



HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA WITH YANGSI RINPOCHE, GESHE THUPTEN JINPA AND MAITRIPA COLLEGE GRADUATES, PORTLAND, OREGON, US, MAY 2013. PHOTO BY LEAH NASH.

## BROADENING THE FOCUS

# MAITRIPA COLLEGE'S MINDFULNESS AND COMPASSION INITIATIVE

**I**n June 2013, Geshe Thupten Jinpa, Ph.D., His Holiness the Dalai Lama's principal English translator, offered Maitripa College president Yangsi Rinpoche some summary advice for the college's programming, on His Holiness' behalf. Maitripa College, in Portland, Oregon, US, currently offers a Masters of Arts in Buddhist Studies degree and a Masters of Divinity degree. Geshe Jinpa said:

"The key point His Holiness made was to underline the point that Maitripa could become a place of learning that could appeal to [and] benefit a broader range of students, as well as a predominantly Buddhist population. So, in addition to continuing with your more specific Buddhist Studies program, the college could develop ... courses on contemplative psychology, with explicit focus on the ongoing secularized contemplative practices like compassion meditation, loving-kindness and mindfulness, and so on. This could be of benefit to many."

Similarly, the advice continued, Maitripa College could develop theoretical courses on Buddhist psychology and how to apply it today, or contemplative science courses that "bring together Buddhist philosophy and psychology, meditation research, and happiness studies."



During a return visit by Geshe Jinpa in May 2015, Maitripa College announced its Mindfulness and Compassion Initiative to fulfill His Holiness' advice. In front of a small, invited audience, Yangsi Rinpoche led a panel discussion that included Geshe Jinpa and Rasmus Hougaard, who is the founder and managing director of the Potential Project and also serves as a member of the FPMT, Inc. Board of Directors. The discussion explored the benefits of mindfulness and compassion education.

In September 2015, Maitripa College entered the pilot phase of the initiative, offering the class "Mindfulness & Compassion: Mahayana Buddhist and Scientific Approaches." The well-attended course was dedicated to understanding what traditional Mahayana Buddhism and Western psychology have to say about mindfulness and attention on the one hand, and compassion and self-compassion on the other. Yangsi Rinpoche, with guest instructors working in cognitive neuroscience research, taught the course.

Maitripa College is inspired by the FPMT's Five Pillars of Service and has been engaged since its 2005 founding with the four pillars of Dharma, social/community service, interfaith activities and income-generating activities. With the Mindfulness and Compassion Initiative, Maitripa is developing contributions to the fifth pillar, Universal Education. For instance, alumni Anita Bermont and Jacob Lindsley taught two introductory meditation courses – "Change Your Mind" and "Open Your Heart" – to more than 50 participants in March–May 2016, piloting a curriculum of meditation and mind training for general audiences.

The college has also organized "Words Like Gold," a 2016 public lecture series addressing challenging topics – past and future lives, gender, sexuality, race, social justice, and euthanasia – relevant to transmitting Buddhism in the present day. The college has invited scholar-practitioners to explore the extension of mindfulness and compassion to these current social and cultural issues. While the Buddhist scriptures of ancient India and pre-modern Tibet are a guide to navigating these topics, they do not offer authoritative commentary, creating an opportunity for in-depth consideration. The first speaker was the eminent Robert Thurman, Ph.D. (see page 48 for *Mandala's* interview with him), who connected ideas about the rejection of the theory of rebirth to contemporary political ethics, particularly in the United States. In May 2016, the college hosted Ven. Lhundup Damchö (Diana Finnegan), Ph.D., known for translating the *Sanghata Sutra* used by FPMT, for a well-received talk, "A Woman's Place (in Buddhism): Gender Identity and Liberation Practices."

In the near future, Maitripa College plans to develop for-credit courses on the theory, practice and instruction of meditation and mind training. These will take into consideration historical and doctrinal sources, examining how contemporary secular adaptations draw upon them to enter into interfaith and scientific/contemplative dialogues. Also, the college plans for future students to be increasingly mentored in a developmental approach to study, practice and teaching in order to gain skills for their own spiritual formation and for spiritual leadership in service to others. More broadly, the Mindfulness and Compassion Initiative will support the college's contributions to the development of contemplative education pedagogy and assessment in higher education in the West.

In 2016, Maitripa College received a grant from the FPMT International Merit Box Project to continue work on the Mindfulness and Compassion Initiative.

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## RASMUS HOUGAARD ON THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING MINDFULNESS WITH BUDDHIST ROOTS, STRONG INTEGRITY AND CORRECT INTENTION

Rasmus Hougaard's Potential Project is based in Copenhagen, Denmark, and provides *Corporate-Based Mindfulness Training*, a learning program recognized by the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom, to corporations and organizations in Europe, Asia, Australia and North America. Rasmus spoke at Maitripa College in May 2015 on the global mindfulness movement and its link to bringing compassion training into secular institutions.

**M** My job is basically traveling around the world and meeting with people who are actively engaged in bringing mindfulness to society. Specifically my field is bringing it into all levels of an organization, including large organizations that function on a global scale.

Since we launched, it has been very interesting to see how the mindfulness movement has grown. Back when we started, there were no other people doing the work that we were doing. Nowadays, there are thousands. It is very encouraging to see this and also a little bit challenging, which I'll come to.

It is not only organizations that are learning mindfulness, as you probably know. This learning is also happening in education and in the health system. Mindfulness is becoming an integrated part of all kinds of treatments and well-being projects. So mindfulness is one of the booming techniques in the world now. I looked at Google statistics and mindfulness was one of the five most searched for words last year.

This is great because mindfulness really helps people live better lives, but there are also downsides when mindfulness is popularized and anyone can take ownership of it. What we see in all parts of the world are companies that are training people to become mindfulness instructors whose credentials might not

be the best for teaching others to teach mindfulness. This has been a bit worrying for us because we want to keep the Buddhist approach to mindfulness quite clear. The Buddha got enlightened and many people have been enlightened with the techniques that were taught 2,500 years ago. But what is apparent is that the popularization of mindfulness has a diluting tendency. That is a shame because it will decrease the reputation of mindfulness and it will be more difficult for people like the students at Maitripa College to teach and get respect for what they are doing.

In our experience and in our approach to mindfulness, it is very important to keep some of the fundamental aspects that the Buddha was teaching and that you can see in teachers like Nagasena, Asanga, Nagarjuna and so on. We have at least three foundations of mindfulness that we feel are very important to include. Mindfulness in our perspective is not *just* attention. Attention is good and great, but it is really only



RASMUS HOUGAARD SPEAKING AT MAITRIPA COLLEGE, PORTLAND, OREGON, US, MAY 2015. PHOTO BY CHRIS MAJORS.

a small part of mindfulness. It's very important to have what we call in the Tibetan tradition the shamatha path of developing stability of mind – a balanced mind that is not agitated and that is not drowsy, but that is really focused right here, right now in a balanced and clear way. It's also very important to include the vipassana path – the insight of impermanence, of dissatisfaction and of selflessness and emptiness. And the last thing is ethics. If mindfulness is taught just as attention training, then it is great for teaching better soldiers and better bankers that can make more profit. But what we are finding is that if taught in the right way, ethics becomes an integral part of mindfulness. You cannot live a mindful life if you don't live ethically. And you cannot live an ethical life without mindfulness. Those two go hand in hand if taught and practiced in the right way.

The link between mindfulness and compassion is, in our experience, very strong. I'll share a story of one of our first clients, which was a very fast-paced, high-pressure insurance company in Scandinavia. We've worked with them for about seven years now. When they started, they had this idea that the training would make them a little less stressed and more effective. But what happened was articulated later by the sales director, and as you can imagine, the sales director was a tough guy, interested in the bottom line.

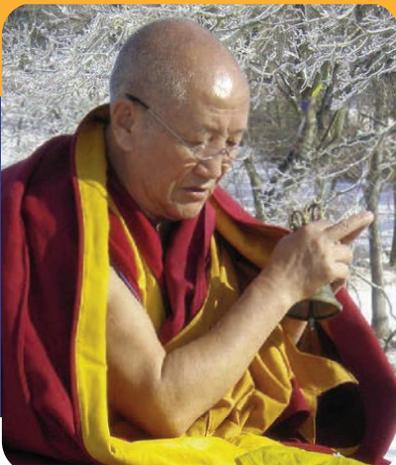
He told me that what he found was that after weeks of training with his colleagues together every day, there was a transformation in the people. He said, "I find that something bigger is happening. I find that we are becoming better human beings."

To me that was a great example of what mindfulness does to us when we bring it into practice as a group. We get more peace with ourselves. When we find more peace with ourselves, we find more peace with others. We don't spur conflict as easily. And when we have that warm peace of mind, the positive tendencies in us naturally grow, because basically human beings are good. We all want to do good. None of us really wants to do harm. So if we have the space of mind to let our innate qualities of compassion come up, that happens naturally.

Mindfulness is a great way of leading others into compassion because it makes it easier to practice compassion. I so appreciate that Maitripa College is including both in this initiative. The ability to teach mindfulness and compassion is a much requested skill set in the world nowadays. Whether you talk about education, or corporations, or health care, everybody needs it, but very few institutions have the roots, the integrity, and the right intentions for doing it in a skillful way. You have to do this because it is so important.

## Gyumed Khensur Rinpoche Lobsang Jampa

### *Six Yogas of Naropa Retreat Series*



We are delighted to announce that Gyumed Khensur Rinpoche has very kindly accepted the center's request to teach and lead a modular retreat on the Six Yogas of Naropa, the most well-known completion stage yogic practices in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, containing the essential and complete tantric practices necessary for attaining enlightenment in one lifetime. A week-long retreat will be conducted every winter until Rinpoche has completed the teachings.

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## GESHE THUPTEN JINPA ON COMPASSION'S POTENTIAL TO CHANGE THE WORLD



GESHE THUPTEN JINPA AT MAITRIPA COLLEGE, PORTLAND, OREGON, US, MAY 2015. PHOTO BY CHRIS MAJORS.

Geshe Thupten Jinpa is a former monk and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge as well as a Geshe Lharampa degree. He has been the principal English translator for His Holiness the Dalai Lama for three decades. He is an adjunct professor of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy at McGill University and a member of Mind and Life Institute's board of directors. He helped create Compassion Cultivation Training, a secular, science-based compassion program developed at Stanford University.

Geshe Jinpa addressed the question of why compassion is an essential topic for today's world during Maitripa College's Mindfulness and Compassion Initiative panel discussion in May 2015. Geshe Jinpa had recently published a book on the topic, *A Fearless Heart: How the Courage to Be Compassionate Can Transform Our Lives*, and discussed his motivations for writing it.

There were several things that led me to write a book on compassion, one of which is having been a student at Cambridge, where I studied philosophy and had the chance to really interact with people at a high philosophical and scientific level. One thing that has always left me unsettled was the unwillingness on the part of many educated people there to accept the reality of a genuinely compassionate act – a selfless act. There was this belief that even what seemed like an altruistic act had to have some hidden self-interest, that somehow every human action needs to be explained on the basis of underlying self-interest because that's what Darwinian evolutionary theory demands of us. There was a high-level cultural resistance to taking compassion seriously as part of our conception of who we are and that has always made me feel unsettled and want to do something about it.

The second inspiration is that while there are problems associated with the wide-spread adoption of mindfulness, the results of mindfulness as a movement are fairly remarkable. It has really shown that if you take specific practices out of the traditional Buddhist context, integrate them with clinical and contemporary scientific research, and adapt them to specific needs like pain or stress management, there is an interesting result. I think that the successes of the mindfulness movement are proof that this works.

If mindfulness has this potential, compassion could have even more impact. One of the interesting things about compassion is that compassion has a very strong emotional component to it. And emotion is in some sense more powerful than cognitive thought processes, because after all, if you look at all the actions that we do, most of our behavior is motivated by an emotion. Whatever it is, it's a powerful driving force behind human behavior. Thus, there is the possibility that if we can tap into our compassionate instinct and learn to live more from that standpoint, it could have huge implications. This is what the new science of compassion is pointing to currently.

In fact, even from the point of view of personal happiness, compassion is key. Compassion is proving to be a powerful buffer against the danger of falling into loneliness, because a central element of compassion is the feeling of connection. Compassion also provides a tremendous sense of purpose, because when you act out of compassion with kindness to someone it feels good. You feel you matter. You feel you have made a difference in someone's life and that gives you a sense of purpose. Current research is increasingly showing that even from the self-interest point of view, there are all these personal benefits.

Furthermore, one of the beauties of compassion is that when we take compassion seriously, it offers us the possibility to appreciate the contributions of all the teachings of the great religions of the past. Sometimes in the secular West, we tend to think that religion was valuable in a particular period. But now that we are in a scientific age, we don't need to learn anything from religion, as if all the human experience and knowledge of thousands of years means nothing. That is a kind of arrogance, actually. If you look at the history of human thought and human experience, we have been intrigued and interested in compassion for thousands of years. There is a reason why the golden rule underpins the ethical teachings of all the religious traditions. It is, in a nutshell, an expression of a compassionate principle: you need to take into account what the other person is feeling in your interactions.

I think this is where I see compassion really offering a much broader platform: for us to learn from each other, to change the way we see the world, to change the way we interact with others, and even to change the way in which we live in the world.

For more on Maitripa's Mindfulness and Compassion Initiative, visit [maitripa.org](http://maitripa.org). The Potential Project can be found online at [potentialproject.com](http://potentialproject.com).