the West. In later years, I thanked Rinpoche for training us the way he did. Now our job is to live what he taught us the best we can and to share it with others.

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### ABOUT ROD MEADE SPERRY

Rod Meade Sperry is digital editorial director for Lion's Roar. He is, with Miguel Chen, co-author of *I Wanna Be Well: How a Punk Found Peace and You Can Too* and *The Death of You: A Book for Anyone Who Might Not Live Forever*. Rod also edited the Lion's Roar book, *A Beginner's Guide to Meditation: Practical Advice and Inspiration from Contemporary Buddhist Teachers*.

**TOPICS:** Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Miguel Chen



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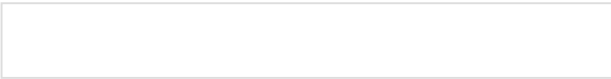
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