

Melody of Dharma

☀ TEACHING ON NGÖNDRO

A Teaching by H.H. the Sakya Trizin

☀ REMEMBERING GREAT MASTERS

Ananda

☀ SAKYA CENTRE GOLDEN JUBILEE

☀ INAUGURATION OF THE NEW TSECHEN THINLEY DARJAY LING, KALIMPOG



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Cover photo: Parinirvana Temple, Kushinagar

From The Editors

Dear Reader,

Over a year has gone by since we last went to print, and we very much regret our prolonged silence.

Much has happened since then, beginning with the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Sakya Centre in November 2014. Our teachers have been, as always, continually engaged in their religious activities both in India and abroad, with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin teaching in the U.S.A. and Asia, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche bringing the Sakya Buddhadharma to Israel for the first time and Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche conducting a Phurdup tour of Asia.

These past months have seen several events of significance, among which the announcement by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin of a new directive concerning the future role of the Sakya Throne Holder. There was also the tragic news of the cataclysmic earthquake that shattered Nepal on the 25th of April. In response, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin established the Sakya Earthquake Relief Fund, while a dedicated team of Sakya monks, nuns and lay people joined the hands-on rescue effort that helped to alleviate the suffering brought about by the disaster.

And now, we have come full circle, with an extraordinary three-month programme of intensive Dharma activities centering on the inauguration of Tsechen Thinley Darjay Ling, the new Sakya Monastery in Kalimpong, and the bestowal of the Holy Lamdre teachings there by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, which brought together nearly all the high Sakya Lamas as well as over a thousand Sakya monastics from different monasteries in India and Nepal.

Next year will see our teachers once again pursuing their activities abroad, with His Holiness conducting a European programme that will include the conferral of the Holy Lamdre in Frankfurt, Germany. We hope that many of our readers will have the privilege to attend these precious gifts of Dharma.

Until then, we wish each and everyone a happy festive holiday and an excellent new year.

In the Dharma,

The Editing Team

His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

Tentative Teaching Tour 2016

VENUE		PROGRAMME
April 9- May 7 -	Walden/NYC centres, New York (tsechen-kunchabling.com)	Vajrayogini Teachings
May 18 -	Sakya Monastery, Seattle (www.sakya.org)	Short Kalachakra Jenang
May 19 -	Madrid/Pedreguer, Spain (www.meditacionbudista.org)	Vajrayogini Teachings
June 16 -	Barcelona, Spain (https://sakyagephelling.wordpress.com)	Vajrakilaya Wang (1 day) Teachings
June 20 -	Lisbon, Portugal (http://krfportugal.org/eng/index.php)	Guru Rinpoche Empowerment Teaching on Mind-Training
June 24 -	Brussels/Antwerp, Belgium (sonam_peace2002@yahoo.com)	Kalachakra
June 28 -	Kuttolsheim, France (sakyatsechenling.assoc.pagespro-orange.fr)	Chogyal Phagpa's 'The Jewel Ornament' (3 days) Bodhisattva Vows (1 day) Avalokiteshvara Wang – 2 arms- (1 day)
July 6 -	Frankfurt, Germany (www.sakya-foundation.de)	Lamdre
August 11 -	Helsinki/Siikainen, Finland (tsechondondrupling@gmail.com)	Chenrezig Wang – (1 day) Teaching on Mind-Training
August 16 -	Delhi	

KUSHINAGAR

Final Resting Place of the Buddha



"Ananda, don't call it a miserable little town of wattle-and-daub, right in the jungle in the back of beyond! One upon a time, Ananda, King Mahasudassana was a wheel-turning monarch, a rightful and righteous king, who had conquered the land in four directions and ensured the security of his realm. And this King Mahasudassana had this very Kushinara, under the name of Kushavati, for his capital... I was King Mahasudassana then."

Kushinagar – or Kushinara, as it was named in the days of the Buddha, is a small town in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh in Northern India. It is the place that the Lord Buddha chose for his Parinirvana, and it is revered by all Buddhists as one of the four holiest pilgrimage sites, along with Lumbini, Sarnath and Bodh Gaya.

Although there is little sign today of its former splendour the town was, long before the time of the Buddha, Kushavati, the magnificent capital of King Mahasudassana, a previous incarnation of the Buddha. As the Buddha himself so vividly describes to his attendant Ananda in the Mahasudassana Sutra, Kushavati had been in olden times the capital of an idyllic kingdom, a paragon of beauty, opulence and righteousness.

At the time of the Buddha, Kushinara belonged to the Mallas, one of the sixteen mahapanjads in ancient India. Shortly afterwards, it was absorbed into the growing empire of Magadha. By the third century B.C.E., it had become part of King Ashoka's vast empire. Upon his visit there, the latter erected stupas and pillars com-

memorating the Parinirvana of the Buddha. Kushinagar continued to thrive as a major pilgrimage site until the twelfth century, when it was razed to the ground by invading Turks.

It lay in oblivion until the 19th century, when British archeologist Alexander Cunningham discovered its ruins and identified them as the remnants of Kushinara. A substantial brick mound was recognised as the Parinirvana Stupa. Within this mound, excavations unearthed a 6 metre-long statue of





the Buddha lying in the Lion Posture, as described by 7th century Chinese pilgrim Hsüang-tsang. Sharing the plinth that carries the Stupa, is the Parinirvana Temple, a modern-day reconstruction of an older temple, and which now serves as repository for the reclining Buddha statue.

Surrounding the central structures lie the remains of monas-



teries, stupas, shrines and living quarters, witnesses to the centuries previous to the invasions, when Kushinagar was a major pilgrimage site for Buddhists.

A short distance from there lies Ramabhar Tila, the remains of a stupa that marks the place where the body of the Buddha was cre-





mated. Like the Parinirvana stupa, it is surrounded by smaller shrines and stupas, showing that it too was a site revered by pilgrims.

Nearby, the Hiranyavati River



still flows quietly, as it did when the Mallas gave the Buddha's body its last cleansing.

A short distance away sits a small building that shelters the

eleventh-century gilded statue of Matha Kuar. Fashioned from blue stone quarried in Bodh Gaya, it stands three metres high and is at the centre of the remains of a monastery surrounded by smaller outer buildings and shrines.

In recent years, as Kushinagar regained its place as a major pilgrimage site, a museum was built to nest the sacred images found at the site. New temples were erected by Buddhist countries in their respective styles, in celebration of the Buddha's final attainment.

Although Kushinagar cannot boast the same infrastructure for visiting tourists as the three other major pilgrimage sites do, it is slowly developing its facilities and will gradually be able to host the great number of pilgrims who wish to do the Buddha's bidding and pay devotion at all four sites that commemorate the greatest events of his life on earth.



Museum



Thai Temple



Burmese Temple

MAHASUDASSANA SUTRA



Once the Lord was staying at Kusinara in the Mallas' sal-grove shortly before his final Nibbana between the twin sal-trees.

The Venerable Ananda came to the Lord, saluted him, sat down to one side and said: "Lord, may the Blessed Lord not pass away in this miserable little town of wattle-and-daub, right in the jungle in the back of beyond! Lord, there are other great cities such as Campa, Rajagaha, Savatthi, Saketa, Kosambi or Varanasi. In those places there are wealthy Khattiyas, Brahmins and householders who are devoted to the Tathagatha and they will provide for the Tathagatha's funeral in proper style."

"Ananda, don't call it a miserable little town of wattle-and-daub, right in the jungle in the back of beyond! Once upon a time, Ananda, King Mahasudassana was a wheel-turning monarch, a rightful and righteous king, who had conquered the land in four directions and ensured the security of his realm. And this King Mahasudassana had this very Kusinara, under the name of Kusavati, for his capital. And it was twelve yojanas long from east to west, and seven yojanas wide from north to south. Kusavati was rich, prosperous and well-populated, crowded with people and well-stocked with food. Just as the deva-city of Alakamanda is rich, so was the royal city of Kusavati. And the city of Kusavati was never free of ten sounds by day or night: the sound of elephants, horses, carriages, kettle-drums, side-drums, lutes, singing, cymbals and gongs, with cries of 'Eat, drink and be merry' as tenth.

"The royal city of Kusavati was surrounded by seven encircling walls. One was of gold, one silver, one beryl, one crystal, one ruby, one emerald, and one of all sorts of gems.

"Kusavati was surrounded by seven rows of palm-trees, of the same materials. The gold trees had gold trunks with silver leaves and fruit, the silver trees had silver trunks with gold leaves and fruit. The beryl had beryl trunks with crystal leaves and fruit, the crystal trees had crystal trunks with beryl leaves and fruit. The ruby trees had ruby trunks and emerald leaves and fruit, the emerald trees had emerald trunks and ruby leaves and fruit, while the trees of all sorts of gems were the same as regards trunks, leaves and fruit. The sound of the leaves stirred by the wind was lovely, delightful, sweet and intoxicating, just like that of the five kinds of musical instruments played in concert by well-trained and skill-



ful players. And, Ananda, those who were libertines and drunkards in Kusavati had their desires assuaged by the sound of the leaves in the wind.

“King Mahasudassana was endowed with the seven treasures and the four properties. What are the seven? Once, on a fast-day, the divine Wheel-Treasure appeared to him, thousand-spoked, complete with felloe, hub and all appurtenances. On seeing it, King Mahasudassana thought: ‘I have heard that when a duly anointed Khattiya king sees such a wheel on the fast-day of the fifteenth, he will become a wheel-turning monarch. May I become such a monarch!’



“Then, rising from his seat, covering one shoulder with his robe, the King took a gold vessel in his left hand, sprinkled the Wheel with his right hand, and said: ‘May the noble Wheel-Treasure turn, may the noble Wheel-Treasure conquer!’ The Wheel turned to the East, and King Mahasudassana followed it with his fourfold army. And in whatever country the Wheel stopped, the King took up residence with his fourfold army.

“And, those kings who faced him in the eastern region came and said: ‘Come, Your Majesty, welcome! We are yours, Your Majesty. Rule us, Your Majesty!’ And the King said: ‘Do not take life. Do not take what is not given. Do not commit sexual misconduct. Do not tell lies. Do not drink strong drink. Be moderate in eating.’ And those who had faced him in the eastern region became his subjects.

“And when the Wheel had plunged into the eastern sea, it emerged and turned south, and King Mahasudassana followed it with his fourfold army. And those Kings...became his subjects. Having plunged into the southern sea it turned west..., having plunged into the western sea it turned north, and King Mahasudassana followed it with his fourfold army...and those who had faced him in the northern region became his subjects.

“Then the Wheel-Treasure, having conquered the lands from sea to sea, returned to the royal capital of Kusavati and stopped before the King’s palace as he was trying a case, as if to adorn the royal palace. And this is how the Wheel-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana.

“Then the Elephant-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana, pure white, of sevenfold strength, with the wonderful power of traveling through the air, a royal tusker called Upasatha. Seeing him, the King thought: ‘What a wonderful riding-elephant, if only he could be brought under control!’ And this Elephant-Treasure submitted to control just like a thoroughbred that had been trained for a long time. And once the King, to try him, mounted the Elephant-Treasure at crack of dawn and rode him from sea to sea, returning to Kusavati in time for breakfast. And that is how the Elephant-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana.



“Then the Horse-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana, with a crow’s head, dark-maned, with the wondrous power of traveling through the air, a royal stallion called Valahaka. And the King thought: ‘What a wonderful mount, if only he could be brought under control!’ And this Horse-Treasure submitted to control just like a thoroughbred that had been trained for a long time...And that is how the Horse-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana.

“Then the Jewel-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana. It was beryl, pure, excellent, well-cut into eight facets, clear, bright, unflawed, perfect in every respect. The luster of this Jewel-Treasure radiated for an entire yojana round about. And once the King, to try it, went on night-maneuvers on a dark night with his four-fold army, with the Jewel-Treasure fixed to the top of his standard. And all who lived in the villages round about started their daily work, thinking it was daylight. And that is how the Jewel-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana.

“Then the Woman-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana, lovely, fair to see, charming, with a lotus-like complexion, not too tall or too short, not too thin or too fat, not too dark or too fair, of more than human, deva-like beauty. And the touch of the skin of the Woman-Treasure was like cotton or silk, and her limbs were cool when it was hot, and warm when it was cold. Her body smelt of sandal-wood and her lips of lotus. This Woman-Treasure rose before the King and retired later, and was always willing to do his pleasure, and she was pleasant of speech. And this Woman-Treasure was not unfaithful to the King even in thought, much less in deed. And that is how the Woman-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana.



“Then the Householder-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana. With the divine eye which, as the result of kamma, he possessed, he saw where treasure, owned and ownerless, was hidden. He came to the King and said: ‘Have no fear, Your Majesty, I will look after your wealth properly.’ And once, the King, to try him, went on board a ship and had taken to the current in the middle of the Ganges. Then he said to the Householder-Treasure: ‘Householder, I want some gold coin!’ ‘Well then, Sire, let the ship be brought to one bank.’ ‘I want the gold coins here!’ Then the householder touched the water with both hands and drew out a vessel full of gold coins, saying: ‘Is that enough, Sire? Will that do, Sire?’ and the King said: ‘That is enough, householder, that will do, you have served me enough.’ And that is how the Householder-Treasurer appeared to King Mahasudassana.



“Then the Counselor-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana. He was wise, experienced, clever and competent to advise the King on how to proceed with what should be proceeded with, and to withdraw from what should be withdrawn from, and to overlook what should be overlooked. He came to the King and said: ‘Have no fear, Your Majesty, I shall advise you.’ And that is how the Counselor-Treasure appeared to King Mahasudassana, and how he was equipped with all the seven treasures.

“Again, Ananda, King Mahasudassana was endowed with the four properties. What are they? Firstly, the King was handsome, good to look at, pleasing, with a complexion like the finest lotus, surpassing other men.

“Secondly, he was long-lived, outliving other men.

“Thirdly, he was free from illness, free from sickness, with a healthy digestion, less subject to cold and heat than that of other men.

“Fourthly, he was beloved and popular with Brahmins and householders. Just as a father is beloved by his children, so he was with Brahmins and householders. And they were beloved by the King as children are beloved by their father. Once the King set out for the pleasure-park with his fourfold army, and the Brahmins and householders came to him and said: ‘Pass slowly by, Sire, that we may see you as long as possible!’ And the King said to the charioteer: ‘Drive the chariot slowly so that I can see these Brahmins and householders as long as possible.’ Thus King Mahasudassana was endowed with these four properties.

“Then King Mahasudassana thought: “Suppose I were to construct lotus-ponds between the palm-trees, a hundred bow-lengths apart.’ And he did so. The lotus-ponds were lined with four-colored tiles, gold, silver, beryl, and crystal, each pond being approached by four staircases, one gold, one silver, one beryl and one crystal. And the gold staircase had gold posts with silver railings and banisters, and so on. And the lotus-ponds were provided with two kinds of parapet, gold and silver--the gold parapets having gold posts, silver railings and banisters, and the silver parapets having silver posts, gold railings and banisters.

“Then the King thought: “Suppose I were to provide each pond with suitable flowers for garlands--blue, yellow, red and white lotuses which will last through all seasons without fading?’ And he did so. Then he thought: ‘Suppose I were to place bathmen on the banks of these ponds, to bathe those who come there?’ And he did so. Then he thought: ‘Suppose I were to establish charitable posts on the banks of these ponds, so that those who want food can get it, those who want drink can get it, those who want clothes can get it, those who want transport can get it, those who want a sleeping-place can get it, those

who want a wife can get one, and those who want gold coin can get it?’ And he did so.



“Then the Brahmins and householders took great wealth and went to the King, saying: ‘Sire, here is wealth that we have gathered together especially for Your Majesty, please accept it!’ ‘Thank you, friends, but I have enough wealth from legitimate revenues. Let this be yours, and take away more besides!’ Being thus refused by the King, they withdrew to one side and considered: ‘It would not be right for us to take this wealth back home again. Suppose we were to build a dwelling for King Mahasudassana.’ So they went to the King and said: ‘Sire, we would build you a dwelling’, and the King accepted by silence.

“Then Sakka, ruler of the gods, knowing in his mind King Mahasudassana’s thought, said to the attendant-deva Vissakamma: ‘Come, friend Vissakama, and build a dwelling for King Mahasudassana, a palace called Dhamma.’ ‘Very good, Lord’, Vissakamma replied and, as swiftly as a strong man might stretch his flexed arm or flex it again, he at once vanished from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three and appeared before King Mahasudassana, and said to him: ‘Sire, I shall build you a dwelling, a palace called Dhamma.’ The King assented by silence, and Vissakamma build him the Palace of Dhamma.



“The Palace of Dhamma, Ananda, was a yojana in length from east to west, and half a yojana wide from north to south. The whole palace was faced up to three times a man’s height with tiles of four colors, gold, silver, beryl, and crystal, and it contained eighty-four thousand columns of the same four colors. It had twenty-four staircases of the same four colors, and the gold staircases had gold posts with silver railings and banisters...It also had eighty-four thousand chambers of the same colors. In the gold chamber was a silver couch, in the silver chamber a gold couch, in the beryl chamber an ivory couch, and in the crystal chamber a sandal-wood couch. On the door of the gold chamber a silver palm-tree was figured, with silver stem, gold leaves and fruit...On the door of the silver chamber a golden palm-tree was figured, with golden trunk, leaves and fruit, on the door beryl chamber a crystal palm-tree was figured, with crystal trunk and beryl leaves and fruit, on the door of the crystal chamber a beryl palm-tree was fig-

ured, with crystal leaves and fruit.

“Then the King thought: ‘Suppose I were to make a grove of palm-trees all of gold by the door of the great gabled chamber where I sit in the daytime?’ and he did so.



“Surrounding the Dhamma Palace were two parapets, one of gold, one of silver. The gold one had gold posts, silver railings and banisters, and the silver one had silver posts, gold railings and banisters.

“The Dhamma Palace was surrounded by two nets of tinkling bells. One net was gold with silver bells, the other silver with gold bells. And when these nets of bells were stirred by the wind their sound was lovely, delightful, sweet and intoxicating, just like that of the five kinds of musical instruments played in concert by well-trained and skillful players. And those who were libertines and drunkards in Kusavati had their desires assuaged by the sound of those nets of bells.

“And when the Dhamma Palace was finished, it was had to look at, dazzling to the eyes, just as in the last month of the Rains, in autumn, when there is a clear and cloudless sky, the sun breaking thorough the mists is hard to look at, so was the Dhamma Palace when it was finished.

“Then the King thought: ‘Suppose I were to make a lotus-lake called Dhamma in front of the Dhamma Palace?’ so he did so. This lake was a yojana long from east to west, and half a yojana wide from north to south, and lined with four kinds of tiles, gold, silver, beryl and crystal. There were twenty-four staircases to it of four different kinds: gold, silver, beryl and crystal. The gold staircases had gold posts with silver railings and banisters, the silver had gold railings and banisters...



“Then Dhamma Lake was surrounded by seven kinds of palm-trees. The sound of the leaves stirred by the wind was lovely, delightful, sweet and intoxicating, just like that of the five kinds of musical instruments played in concert by well-trained and skillful players. And, Ananda, those who were libertines and drunkards in Kusavati had their desires assuaged by the sound of the leaves in the wind.

“When the Dhamma Palace and the Dhamma Lake were finished, King Mahasudassana, having satisfied every wish of those who at the time were ascetics or Brahmins, or revered as such, ascended into the Dhamma Palace.

“Then, King Mahasudassana thought: ‘Of what kamma is it the fruit, of what kamma is it the result, that I am now so mighty and powerful?’ Then he thought: ‘It is the fruit, the result of three kinds of kamma: of giving, self-control, and abstinence.’

“Then the King went to the great gabled chamber and, standing at the door, exclaimed: ‘May the thought of lust cease! May the thought of ill-will cease! May the thought of cruelty cease! Thus far and no further the thought of lust, of ill-will, of cruelty!’

“Then the King went into the great gabled chamber, sat down cross-legged on the golden couch, and detached from all sense-desires, detached from unwholesome mental states, entered and remained in the first jhana, which is with thinking and pondering, born of detachment, filled with delight and joy. And with the subsiding and oneness of mind, he entered and remained in the second jhana, which is without thinking and pondering, born of concentration, filled with delight and joy. And with the fading away of delight, remaining imperturbable, mindful and clearly aware, he experienced in himself that joy of which the Noble-Ones say: ‘Happy is he who dwells with equanimity and mindfulness’, he entered and remained in the third jhana. And, having given up pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of former gladness and sadness, he entered and remained in the fourth jhana which is beyond pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness.

“Then the King, emerging from the great gabled chamber, went to the golden gabled chamber and, seated crosslegged on the silver couch, stayed pervading first one quarter, then the second, the third and the fourth quarter with a mind filled with loving-kindness. Thus he stayed, spreading the thought of loving-kindness above, below and across, everywhere, always with a mind filled with loving-kindness, abundant, magnified, unbounded, without hatred or ill-will. And he did likewise with compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

“Of King Mahasudassana’s eighty-four thousand cities, his capital Kusavati was the chief; of his eighty-four thousand palaces Dhamma was the chief; of his eighty-four thousand gabled halls the great gabled chamber was the chief; his eighty-four thousand couches were of gold, silver, ivory, sandal-wood, covered with fleece, wool, spread with kadali-deer hide, with head-covers, with red cushions at both ends; of his eighty-four thousand elephants adorned with gold ornaments, with gold banners and spread with gold nets, Uposatha the royal tusker was chief; of his eighty-four thousand carriages, covered with lion-skins, tiger-skins, leopard-skins or with orange-colored cloth, adorned with gold ornaments, gold banners and spread with gold nets, the chariot Vejayanta was the chief; of his eighty-four thousand wives Queen Subhadda was the chief; of his eighty-four thousand householders



the Householder-Treasure was the chief; of his eighty-four thousand Khattiya retainers the Counselor-Treasure was the chief; his eighty-four thousand cows had tethers of fine jute and milk-pails of silver; his eighty-four thousand bales of clothing were of the finest linen, cotton, silk and wool; his eighty-four thousand rice-offerings were there for the taking by those in need, evening and morning.

“And at the time, King Mahasudassana’s eighty-four thousand elephants waited on him evening and morning. And he thought: ‘These eighty-four thousand elephants wait on me evening and morning. How if, at the end of each century, forty-two thousand elephants were to wait on me, turn and turn about?’ And he gave instructions accordingly to his Counselor-Treasure, and it was done.

“And, Ananda, after many hundred, many hundred thousand years, Queen Subhadda thought: ‘It is a long time since I saw King Mahasudassana. Suppose I were to go and see him?’ So she said to her women: ‘Come now, wash your heads and put on clean clothes. It is long since we saw King Mahasudassana. We shall go see him.’ ‘Yes, Your Majesty’, they said, and prepared themselves as ordered, then returned to the Queen. And Queen Subhadda said to the Counselor-Treasure: ‘Friend Counselor, draw up the fourfold army. It is long since we saw King Mahasudassana. We shall go and see him.’ ‘Very good, Your Majesty’, said the Counselor-Treasure and, having drawn up the fourfold army, he reported to the Queen: ‘Now is the time to do as Your Majesty wishes.’

“Then Queen Subhadda went with the fourfold army and her womenfolk to the Dhamma Palace and, entering, went to the great gabled chamber and stood leaning against the door-post. And King Mahasudassana, thinking: ‘What is this great noise, as of a crowd of people?’ came out of the door and saw Queen Subhadda leaning against the door-post. And he said: ‘Stay there, Queen! Do not enter!’

“Then King Mahasudassana said to a certain man: ‘Here, fellow, go to the great gabled chamber, bring the gold couch out and lay it down along the gold palm-trees.’ ‘Very good, Sire,’ said the man, and did so. Then King Mahasudassana adopted the lion-posture on his right side with one foot on the other, mindful and clearly aware.

“Then Queen Subhadda thought: ‘King Mahasudassana’s faculties are purified, his complexion is clear and bright, oh--I hope he is not dead!’ So she said to him: ‘Sire, of your eighty-four thousand cities, Kusavati is the chief. Make a wish, arouse the desire to live there!’ Thus, reminding him of all his royal possessions she exhorted him to wish to stay alive.

“At this, King Mahasudassana said to the Queen: ‘For a long time, Queen, you spoke pleasing, delightful, attractive words to me, but now at this last time your words have been unpleasing, undelightful, unattractive to me.’ ‘Sire, how then am I to speak to you?’

“This is how you should speak: ‘All things that are pleasing and attractive are liable to change, to vanish, to become otherwise. Do not, Sire, die filled with longing. To die filled with longing is painful and blameworthy. Of your eighty-four thousand cities, Kusavati is the chief: abandon desire, abandon the longing to live with them...Of your eighty-four thousand palaces, Dhamma is the chief: abandon desire, abandon the longing to live there...’

“At this, Queen Subhadda cried out and burst into tears. Then, wiping away her tears, she said: ‘Sire, all things that are pleasing and attractive are liable to change...Do not, Sire, die filled with longing...’

“Soon after this, King Mahasudassana died; and just as a householder or his son might feel drowsy after a good meal, so he felt the sensation of passing away, and he had a favorable rebirth in the Brahma-world.



“King Mahasudassana indulged in boyish sports for eighty-four thousand years, for eighty-four thousand years he exercised the viceroyalty, for eighty-four thousand years he ruled as King, and for eighty-four thousand years, as a layman, he loved the holy life in the Dhamma Palace. And, having practiced the four divine abidings, at the breaking-up of the body he was reborn in the Brahma-world.

“Now, Ananda, you might think King Mahasudassana at that time was somebody else. But you should not regard it so, for I was King Mahasudassana then. Those eighty-four thousand cities of which Kusavati was the chief were mine,...the eighty-four thousand rice-offerings...were mine.

“And of those eighty-four thousand cities I dwelt in just one, Kusavati,...of the eighty-four thousand wives I had, just one looked after me, and she was called Khattiyani or Velamikani; of the eighty-four thousand bales of cloth I had just one...; of the eighty-four thousand rice offerings there was just one measure of choice curry that I ate.

“See, Ananda, how all those conditional states of the past have vanished and changed! Thus, Ananda, conditional states are impermanent, they are unstable, they can bring us no comfort, and such being the case, Ananda, we should not rejoice in conditioned states, we should cease to take an interest in them, and be liberated from them.

“Six times, Ananda, I recall discarding the body in this place, and at the seventh time I discarded it as a wheel-turning monarch, a righteous king who had conquered the four quarters and established a firm rule, and who possessed the seven treasures. But, Ananda, I do not see any place in this world with its devas and maras and Brahmas, or in this generation with its ascetics and Brahmins, princes and people, where the Tathagata will for an eighth time discard the body.”

So the Lord spoke. The Well-Farer having said this, the teacher said:

“Impermanent are compounded things, prone to rise And fall, Having risen, they’re destroyed, their passing truest Bliss.”

(Source: Wikipitaka)

The Last Days of the Buddha



"Behold, bhikkhus, I exhort you: All compounded things are subject to vanish. Strive with earnestness!"

These were the last words uttered by the Blessed One before he passed into the succession of jhanas that would culminate in his Parinirvana. Eighty years had passed since the Buddha had descended from Tushita Heaven to take birth for the last time. And now, nearly five decades after his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya and his first sermon at Sarnath, his life cycle had reached an end.

The final days of the Buddha are vividly described in the Maha-parinirvana Sutra. In its pages, we follow his northbound journey from Rajgir to Kushinagar in a chronicle punctuated with sermons that encapsulate and give a final closure to his teachings.

The narrative begins with the Blessed One dwelling at Vulture's Peak in Rajgir, instructing the assembled bhikkhus on the seven conditions leading to welfare, the seven good qualities, the seven factors of enlightenment, the seven perceptions and the six conditions to be remembered.

From there the sutra describes how the Buddha,

accompanied by his faithful attendant Ananda and followed by a great number of bhikkhus, heads north on his last journey, stopping sporadically along the way to give teachings, until he reaches his final resting place at Kushinagar.

Some of the stages on this last journey are marked by events of note. Sariputra's Lion Roar, voiced at Nalanda, wherein the latter proclaims the unparalleled superiority of the Buddha as an enlightened being; the Buddha's miraculous crossing of the overflowing Ganges at Pataligama, whose future glory the Buddha predicts; the definitive teaching of the Four Noble Truths at Kotigama; at Nadika, the bestowal by the Buddha of the "Mirror of the Dharma" to Ananda, a sublime teaching that forever frees from all lower rebirths; at Beluva, the pivotal advice that the Buddha gives to Ananda: "*Ananda, be islands unto yourselves, refuges unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Dhamma as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge, seeking no other refuge.*"; at Vesali, the Bud-

dha's relinquishment of his will to live and subsequent announcement of his imminent parinirvana to the assembly of bhikkhus; the Buddha's meal at the mango grove of Cunda the smith, where he accepts the latter's epicurean offering of *sukara-maddava*, a great delicacy that turns out to be the Buddha's last meal on earth.



*When he had eaten Cunda's food, I heard,
With fortitude the deadly pains he bore.
From the sukara-maddava a sore
And dreadful sickness came upon the Lord.
But nature's pangs he endured. "Come, let us go
To Kusinara," was his dauntless word.*

The account continues, following the steps of the Buddha and his retinue as they embark on the last stage of their journey. Grippled by pain, the Holy One has to pause frequently along his path. On one such occasion, he asks his faithful attendant Ananda to bring him water from a nearby river. As hundreds of carts have just crossed the shallow river and muddied its waters, Ananda begs the Lord to wait until the next stop to quench his thirst. But the Buddha insists, and when he repeats his request for the third time, Ananda finally does his bidding. To the latter's amazement and

bitter repentance for doubting the Buddha, he finds his jug filled with crystal-clear water.

It is there that Pukkusa of the Malla clan becomes the Buddha's disciple and offers the Holy One two sets of shining golden-coloured robes. So radiant is the body of the Buddha, that when Ananda drapes the Buddha's body with one of them, the robe's shine dims and its golden hue becomes dull. The Blessed One explains to Ananda that there are two instances when the Tathagata's skin takes on this splendour: one at the time of his supreme enlightenment and the other at the time of his parinirvana. Whereupon the Lord announces to Ananda that he will come to his final passing on the last watch of that very night.

The Buddha, followed by hundreds of his bhikkhus, then presses on toward Kushinagar, making one last stop at the Kakuttha River, where the Holy One drinks and bathes for the last time. It is here that the Buddha makes clear to all that Cunda the smith is not to be blamed for giving the Lord a poisonous meal, but rather that he is to be praised for being accessory to the Buddha's supreme accomplishment.

Shortly thereafter, as the Buddha reaches his final resting place at the Mallas' Sala Grove near Kushinagar, his attendant prepares a couch for him between two sala trees and the Lord lies down on his right side, in the lion's posture. As he does, the sala trees burst into blossom, although they are out of season, and shower the Holy One with fresh petals. From the heavens, mandarava flowers and sandalwood powder rain down and heavenly music sounds. At this, the Buddha tells Ananda that these are fine offerings, but that the highest way to pay reverence to the Tathagata is to abide by the Dharma.

The entire space has filled with deities, gathered from all the spheres in the universe to lament the passing of the Tathagata. Upon Ananda's concern that the Buddha's disciples will soon be deprived of the guidance and inspiration of their master, the Buddha makes the exhortation that all pious persons should visit the four holy sites with faith and reverence: Lumbini, where the Tathagata was born, Bodh Gaya where he attained enlightenment, Sarnath where he first taught his Four Noble Truths and Kushinagar, where he is about to leave his body. The Buddha then gives instructions to Ananda on how to perform his funeral rites.

Later, upon learning that Ananda is shedding woeful tears in a nearby temple, the Buddha summons him and speaks to him thus: *"Enough, Ananda! Do not grieve, do not lament! For have I not told you from the very beginning that with all that is dear and beloved there must be change, separation, and severance? Of that which is born, come into being, compounded, and subject to decay, how can one say: 'May it not come to dissolution'? There could be no such state of things. Now for a long time you have served the Tathagata with loving-kindness in deed, word and thought, graciously, pleasantly, with a whole heart and beyond measure. Great good you have gathered, Ananda! Now you should put forth energy, and soon you too will be free from the taints."* Upon this, the Buddha speaks of Ananda to the gathered assembly of bhikkhus, praising his rare and superlative qualities.

And then, as Ananda pleads with the Buddha not to pass away in *'this miserable little town of wattle-and-daub, right in the jungle in the back of beyond'*, the Buddha retorts that on the contrary, Kushinagar was once Kusavati, the bejeweled and unblemished

capital of the universal emperor Mahasudassana. Furthermore, this worthy emperor was none other than the Buddha himself in a previous incarnation.

When the Mallas of Kushinagar learn that the Tathagata is to leave his body on that very night, their grief is without bounds and they rush en masse to the Sala Grove to bid their heartwrenching farewells. In their midst is the wandering ascetic Subhadda, who becomes the Buddha's last disciple and is given full ordination by the Holy One.

As his final legacy to his bhikkus before he leaves the world, the Buddha pleads with them not to lament that their teacher is no more, but rather to now



rely completely on the Dharma and the Vinaya that he has taught them. Three times, the Holy One urges the Bhikkhus to voice any possible doubt that might linger pertaining to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When his bidding is met with silence, the Lord is satisfied, and utters his last words: *“Behold now, bhikkhus, I exhort you: All compounded things are subject to vanish. Strive with earnestness!”*

At this, the Holy One enters the succession of jhanas that culminates in his Parinirvana. When he finally ceases to be, a colossal earthquake shatters the land and roaring thunder pounds the heavens. Orphaned, those among the bhikkhus still in the throes of passion and all the Mallas hurl themselves to the ground, writhing in frenzied despair.

Regaining their composure, the Mallas begin preparations for the last rites of the Buddha. They gather all the perfumes, flower garlands, dancers and musicians in Kushinagar, along with five hundred sets of robes, and make their way to the Sala Grove to worship the body of the Blessed One. The heavenly deities gather in myriads to venerate the Supreme Lord. Six days are spent paying homage to the Tathagata’s remains with dance, song, music, an abundance of flower garlands and fragrant perfumes, both human and celestial.

At last, the time comes to carry the body to the cremation ground. A rain of mandarava flowers gushes from the heavens, covering the ground knee-deep. The body of Tathagata is prepared for the burial rites due to a universal monarch; it is wrapped in five hundred layers of new linen and teased cotton wool and placed in a rare and precious iron oil-vessel inside another such iron oil-vessel and laid on a funeral pyre built

with logs of exquisitely scented wood.

The Mallas make several attempts to set the pyre alight, but their efforts are futile. Only when Maha Kassapa arrives with his five hundred monks and perambulates the funeral pyre does the pyre burst into flames, of its own accord.

When nothing but the bones of the Tathagata are left, rains pour down from the heavens to extinguish the flames. The Mallas bring the relics of the Blessed One to their council hall and pay homage to them for a further seven days. When all is done, the Buddha’s relics are divided into eight parts, in addition to the ashes and the urn that contain them. A stupa is erected over each of these, to be revered for oncoming ages by humans and deities alike, anointing the earth with their blessings.

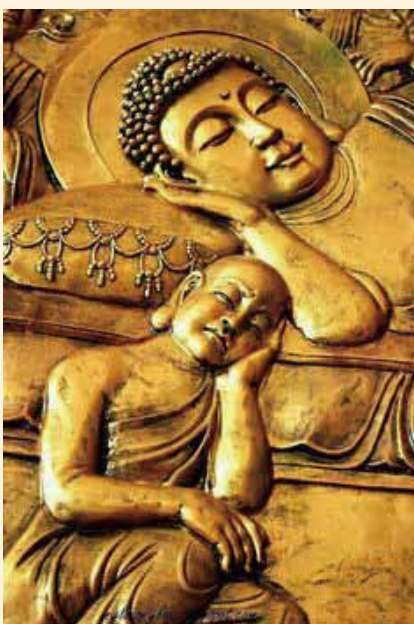


Remembering Great Masters

Ananda

Keeper of the Dharma

(6th – 5th centuries BC)



Ananda was one of the Buddha's ten foremost disciples and, along with Sariputra and Moggallana, he was the closest to him. He served as his personal attendant over the twenty-five years preceding the Buddha's Parivirvana, and was at his side during his last moments. He was endowed with a remarkable retentive memory and it is to this that we owe the preservation of the Sutta Pitaka sutras.

Ananda was the Buddha's first cousin – their fathers were brothers – and was born on the same day as him. They both belonged to the warrior caste of the royal family of the Sakyas. The word 'Ananda' in Pali and Sanskrit means 'bliss', and Ananda fully lived up to his name. He attracted the affection and praise of both the Buddha and the sangha, and his advice was much sought after by the lay members of the community. He was responsible for convincing the Buddha to include women into the sangha, and he was always inclined to further their cause.

He became a monk when he was 37 years old, along with his brother Anuruddha and his cousin Devadatta. Unlike his brother, he didn't attain enlightenment until very late in life. When the Buddha and Ananda were both 55 years old, the Buddha called a meeting of the sangha and declared that, until then, he had never had a completely reliable attendant and was now seeking one. Although Ananda was the only one among the monks who didn't offer his services, the Buddha emphatically chose him to fill that significant role. From that day on, Ananda was never to leave the Buddha's side, catering to his every need until the latter's passing into Parinirvana.

The Buddha often asked Ananda to teach on his behalf, or to explain more fully to the congregation what the former had taught. The Buddha often praised his qualities, mainly his passionate devotion to the Dharma, his wisdom, his lack of pride and his warm generosity. He brought joy to everyone who approached him, and had no enemies. The Buddha affirmed that he was by far the best attendant that he had ever had. In one instance, Ananda went so far as to place himself between the Buddha and a frenzied elephant set loose by a jealous Devadatta to kill the Holy One.

But what most distinguished Ananda as a pre-eminent disciple was his extraordinary memory. He had attended an incalculable number of the Buddha's teachings over the decades, remembered them to the word and thoroughly understood their meaning. It is written that he could remember everything, even if he had heard it only once, and could repeat teachings of the Buddha flawlessly up to 60,000 words, without leaving out a single syllable. A good reason why he could do this was that his mind was free of hindrances and had become a vessel of truth.

After the Buddha's passing, the venerable Maha-Kassapa convoked the monks to a council in order to consolidate the Buddha's teachings and the rules of the Vinaya. It was stipulated that only Arhats could attend, of which there were five hundred. Because he was such a faultless repository of what the Buddha had taught over the years, it was imperative that Ananda should attend. But surprisingly, Ananda was the only one among the Buddha's most eminent disciples who was not an Arhat. And so Ananda made an unbridled effort to attend liberation and finally did so just hours before the Council began. This is how Ananda earned his name "Keeper of the Dharma".

After the passing of the Buddha, Maha-Kassapa took on the leadership of the Order as Elder of the Sangha, while Ananda became Second Elder. Ananda continued to serve the Sangha until he left this earth at the ripe age of a hundred and twenty, leaving behind him the priceless legacy of the Buddha's words.

The Practice of Ngöndro

by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

(Minnesota Sakya Centre 2014)



As human beings, we have many requirements in our lives. The most important among these is spiritual practice, the path that can lead us to attain peace and happiness in this life and in future lives.

The Buddha's teachings say that all sentient beings, not only human beings, but all sentient beings, possess Buddha Nature. Everyone has the seed of Buddhahood, and if we meet with the right methods, we can accomplish the ultimate achievement. According to the Buddha's teachings, we are all equal. I feel that the Buddha was the first to give equal rights, not only to human beings, but to all sentient beings. Every sentient being has Buddha Nature, and so everyone has a chance to attain Buddhahood.

But at the moment, we do not realise this. We cannot see our Buddha Nature, the true nature of our mind, because our view is covered by the obscuration of defilements and the obscuration to knowledge. Because of this, because of our lack of wisdom and our great ignorance, instead of seeing the true nature of

our mind, we cling to ourselves as a self, without any logical reason. Due to a long-time build-up of strong habitual tendencies, we cling to a self. And when we cling to a self, then naturally, there are others. And when we have self and others, there is attachment to one's own side and anger towards others, and there is ignorance. These are the three main defilements. From these arise pride, jealousy, stinginess, and all the negative emotions, and when we perform deeds driven by the defilements, we get caught up in what we call samsara, or the cycle of existence.

As long as we are in samsara, we are not free from suffering. According to the teachings, samsara is divided into three realms: the three lower realms and the three higher realms. The three lower realms consist of the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm and the animal realm. We don't have access to the hell realm and the hungry ghost realms, we cannot see them; but we can learn about their nature in the sutras and in the authentic commentaries. The animal realm, on the

other hand, we can perceive directly, we can see for ourselves how animals suffer.

The higher realms are formed by the human realm, the demi-gods realm and the gods realm. In these there seems to be a mixture of happiness and suffering, but if we examine them closely, we can see that there is no real happiness in them. Only when we compare it with the great suffering of the lower realms does it appear like happiness; but in fact, even what we consider happiness is really another kind of suffering.

Every sentient being has Buddha Nature, and so everyone has a chance to attain Buddhahood.

We as human beings are afflicted by the four major sufferings: the suffering of birth, the suffering of old age, the suffering of sickness and the suffering of death. And there are also many other kinds of suffering, such as the ones that we face in our everyday life.

As for the demi-god realm and the god realms, again we do not have access to them, but we can learn about them in the authentic teachings. The demi-gods are naturally afflicted by jealousy; they are superior to human beings, but they are not equal to the gods and they are always competing with them. Since their merit is not equal to that of the gods, they are always defeated, and this makes them experience great suffering.

The god realm has three different kinds of gods. One of these is the Karmadatu, the realm of desire. Its gods have beautiful bodies and live luxurious lives, in beautiful surroundings, but this doesn't last forever. One day, suddenly, they realise that they are going to die; not only that they are going to die, but that since they spent their entire life indulging in enjoyment, never thinking about spirituality, they are most likely

to fall into the lower realms. Since they have a certain amount of clairvoyance, they know where they are going to be reborn, and so they experience tremendous mental suffering.

And then there are the higher realm gods – the gods who reside in the Rupadatu, or the realm of form and those who reside in the Arupadatu, or the realm of the formless. In these realms, the gods do not experience visible suffering as we do, the physical and mental suffering that we experience, but the strength and power of the worldly meditation that brought them to such a high level, eventually becomes exhausted and they fall from the god realm into the realms of suffering.

And so in this way, it goes on and on, and we call it the circle of life, or the wheel of life. Just like a wheel keeps turning round and round, we are born here, we go through this life, and we begin our next life.

There is of course, the question of whether or not there is a next life. Because we don't see it, we don't have direct access to it, many people believe that there is no such thing as a next life. Some people say that they don't know, and yet others say that there is indeed a next life. We have a body and a mind. Our body is visible, we can see it with our eyes we can touch it with our hands, and we can describe its colour, size and shape. We know where it came from, how it was formed, how it grows and how it is maintained. One day this body will be disposed of in one way or another. But mind is something very different. Mind we cannot see with our eyes, we cannot touch with our hands, we cannot describe its size, shape or colour. Mind is something invisible. Yet mind is what is most powerful. If there is no mind, then our physical body is like a dead body, it cannot function. It is the mind that does everything – all the good things,

all the bad things, the virtuous deeds, the non-virtuous deeds. When we leave this body, our body will be disposed of in one way or another, but the mind cannot be washed, cannot be buried, cannot be cremated. And since it is already invisible, powerfully invisible, it cannot be made to disappear. And so, since it cannot disappear, it has to enter another life. There is a logical reason, logical proof that mind continues and when it continues, it enters another life. So we can establish and prove that there is a next life. And if we can prove that there is a next life, we can also establish that there was a previous life. And so it goes on and on.

Throughout the whole of samsara, everyone experiences suffering, in poor countries, developing countries and even developed countries. Of course, in poor countries there is a great deal of physical suffering, such as hunger and poverty. But also in developed countries, we can see that although we have great facilities, many possessions, we can never be satisfied. We always have something to complain about, many problems, many things. The whole of samsara is suffering.

Nobody wants suffering. Whether we are a believer or a non-believer, whatever religion we follow, whatever philosophy we follow, whatever ideology we follow, nobody wants suffering. And everybody longs for happiness. For the sake of happiness we develop, for the sake of happiness we practise, and for the sake of happiness we also do bad things. People who do bad things do them because they believe that these things will bring them a certain kind of happiness. Everything is done for the sake of happiness. But real happiness cannot be achieved merely by making efforts to achieve material progress. This is obvious.

Real happiness can only be achieved through spiritual practice. Religious practice changes our mind.

There are many different religions in the world, and I myself personally believe that each of the major religions of the world has its own beauty and its own way to help human kind. We are all different, and so we need different religions, in the same way that we need different kinds of medicine. There is not one single medicine that can cure all diseases. But from my point of view as a Buddhist, the way to achieve real peace and happiness is through the practice of Dharma. In Sanskrit, the word Dharma actually has many different meanings, according to different contexts. But when we refer to the Holy Dharma, we speak of the teaching that changes our mind, shapes our mind. We can say that the Buddha is great because the teaching that he gave us changes our mind. If we practise it, we gain experience, it changes our mental attitude. It gives us the strength to face problems and it gives us comfort. And so this teaching is great and we can establish that the one who gives us such a great teaching, is himself great.

According to the Buddha's teachings, the only way to overcome suffering is to practise the Dharma. To practise the Dharma, we need a foundation. Although every sentient being has Buddha Nature and, if the right methods are applied, every sentient being can become a Buddha, human beings are the ones with the best opportunity to do so. Because those in the lower realms are experiencing an unimaginable amount of suffering and ignorance, they have not the slightest chance to practise the Dharma. And those in the higher realms, although they seem to enjoy infinitely more advantageous life conditions than human beings, they lack the base to practise the Dharma that humans have. As far as a base to practise the Dharma is concerned, human life is the best of all. As human beings, we have the opportunity, the leisure and the freedom to practise the Dharma. And, at the same time, we

experience suffering. This helps to lead us onto the spiritual path.

Real happiness can only be achieved through spiritual practice. Religious practice changes our mind.

And so, as a base to practise the Dharma, human life is the best. But, as it says in the teachings, human life is very difficult to obtain. Actually, a human life that is endowed with all the prerequisites, a human life that is free from all the unfavourable conditions, and a human life that has all the favourable conditions, is very difficult to obtain, from many points of view. First, from the number point of view. There are great numbers of human beings, the earth suffers from overpopulation and so it seems that there are so many human beings. But when we compare their numbers with those of other living beings, human beings are actually very few. It is easy to count how many people live in a country, but it is difficult to count how many insects there are, even in a small place. Not only from the number point of view, but also from the example point of view and from the nature point of view, it is very difficult to obtain a human life.

Not only is it very difficult to obtain, but it is also very precious. More precious even than what we call the wish-fulfilling jewel. It is said that there is a jewel, a special jewel that can fulfill all one's wishes, like material needs, food, shelter, medicine, clothes and so on. But it cannot bestow liberation or enlightenment, or even a higher rebirth. Human life is more precious than the wish-fulfilling jewel, because through this human life we can accomplish higher rebirth, liberation, and even ultimate enlightenment. So therefore this human life is very, very precious. It is due to our own merit, virtuous deeds and prayers that this time

we are born as a human being, free from all unfavourable conditions and endowed with all the favourable conditions. So when we have such an opportunity, if we miss this chance it is difficult to know when we'll have such an opportunity again. So we should not waste it and we must practise and try to make some progress toward liberation and enlightenment.

Liberation and enlightenment are not something that someone can give us as a gift, or pray for us and help us attain it. The Buddha said "I have shown you the path of liberation, but the liberation itself depends entirely on you." The Buddha also said "You yourself are your own saviour. Nobody can save you. Only you can save yourself." The way that the Buddha helps sentient beings is not by performing miracles, and not by actually helping us with his own hands, but it is by showing us the right direction. His teachings tell us that 'this way is the right way, that way is the wrong way; if we go that way, we are going to suffer, but if we go this way, then we will attain liberation and will be free from all suffering'. And so the Buddha has shown us the path. But to reach our destination, we ourselves must actually make the journey. The Buddha cannot just take us there.

The Buddha is like a doctor. When we are sick, it is very important to have a good doctor, but after consulting the doctor, the main work has to come from the patient. The patient has to follow the doctor's advice, take the right medicine, do the right things. Otherwise, even if we have the best doctor, if we don't follow his advice, don't take the right medicine, don't do the right things, then we won't be cured. Similarly, the Buddha is like a doctor, the Dharma is like medicine and we ourselves are like patients. And so it is us who have to help ourselves, follow the doctor's advice and to the right things. Then one can be cured. This is why

the Buddha said “You are your own saviour.” And so, now that we have this great opportunity by being born as human beings, and now that we have all the necessary conditions to practise the Dharma, we shouldn’t lose this chance. And we must do it quickly, because we never know when we will have such an opportunity again.

The Buddha said that everything is impermanent. All compound things are impermanent. Compound things refer to things that are created through causes and conditions. The Buddha also said that the end of gathering is separation. For example, we are gathering here today only for a few hours and then we all go in our separate directions. But the same applies even in what we think of as something more permanent, for example, a family. We think that all family members belong together. But this is also only temporary, because no one lives forever. The older members leave first, then the parents and then the children. Eventually everyone leaves this world and goes in different directions, to different families, different places. So the end of gathering is separation.

Also, the end of accumulation is exhaustion. No matter how much we accumulate wealth, possessions, power, none of these lasts forever. Eventually they will all become exhausted.

Likewise, the end of height is collapse. No matter how high we reach, we’ll eventually fall. We can read how in history great universal emperors conquered and owned entire continents, even several continents. Also in modern times, empires have owned almost the entire world. But these empires did not last forever. Eventually, they shrank and became very small. So the end of height is collapse.

And the end of birth is death. Anyone is born into this world is going to die eventually. There is no one who was born that did not die. There’s not the slightest doubt about this. Anyone who is born into this world has to die. We read about great masters of the past who were very holy, helped so many beings, devoted their entire lives to benefitting other sentient beings. But even they are today part of history, they are historical figures. Also great statesmen, great emperors, great leaders, our own ancestors, many great people, good people – they are no longer here, they no longer exist. And if we look at all of us gathered here today, none of us will be here in a hundred years. So the end of birth is death. As to when death will come, no one can tell. There is complete uncertainty as to when death will strike us. There are divinations, astrological charts and prophecies that can tell us that we are going to live for so many years, these provide no absolute certainty. Just like the flame of a candle, even though it is still long and is burning well, it can be blown out by a gust of wind at any moment; similarly our life can end suddenly – anything can happen, an accident, a heart attack, anything can happen.

Internally also, our physical body is made of elements like heat, water and so on. When these elements are balanced, we are healthy and happy. But if the elements are imbalanced for example by eating the wrong foods, doing the wrong things, then disturbances arise, such as pain and sickness. So our lifespan is not definite. Even if it is, obstacles can blow it out at any moment.

So therefore, it is very important to use this precious life in an effective way, so that it is not wasted, so that it is used in a purposeful way. A purposeful way means to make ourselves happy and also to help others. It means to make efforts on the spiritual path

so that we can make headway toward liberation and enlightenment.

The Buddha said “I have shown you the path of liberation, but the liberation itself depends entirely on you.”

Many people are interested in the Dharma path, including the many people who follow the traditional way of going to the temple, doing prostrations, making offerings and circumambulations, reciting prayers, doing meditations, reciting mantras and so on. All this, of course, is very meritorious and can gain us great merit, but it is not really effective unless we make our own inner mental transformation. First, we have to think of what is the most important thing in our life. In worldly life, people want higher positions, wealth, fame, many friends, many supporters. But all this worldly prosperity has no real purpose. How long can one live? There are very few people who live up to a hundred. And so it is, at most, just a matter of a hundred years. And the day we leave this world, no matter how clever we are, how powerful we are, how rich we are, how many friends and supporters we have, none of this can help. We have to leave by ourselves, alone. No one can share our suffering, nobody can help us. The only thing that can help us at that moment is the spiritual practice that we have done, the virtuous deeds that we have performed. And so it is very important to practise right now, because we never know whether we'll ever have such a chance to practise in the future. Many people think: “I'm young and so right now I'm just going to enjoy life and when I get older, then I'll enter the spiritual path.” But many young people die, even before old people do. Many perfectly healthy people die before sick people do. We just can't tell how long we'll live, and so it is very

important to follow the spiritual path and practise very diligently, straight away.

Although we do many practices, I feel that we're not really thinking about what we're doing. We just go through the motions – especially those who are following the traditional Dharma path. We go to the temple and pray, and so on. But we are not really thinking about why we are practising the Dharma, what is the benefit of practising the Dharma. If we don't practise the Dharma, then what happens? What are the consequences that we face? So first of all, I think that it is very important to think about what is the most important thing in our life, about how we can obtain real peace and happiness? And then we realise that the only way to achieve real peace and happiness is to practise the Dharma. And how can we practise the Dharma? Dharma is not just about praying, going to the temple, making offerings and doing prostrations and circumambulations. The main Dharma means that we need to transform our mind. Reciting prayers and mantras and doing circumambulations are very virtuous deeds, which are very meritorious, but if our mind remains the same, these alone will not enable us to attain liberation or enlightenment. We need to transform our mind.

And to transform our mind, we need to do the preliminary practices like reflecting on the suffering of samsara, the difficulty of obtaining the precious human birth, impermanence, and cause and effect. And then we think “Why are we here? Why do we have to go through this life and all its suffering? Why do we have to suffer? Who's doing all this to us? Why do we go through so many different experiences?” The Buddha said that everything is created by our own karma. There is no creator who creates our happiness and our suffering. These are a result of our own deeds. So we

cannot blame anyone. Those who believe in a creator can blame him – “Why are you doing this to me?” Or deities – if we believe that the deities create our happiness and suffering, We worship the deities, we pray to them, and yet they don’t help us when we’re in a crisis. In a small village in South India, there was a school, the village school. It was very poor and its roof was made of grass. One day there was a big fire and the grass roof burned so fast that many of the small children couldn’t escape on time and died. Their parents were of course in great pain. They were all very religious people, and performed pujas every day. They had statues of the deities in their homes, and they made offerings to them and recited prayers. Their main prayers were for the safety of their children and so every day they prayed for them. But many of these children died in the fire. The parents became so angry at their gods that they threw all the statues into a ditch. This is understandable behaviour from someone who believes that the deities create all our suffering and happiness. But in the Buddhist tradition, we cannot blame the deities. The deities do help us in certain ways, but mainly our destiny depends on ourselves. It is due to our own negative deeds that we face suffering.

It is also due to our own good deeds that today we enjoy life, so we can credit ourselves for this. In this way, Buddhism teaches the law of Karma, the law of cause and effect. All the good things in our life, our longevity, our good health, our prosperity, the fulfillment of our wishes – all these are due to our good deeds, the good deeds that we have performed in the past. And all the bad thing that we experience, a short life, sickness, poverty, failures, the inability to fulfill our wishes, are also due to the non-virtuous deeds that we have performed in the past. So we cannot blame anybody. We have to blame ourselves. This is the law of Karma.

The Buddha said that everything is impermanent. All compound things are impermanent.

If we want to practise Dharma seriously, it is very important to think about this. Then we realise how important it is to practise in earnest and not waste any time. And also how important it is to practise the Dharma effectively. There are millions upon millions of persons who are not interested in any spiritual path at all. There are also many beings who are interested in the spiritual path, and who in appearance are practising the Dharma, but in reality they are not practising the real Dharma. Even though we wear robes, we recite prayers and mantras, we go to the temple, we meditate and so on, our mind is still the worldly mind. We have all the worldly attachments and think worldly thoughts. And so even our practice is in a way linked with worldly gains. Although in appearance it is spiritual practice, in reality it becomes just another worldly activity. So therefore, to make it a real spiritual path, even if we cannot practise the whole time, whatever amount of time that we can use, even if it is only a few hours, at that moment we should not think of worldly gains, we should try to make it true Dharma, a true path that will lead us to liberation and enlightenment. It says in ‘Parting From the Four Attachments’ that if we have attachment to this life, we are not a religious person. This is very important, because even though we practise, our practice is not effective. It is not done in the right way and it becomes a worldly activity.

And so the foundation or preliminary practice, what we call Ngöndro in Tibetan, is very, very important because through this Ngöndro practice, we make our path, our religious practice, a real Dharma, one that will lead to liberation and enlightenment. It

is very important. Many people nowadays think that Ngöndro practice is just about counting refuges, reciting mantras, making mandala offerings and so on, to reach a certain number. If we reach this number, then we expect something to happen. But unless and until it changes our mind, then no matter how many mantras we recite, no matter how many mandala offerings we make, it does not make much of a difference. As long as it does change your mind, then even reciting a few mantras makes a difference. And so, first of all, we need to reflect on things like the suffering of samsara, the difficulty of obtaining the precious human life, impermanence, and the law of Karma. These are very, very important. And this is not something that we count or just recite, it is something that we need to think about in our daily life, even while we're walking, when we're in the midst of people, when we're involved in a busy life. We can think of this, we can think of samsara, we can think of suffering, we can think of impermanence. We don't need to be in a temple or in our own shrine room to think about this; we can do so while we're working, while we're traveling, we can think about this and it will lead our mind to the spiritual path.

This is what the common preliminary practice really means, in simple terms, not in scholarly ones. Common, in the sense that it belongs to both sutrayana and mantrayana. The Ngöndro itself is an uncommon preliminary practice. Uncommon, because it belongs to the mantrayana or vajrayana way of practising.

Its first practice, refuge, has many different levels. There is worldly refuge and beyond worldly refuge. Worldly refuge itself has two parts: object worldly refuge and mind worldly refuge. Object worldly refuge means that when we face crises in our life, when we find ourselves in desperate situations, we seek refuge

in spirits, local deities, trees, mountains, rocks, etc. This is worldly object refuge. Worldly mind refuge means that even if we take refuge in the right objects like the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, our purpose is worldly, for example to have a long life, good health, prosperity, success, the fulfillment of our wishes. Worldly refuge is not the right refuge.

And then there is the beyond worldly refuge, which also has two parts: Hinayana and Mahayana. Within Hinayana, are the Sravakas and Pratiékabuddhas. Each one of these refuges has four different parts: cause, object, duration and purpose. In the worldly refuge, the cause is mainly fear. When we face crisis in life, we feel fear and this drives us to take refuge; the object is, as we already said, the worldly deities; the duration is just long enough to overcome our temporary problems and suffering; and the purpose is just for one's own sake. In Hinayana, the object for Sravakas is not to become Buddhas, but Arhats, and they take refuge in the Sangha. For Pratiékabuddhas, the objective is not to become fully enlightened Buddhas, but just Pratiékabuddhas, and their main object of refuge is the Dharma.

In Mahayana refuge, the causes for taking refuge are three – fear, faith and compassion, but the main one is compassion. In Mahayana, every practice that we do is not for our own sake, but rather for the sake of all sentient beings. To have this goal, we need to have compassion. If we don't have compassion, how can we have the mind to help sentient beings? So the main cause is compassion. As for the object, although in all Buddhist traditions, the object of refuge is the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, in Mahayana the explanation of these is different. In Mahayana, when we say the Buddha, we refer to one who possesses the three kayas, the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and

Nirmanakaya. The Dharmakaya means the body of reality, and it is referred to as having double purity. Double purity means the natural purity that we all have, the true nature of our mind, which is pure, never stained with the obscurations. If our true nature of the mind were stained with the obscurations, then one could never become free from the obscurations. But we can become free of them because the obscurations are only temporary and they are not within the nature of the mind. So we all possess natural purity. However, we cannot see it because at the moment we have temporary obscurations that block us from seeing our natural purity. But the Buddhas have double purity because of their accumulation of merit and wisdom, which clears all the obscurations, including their propensities. Dharmakaya is not something that we gain from outside. It is something that we already have, but which we don't see because of our obscurations. Once our obscurations are cleared, then the Dharmakaya is revealed and we can see it. And so it is called the double purity.

Sambhogakaya means the body of enjoyment. When we clear all the obscurations, then we gain all the great qualities. At the moment, we don't have these qualities, but when we clear the obscurations, our ordinary physical body becomes the Buddha's body with the thirty-two signs and eighty qualities, and our ordinary voice becomes the Melody of Brahma with the sixty branches, and our ordinary mind becomes omniscient wisdom.

Nirmanakaya means the body of emanation. Dharmakaya is invisible – it is beyond, it is ultimate reality, and so it is only visible to Buddhas. The Sambhogakaya is only visible to the highest level of the Buddha's followers like the Bodhisattvas, but not to ordinary beings. But the Nirmanakaya body of emanation

is revealed – wherever, whenever, in whatever form is required – human form, animal form, all kinds of different forms – in order to help beings. So the Buddha with the three kayas is only described in the Mahayana.

To transform our mind, we need to do the preliminary practices like reflecting on the suffering of samsara, the difficulty of obtaining the precious human birth, impermanence, and cause and effect.

The word Dharma has two parts. The teachings and the realisations. The realisations that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have gained by eliminating all the obscurations and attaining all the realisations – the realisations of the truth of cessation and the truth of path. This also belongs to Mahayana.

And then Sangha actually means 'community'. In this case, it is the holy community, the true Sangha, the bodhisattvas who have reached the irreversible state.

So in this way, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha constitute the object, the special Mahayana refuge.

As for the duration, since our goal is to accomplish ultimate enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, we take refuge until enlightenment is reached. If we need to go to an unknown place, the first thing we need is a guide who can show us the path. The Buddha is the guide. So we need to rely on the guide until we reach our destination. Since our destination is to accomplish ultimate enlightenment, we take refuge in the Buddha until enlightenment is reached. And then, to reach our destination, we actu-

ally have to travel on the path, by foot, by car, by any means of transport. And so we take refuge in the Dharma as our actual path. And when we undertake such a long and difficult journey, rather than travelling alone, it is very helpful to have companions, trusted companions. So we take refuge in the Sangha as our companions.

As for the purpose, in the Mahayana the purpose is not for one's own sake but for the sake of all sentient beings. All sentient beings are our mother and our very dear ones. We believe in rebirth, according to which we keep changing our lives, we have been born in different families, different forms, different lives, over and over again. So everybody, every sentient being has actually become our parents and our very dear friends. But because of the change in life, we don't recognise each other and we see some as friends, some as enemies, some as indifferent. But in reality, everyone is the same, everyone has been our mother. Therefore, if we ignore all other mother sentient beings and seek liberation just for ourselves, this is not right. Even on the worldly level, if we're a good-hearted person and our closest family members, our dearest ones, our friends or relatives, are in great suffering, and we are in a safe and happy place, we don't feel happy. Even if we can't help them, at least we try to do something to share their miseries. Similarly, all sentient beings are our mother, all sentient beings are our very dear ones, and so ignoring them and seeking liberation or enlightenment for ourselves alone is not right. We seek enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. And so the main purpose of taking refuge is not for one's own benefit, for one's own wellbeing, but rather for the wellbeing of all sentient beings. This is our purpose.

This is what makes the Mahayana refuge special

– the cause, the object, the duration and the purpose. Taking refuge is the very first thing that we need to do in the preliminary practice. Nowadays, many of us follow the Vajrayana path, and so we need to take the Vajrayana refuge. We can only take the Vajrayana refuge when we have received a major empowerment. And then we need to generate the enlightenment mind which, as we mentioned, is the purpose of the refuge – to help sentient beings.

In Mahayana, every practice that we do is not for our own sake, but rather for the sake of all sentient beings. To have this goal, we need to have compassion.

And then, we have to enter the spiritual path towards enlightenment. We have many obscurations, we have accumulated many negative deeds over our lifetimes, and these need to be purified. We do this through the practice of Vajrasattva meditation, the recitation of the one hundred-syllable mantra. At the same time, we need to accumulate merit. There are many ways to accumulate merit, but the most effective way is to make mandala offerings. All these are Vajrayana practices and can only be done if one has received a major empowerment. And then, in order to receive blessings quickly, we practise Guru Yoga. In order to attain enlightenment, we need to realise the nature of the mind. We cannot realise the nature of the mind merely through explanations, examples or logical reasons. The nature of the mind can only be realised through the accumulation of merit and through receiving the blessings of the Guru. So therefore, Guru Yoga is very important.

And so in this way, we should place great importance on the preliminary practices.

How to Attain Happiness

A Teaching by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche

(Neve Shalom, Israel 2015)



Generally speaking, every sentient being from the tiniest insect to the most powerful person, all have the same wish, which is to attain happiness and to overcome suffering and problems.

So we all have a common goal to achieve. But at the same time, most of us don't know what is the cause of real happiness and what is the cause of suffering. Because of this, although we wish to gain happiness, we engage in the cause of suffering. Although we wish to gain happiness and remove suffering, we destroy the cause of our own happiness. Although we wish to gain happiness and remove suffering, we are acting against our own wish. Therefore, it is important to know what is the right way and what is the wrong way. And for this purpose, the Lord Buddha has shown us what is the right path and what is the wrong path.

Our welfare and the Buddha's teachings have a very strong connection. We should not practice the teachings for our own sake, but for the sake of all sentient beings. And the connection between our own welfare and the Buddha's teachings is that the Buddha gave these not for himself but for all sentient beings, for others' welfare and well-being. The Lord Buddha performed an enormous amount of activities, noble activities, but the most important among these was to turn the Wheel of Dharma, to free sentient beings from suffering and dissatisfaction, and to help them attain temporary and ultimate happiness. The purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to tame our mind. The purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to overcome the suffering of sentient beings. The purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to gain happiness, not only for a few beings, but for every sentient being.

The Buddha gave teachings through which, we can fulfill our own wish. The way that the Buddha guides us is not just through miracles. The Buddha said that he didn't wash away all our negative actions or remove our suffering by his own hands, nor did he transfer his wisdom or his knowledge to others. How the Buddha helps is through showing the right path, the correct path. And if we follow that path, we can be liberated from the suffering of samsara. And if we don't follow it, then we will remain in samsara, where we will experience infinite suffering in the future. The Buddha said: "I have shown you the path. Whether you gain liberation from samsara or not depends on you." This means that the Buddha showed us what is the right path and what is the wrong path. And after that, whether we can gain benefit from the Buddha's teaching or not depends on us.

The purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to tame our mind.

If we study, contemplate, meditate and practise the Buddha's profound teachings, then we can gain liberation, we can gain ultimate happiness from them. The Buddha also said: "One is one's own saviour, and one is one's own enemy." What this means is that our real refuge, our real protector should come from our own practice. The real saviour is oneself. Although we can learn precious and profound teachings, if we don't practise accordingly, then we won't get results. Whether we can obtain results or not depends on our own practice, and for this reason we are our own saviour. The teachings also say that one is one's own enemy: "Our worst enemy is not outside. Our worst enemy is within our own mind." Our worst enemy is our own anger, our own negative thoughts. Our worst enemy is not outside our own mind. For example, if all humans became our enemy and all of

them attacked us at the same time, although it would cause us great suffering, it wouldn't be as great as the suffering of the lower realms. So the worst enemy, the worst suffering is produced by our own anger, and not by external enemies. Therefore we can say that our worst enemy is not outside, it is within our own mind.

So the first thing we need to do is to study, contemplate, meditate and then practise the Buddha's teachings. And when we practise, we need to have the five perceptions, which means that we should see the Buddha as a skillful doctor; we should see the Buddha's teachings as medicine; we should see ourselves as patients; we should see our own defilements such as anger, attachment, ignorance, jealousy and pride as our sickness; and we should see how receiving the teachings and following the teachings is like receiving the doctor's advice and following his advice. These five perceptions are very important.

Even if we consult the best doctor, take the best medicine and have the best facilities, if we don't follow the doctor's advice, for example by not taking our medicine at the right time or not behaving according to his advice, then, no matter how skillful the doctor is, he won't be able to cure our sickness. To cure the sickness, the patient himself or herself needs to put effort in overcoming the sickness and recovering from it. This implies taking medicine at the right dosage, at the right time, and adopting the right behaviour as advised by the doctor. So the main effort should come from ourselves, the main effort should not come from others.

"I have shown you the path, now whether or not you gain liberation from samsara or not depends on you."

Similarly, when we practise the Buddha's teachings, it is important to follow the Buddha's advice, not just to listen to the teachings but to follow the Buddha's instructions. The Buddha's teachings and our own mind have a strong connection. They have a cause and effect connection. The practice of the teaching is the cause, and the result is the taming of our mind, developing positive thoughts in our mind. It is important that we should be aware of this connection.

The Buddha's teachings are based on helping others by overcoming samsara. They are actually designed to guide us in gaining liberation, the enlightened state. But in this process, we can also gain enormous benefit in this life. We can gain enormous benefit in our welfare, in our well-being. Although as Buddhists, we should not just focus on this present life, our proper practice will naturally help this present life. The Buddha's teachings are meant to tame our mind, they are meant to help sentient beings. When we help sentient beings with a positive mind, with altruistic thought, then naturally the result is going to be a good result. Because our best result comes from good action, positive action. So it's important to know why we should practise. The reason is that through the practice, we can gain great benefit, not only for ourselves but for all sentient beings. And it's important to know why we need to help others, why we need to benefit others, why we need to look after others' welfare and well-being.

It seems to me that there are two reasons why we need to benefit others. The first, as I mentioned earlier, is that we all have the same goal to achieve, we all wish to gain happiness and we all wish to remove suffering. In striving to accomplish this common goal, it is not right to ignore others' welfare and just think of our own welfare and well-being alone. This is not right. So we must put effort for the sake of all sentient

beings to gain happiness and remove suffering. Because of this common goal we need to benefit others; this is the first reason. The second reason is that in the teachings it clearly says: "All our happiness is caused by wishing others to be happy. And all the suffering that we experience is caused by wishing ourselves to be happy." This means that altruistic thought is the cause of happiness and selfish thought is the cause of suffering. So because of this, we should focus on others and not just on ourselves alone.

It's important to know what is the cause of happiness and what is the cause of suffering. As I mentioned earlier, the cause of happiness is wishing others to be happy and the cause of suffering is wishing oneself alone to be happy. Because of this, we need to help others, we need to benefit others. And what kind of happiness do we need to achieve, what kind of happiness do we need to accomplish? The answer is that when we talk about happiness, we are talking about ultimate happiness, the happiness found in the state of Buddhahood. This happiness is superior, far superior to our mundane happiness. And if we focus on ultimate happiness, then naturally we will achieve mundane happiness in the process.

First, it is important to know what the difference is between mundane happiness and ultimate happiness. We can see that there is a great difference between the two, from the cause point of view, from the nature point of view, and from the duration point of view. First, let us look at the cause point of view. Mundane happiness can come for example from having a good house, good facilities, having a big name, gaining fame, or money, or power. But most of the time, in the process of gaining these advantages, we are doing negative actions. This means that these advantages are the result of our own negative thoughts, our own negative actions. Most of our mundane happiness is the result of our negative actions, such as deceiving

others and behaving wrongly. This is very different from the cause of ultimate happiness, which is positive action. So from the cause point of view, ultimate happiness is superior to mundane happiness.

From the nature point of view, mundane happiness is actually a kind of suffering. It's known as the suffering of change. For example, a poor person suddenly wins a big lottery and moves into a very luxurious house, with all the modern facilities, all the best amenities. This person in the beginning will feel joy, he or she will feel happiness. But this house and its facilities are not the real cause of happiness. If they were the real cause of happiness, then the more this person stays in that house, the more he or she should feel happier. But in fact, the longer he or she stays in that house, their happiness gradually wanes. After a while they will have all kinds of suffering and all kinds of problems.

So material things are not the real cause of happiness. We can see that there are many poor people experiencing more happiness than rich persons. Many rich people have mental suffering, lots of problems, lots of charities, lots of pressure, and no time to rest. They have to work, and work, and work, they become very busy and can't sleep during the night because they have too much work, too much pressure, too many challenges to face. This means that the materialistic world is not the only way, or not the way, to achieve happiness in our present life. Some poor persons, even though they don't have a good house, their mind is happy, they don't have much to worry about. They are quite happy. Whether we're happy or not doesn't depend on whether we're rich or not.

We can easily say that the happiest person is not the richest person. We can say that the happiest person is not the most powerful person, or the most famous person. This means that fame and power are not the ultimate cause of happiness, not a genuine cause of

happiness.

“Our worst enemy is not outside. Our worst enemy is within our own mind.”

The genuine cause of happiness is doing good actions. Actually, whether we're happy or not depends on our mind, how we face problems, how we take up the challenge of problems within our own mind. For example, if two people are facing the same problem, and one of them can handle the problem well, and the other cannot. The one who cannot handle the problem well feels more suffering than the other, even though they are facing the same problem, the same challenge. This means that whether we're feeling sad or not, whether we're experiencing suffering or not depends on how we handle our situation, it doesn't depend on others. It depends on our own mental state.

We can also say that material development is not the source of happiness. During the last few decades, or since I was born (I was born in the 1970's), there has been a great deal of material development. But we cannot say that nowadays people are happier than they were four decades ago. Material development has been tremendous over that span of time, there are many things that we see now and didn't see in the past. Modern technology has made great advances and is still making them. And yet, we cannot say that nowadays people are happier, that they are experiencing less suffering. We can say though, that we are facing lots of external problems as well as internal problems. There are many kinds of illnesses, many new diseases that are spreading in the world which were not there in the past. Although medical facilities have improved a lot, at the same time there are more and more new diseases, many of them very serious. So there are a lot of external and internal problems that we need to face in this world today.

So the most important thing for us to do is to improve our inner world, not just our external world. Although developing our external world can provide us with many facilities and make us comfortable, we should combine this with developing our inner world. We need to develop our mind. So mundane happiness is actually the suffering of change, while ultimate happiness is free from all kinds of suffering. It's a genuine happiness, a perfect happiness.

And then, from the duration point of view, ultimate happiness is far superior to mundane happiness. We put effort to gain mundane happiness in this life. But if we think carefully, this life is very short. This life won't last forever. There are millions of people in this world, but we have never seen or heard of anyone being born and not eventually dying. Every being that is born in this world will die sooner or later. We cannot avoid death. Sooner or later, it will come, and so our life is very short. Our life has no definite span. We can see people dying at different ages. Some die in their mother's womb, some die right after they were born, some die when they're babies, when they're teenagers, in their twenties, their thirties of their forties, and so on. So there is no definite lifespan for us human beings or for animals that we can see in this world. Happiness in this life is very short. Our life can last at most over a hundred years, no more than that. Actually, there are very few people who can live beyond a hundred. Most human beings in this world die before they're a hundred.

And within these hundred years, there's not a single person who has not experienced suffering, who has only experienced happiness from their birth until their death. There's not a single person like that. For example, if we live up to a hundred and calculate whether we've experienced more happiness or more suffering, we'll find that we've mostly experienced suffering. So, out of our hundred years, our happiness

can maybe mount up to 30 or 40 years, while our suffering can take up 60 or 70 years. We are not happy. Although we can smile, deep in our mind we have this problem, or that problem. So out of a hundred years, we can estimate that our happiness lasts 30 to 40 years. So mundane happiness, the duration of mundane happiness is very short. It only lasts a few decades, not more than that. But ultimate happiness, once achieved, won't cease. Once we gain such ultimate happiness, we will not change from happiness to suffering. Once we achieve this ultimate happiness, then we'll feel happy forever.

So this is the big difference between mundane happiness and ultimate happiness. They are vastly different from the cause point of view, the nature point of view and the duration point of view. Therefore we should focus on ultimate happiness, and when we focus on ultimate happiness, then we will naturally acquire mundane happiness in the process, we will feel happy in this mundane world.

So it's very important for us to handle situations in a good way. Generally speaking, there are many actions, but we can divide these into three major categories: physical, verbal and mental actions. And out of these three, the most important is mental action. Physical and verbal actions, in a way, play a supporting role to mental action. Without the mind, there is no physical or verbal action. All our physical and verbal actions are motivated by our mind. Sometimes, we can be acting in a proper way, using pleasant speech, while our intention is wrong or even bad. So outwardly, it seems that we're doing a positive action, while in reality this action is a negative action because of our negative intention, the real intention behind our physical behaviour or verbal action.

We must have a positive mind, a mind that wishes to help others, a mind that wishes to benefit others, a mind that looks after others' welfare and well-being.

Such a mind is very important for us to develop. So the Buddha's teachings are there to tame our mind, to subdue our mind, to remove our anger, to remove our attachment, our jealousy, our pride. If we can remove these negative thoughts, then naturally we won't experience suffering. Because all our suffering is caused by our negative actions. And all our negative actions are caused by our negative thoughts and our defilements. And all these negative thoughts are caused by our ignorance, our selfish thought.

“All our happiness is caused by wishing others to be happy. And all the suffering that we experience is caused by wishing ourselves to be happy.”

When we have selfish thought, then naturally we have two sides, our own side and the others' side. And when we have two sides, then we feel attachment to our own side, we like our own side. And then we hate, or we feel anger, toward the other side. Because of this selfish thought, we have two sides, because of this selfish thought, we feel attachment and anger. So these three are called the main poisons, or the three poisonous thoughts. And because of these three, other negative thoughts arise, such as pride, stinginess, jealousy, and so on.

So selfish thoughts are the root of all suffering, the root of samsara. It's very important first to know what is the real cause of suffering and what is the real cause of happiness. For example, when the doctor needs to cure the patient's disease, first he needs to diagnose what is this patient's illness, what is his problem. Without identifying the patient's illness or the problem, how can the doctor cure it? It's not possible. The first thing the doctor needs to do is to identify the illness or the problem, and then he

can give the right treatment for the right illness or problem.

Similarly, first we need to know the cause of suffering. If we know that the cause of suffering is selfish thought, then we should try to abandon it, we should try to eliminate it. For example, anger. Anger is something that we can remove from our mind, because anger is not the nature of our mind. The nature of our mind is pure from beginningless time. It is just a mental state. For example, when there's dirt or a stain on a cloth, we can adopt the right remedy or the right antidote that can remove this dirt or stain. Because these are not the nature of the cloth, they are just temporary, they can be removed by using the right remedy – water and soap. So by using the right method, the dirt or stain can be removed from the cloth.

Similarly, our anger and other negative thoughts are not the nature of our mind. They are temporary. Because of this, we can remove them, we can eliminate these defilements. But to eliminate them, we need to put effort. We need to use the right method, we need to adopt the right remedy, or the right antidote. Without such a remedy, we cannot eliminate our defilements. But it's important to know that they can be eliminated. And the right remedy is to cultivate positive thoughts, like kindness and compassion.

We should start with our own family, our children, our parents, and then gradually cultivate the same kindness and compassion toward our friends, our community and finally toward all sentient beings.

The Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels

A commentary by Khenchen Appey Rinpoche
(Part 2)



What is the meaning of the word “*Buddha*”? There are two syllables in Tibetan for the word “Buddha.” These are *sangs* and *rgyas*. *Sangs* refers to awakening from sleep. *Rgyas* refers to the complete blossoming of a flower. Therefore, *sangs.rgyas* means awakening from the sleep of ignorance and increasing the understanding of knowable things. Therefore, in the Sanskrit language “Buddha” refers to either of those two syllables. However, in Tibetan “Buddha” is translated as *sangs.rgyas*.

Arya Asanga said that there are three qualities within the word “Buddha.” Since Buddha himself has awakened from the sleep of ignorance, he possesses the perfection of relinquishment. Second, the Buddha causes others to awaken from the sleep of ignorance. So, the Buddha possesses the perfection

of compassion. Third, the Blessed One increases his realization of wisdom. Therefore, Buddha possesses the perfection of realization which sees all things as they are. In this way, Asanga has explained the term “Buddha” in relation to these three qualities.

Those who have not studied Buddhist philosophy think that studying the Dharma is a very difficult task. For this reason, some of you may think that you are not able to study the Dharma. However, it is not only the study of the Dharma that may appear difficult, but also any worldly matter that you have not studied will not be easy to understand at first. However, if you become accustomed to it, difficult-to-understand worldly matters as well as the study of the Dharma will become easier. There is no task you cannot accomplish if you apply appropriate diligence. We should all study

the Dharma. Especially, it is immensely important for the monks and nuns involved in the practice of the Dharma to study the Dharma first. Generally speaking, the study of the Dharma is not something that should be done solely by monks and nuns. It is very important for all humans who aspire to gain happiness and who wish to discard suffering—whether monks or nuns, female or male lay practitioners—to study and practice the Dharma. Some people may have studied and understood the Dharma, but may not have actively engaged in its practice. Still, through the merit arising from merely listening to the Dharma, the seed of liberation is sown within your mind continuum.

The second section or latter part of *The Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels* concerning the Buddha reads, “*The Blessed Buddha is the One Gone to Suchness. He arose through corresponding causes of merit and his root of virtue is inexhaustible.*” The meaning of this is as follows: Generally, we will not be able to keep this human body forever. One day this body will perish. In that way, even the Shravaka Foe Destroyer who has gained great realization will also die one day, and his ability to benefit sentient beings is limited. However, even though his physical body may not be present, the enlightened activities of the Buddha remain forever, without disruption, until samsara is emptied.

If someone were to ask, “Why is this so?” there are two reasons that explain why the Buddha’s enlightened activities will endure in this universe. The first reason is shown by the first sentence of this section of the sutra, which reads, “*He arose through corresponding causes of merit.*” “Merit” refers to virtue. The enlightened activities of the resultant Buddha are the results that correspond to the causes of multiple virtues. Commonly, it is said that there are five different types of results. Among these is “the ripening result of virtue.” It is said that some

living beings in samsara may engage in virtues, such as maintaining moral conduct, for the sake of the attaining a human birth in their next life. If they engage in this type of virtue along with making the aspiration, “May I attain human birth in my next life,” consequently they will attain that higher rebirth. This is known as “the ripened result of that virtuous activity.” At that very time the result of that person’s virtue is complete, and it will not carry on further than the next lifetime, whereas at the time when the Buddha was a Bodhisattva, the virtues accumulated through his enlightened activities were not for the purpose of his simply gaining a human rebirth. Instead, he made an aspiration that the results of his actions would benefit all sentient beings. In this way, the Buddha’s activities resulted in “a ripening result of virtue.”

The meaning of the phrase “the result similar to its cause” in relation to karma is explained as [referring to] a result that is similar to whatever action was performed. This is known as “the result similar to its cause.” For example, whatever virtuous action is performed now will result in a similar virtuous action in the future. Likewise, whatever non-virtuous action is performed now will result in a similar non-virtuous action in the future. So, this is known as the result similar to its cause. Therefore, the Buddha accumulates merit by such actions as maintaining moral conduct for the purpose of continuing to perform similar virtuous actions in the future for the sake of all sentient beings. Then, whatever result was gained from that would be turned into an aspiration, such as “May I be able to continue to engage in the practice of generosity for the sake of others” or “May I be able to continue to maintain moral conduct for the sake of others.” The Buddha would make such aspirations so that he would continue to obtain the result similar to its cause.

Since the Buddha has made an aspiration not to waste the root of virtue, his virtue will never be

exhausted. Due to this, it is said that the Buddha and his enlightened activities are never spent. The merit arising from such selfless activities produces great merit that is endless. So, the second reason that explains why the Buddha's enlightened activities will endure in this universe is shown by the words of the sutra, "*his root of virtue is inexhaustible.*" So, whatever virtues have been performed to gain Buddhahood for the sake of others are never exhausted.

The ultimate result that you gain by practicing on the path of the Hinayana is the result of a Foe Destroyer. After having attained the state of a Foe Destroyer, your root of virtue is exhausted when you enter into Parinirvana, whereas through practicing on the Mahayana path, you gain the state of ultimate Buddhahood. Having attained the state of a Buddha, the root of virtue never becomes exhausted. All this shows that even after attaining the state of a Buddha, your merit never becomes exhausted.

The subsequent words of the sutra read: "*He is adorned with patience and is the foundation of the treasures of merit. His body is adorned with the noble minor marks and decorated with the flower blossoms of the noble major marks. Conforming to the stages of the field of enlightened activities, his appearance is not unpleasant to one's sight and is delightful to devoted aspirants.*" With respect to the Buddha, these six expressions show how he benefits sentient beings by manifesting the various kayas [i.e., enlightened forms].

The first two expressions, "*He is adorned with patience and is the foundation of the treasures of merit,*" illustrate the causes from which the Buddha's enlightened bodies are produced. Mainly, there are two causes that are explained. These are the root or main cause and the lesser branch causes.

The root or main cause is the one that produces the overall body of the Buddha. The lesser causes

mean those that produce the limbs of the body. The first phrase, "*adorned with patience,*" refers to the root cause. The second phrase, "*the foundation of the treasures of merit,*" refers to the cause of the limbs. Generally speaking, the word "*patience*" means that no matter what difficulties you may face, you do not become angry and your mind does not become disturbed. In brief, "*adorned with patience*" signifies that the beautified body of the Buddha arises from the cause of patience. Generally, if you meditate on patience, you will gain a beautiful body as a result. In contrast to that, if you display a black face with anger and resentment, you will be born with an ugly body as a result. Not only will that be the result in this life, but also in the next one. The beautiful body of the Buddha is a result of his meditating on patience again and again at the time when he was practicing on the path as a Bodhisattva. Due to that, his body is described as "*adorned with patience.*"

Anger is a very major fault. It takes us a long time to destroy anger from its roots. Understanding the faults of anger, it is therefore appropriate to think that you should overcome your anger. The practice of meditation on patience must start from today. How are you to meditate on the practice of patience? For example, even if you are being killed by others, you should try not to be defiled by anger. Instead you must try not to engage in harmful, non-virtuous activities of body, speech and mind. This was said by the Buddha. Even if someone robs you of all your belongings, you should reflect upon it with the thought, "By the merit of this generous gift of my belongings, may those robbers themselves become the treasure of generosity." Instead of letting anger arise, you should try to produce patience instead.

The word "*merit*" in the phrase "*the foundation of the treasures of merit*" means virtuous action. The word "*treasures*" refers to the Buddha's merit, or root

of virtue, being inexhaustible. The word “*foundation*” refers to the Buddha being the source from which many other merits arise. In brief, this phrase shows that the individual limbs of the Buddha’s beautiful body are the result of the accumulation of numerous merits. It is said that ten times the merit of all sentient beings is equivalent to the merit that is the cause of producing one pore of the Buddha’s body. One hundred times the merit that is able to produce all the pores of the Buddha’s body will produce one of the minor marks of enlightened perfection. One thousand times the merit that produces all the eighty minor marks of enlightened perfection produces one of the thirty-two major marks of enlightened perfection. Among the thirty-two major marks of enlightened perfection, twenty-nine of them can individually be produced by one thousand times the merit that produces all the eighty minor marks of enlightened perfection. Now, ten thousand times the merit that produces each of the other twenty-nine major marks of enlightened perfection will produce the curl of hair located between the eyebrows of the Buddha. One hundred thousand times the merit that produces the curl of hair will produce the *ushnisha* [the protuberance at the top of the Buddha’s head]. Ten million times the merit needed to produce the *ushnisha* will produce the “conch of Dharma.” The conch of Dharma seems to signify the Buddha’s voice.

The phrase “*adorned with the noble minor marks and decorated with the flower blossoms of the noble major marks*” explains the very nature of the main structure of the Buddha’s body. The minor and major marks are the physical qualities that beautify the Buddha’s body. Among these two, the minor marks are the subordinate ones while the major marks are the principal ones. There are eighty minor marks, such as coppery-colored fingernails. “*Adorned with the noble minor marks*” means that the Buddha’s body is adorned and beautified by these eighty minor marks.

The major marks refer to the shape of the wheels on the Buddha’s hands and feet, the *ushnisha* on the crown of the head, and the like. “*Decorated with the flower blossoms of the noble major marks*” means that, just as any physical body is beautiful when adorned with a garland of flowers, so those major marks, such as the wheels on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, make the Buddha’s body beautiful.

The first part of the phrase “*conforming to the stages of the field of enlightened activities*” indicates that the Buddha possesses the infinite perfection of enlightened activities. The second part indicates that no matter what behavior or activities the Buddha is engaged in, those who behold him always find him attractive, pleasing, and soothing to their minds. In brief, whatever action the Buddha is performing, such as walking, sitting, sleeping, talking, etc., his enlightened activities are calming to the mind of the observer.

The second part of the phrase, “*his appearance is not unpleasant to one’s sight and is delightful to devoted aspirants,*” describes the enlightened activities of the Buddha’s body. When people see the Buddha’s body and observe his behavior, not only do they think that this “being” is an exceptional one, but also a clear faith and devotion arises within them. Therefore, onlookers always see him as an agreeable sight and not displeasing to look upon.

The [next three] phrases of the sutra, “*delightful to devoted aspirants,*” “*his wisdom cannot be overpowered by others,*” and “*his powers are invincible,*” all demonstrate the types of enlightened activities the Buddha performs for the sake of the different natures possessed by his disciples. The essence of this conveys the idea that the Buddha receives seekers of the spiritual path in different ways. Generally speaking, there are two types of devotees who go to see him. One is the type who sees him out

of devotion. The other type of disciple is the one who goes with the idea of competing with him.

The first type, the one with devotion, is further divided into two groups. The first kind is, for example, someone who has only heard about the Buddha but does not know anything about his qualities. So, out of curiosity, that person wants to see what the Buddha is like in actuality. Due to that thought, a seed is planted in his mind that, when ripened, enables him to see the Buddha later. As a result of this, he later goes to see the Buddha. That type of person is known as one who possesses what is known as “desiring faith.” That kind of faith, however, is not desiring faith in the real sense. The reason for this is that it is just a desire to see the Buddha.

Real desiring faith [that of the second kind of disciple with devotion,] is as follows: One hears of the qualities of the Buddha and comes to understand those qualities. Due to that, there arises faith in the Buddha. When this type of faith occurs within a person, it gives rise to the ripening of the root of virtue that already exists within that person’s mind continuum. For this reason that person now goes to see the Buddha. This is the true meaning of “desiring faith.” It is for this reason that two kinds of desiring faith are described.

These are the two types of people who possess desiring faith. When either of them is in the Buddha’s presence, they become very happy. For example, people who engage in meditation experience both great physical and mental joy. Similarly, at the time when people see the Buddha they become delightfully happy. Those people are acknowledged to be delightfully happy with desiring faith.

The subsequent phrases from the sutra, “*his wisdom cannot be overpowered by others, and his powers are invincible,*” indicate the people who go to see the Buddha with the intention to compete with him. They are also divided into two groups: the first is

the person who wants to debate with the Buddha due to that person’s pride in his knowledge of logic among the five sciences. His intention is to defeat the Buddha through his knowledge. The second type of person is one who is physically very strong. This person has the intention of defeating the Buddha through the art of wrestling.

Among these two, the first, the person who wants to defeat the Buddha through his skills in debate, is unable to do so. The reason for this is that the Buddha’s wisdom cannot be defeated by the wisdom of any other living being. The second person is described in the sutra where it reads, “his powers are invincible.” Even though a person wants to physically compete with the Buddha, there is no way the Buddha’s power can be overpowered. The reason for this is that the Buddha’s physical strength cannot be defeated by gods or men. The Buddha’s body possesses matchless strength. There were many people who physically competed with him, but no one succeeded in defeating him.

To be continued...

[The Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels and its commentary by Khenchen Appey Rinpoche were translated by Jhampa Losal and Jay Goldberg at the International Buddhist Academy under the auspices of the Khenpo Appey Foundation, 2014. Reproduced with gratitude by their kind permission].

MAHAMUDRA

The Great Path to Enlightenment

A teaching by Khenchen Sherab Amipa Rinpoche

(Part 5)

DUALITY

Duality is always linked to ignorance. It leads us to differing opinions and constant uncertainty. Being free of it means having only one, correct view. Liberation from samsara cannot be produced by intellectual knowledge alone. We need to develop feeling, accumulate experience, and practise shunyata.

The most important thing is a warm mental feeling, for great intellectual knowledge alone may make the ego even stronger. In order to prevent such a strengthening of the ego, we must follow the path of Mahamudra with *shiney* (samatha) and *lhag-tong* (vipashyana). Ego and attachment diminish only when we constantly examine our mind. In our practice, we need to carefully observe whether our mind is becoming freer. If not, we must find the reason. What is essential is the knowledge that everything comes from within ourselves. The cause of all disturbances lies within us, not outside. We only believe that disturbances come from outside because we are not yet free from attachment. Attachment results in wrong views. Doubts and wrong views can only be recognised when we are rid of attachment.

Only when we have more experience of *shiney*, *lhag-tong*, bodhicitta and shunyata, and have trained ourselves in self-observation (Tibetan: *nal-jor*) can we expect the duality of our perception to change and



our perception become correct. Our mind will then be in samadhi. It will have developed the quality needed to practise Mahamudra.

NAL-JOR

Nal-jor is the Tibetan word for sadhana. A sadhana is a form of meditation with an object. For example, Buddha Avalokiteshvara, the loving compassion aspect of

the Buddha, can be taken as an external object or our own consciousness as an internal object.

Nal signifies that the mind has become gentle through this practice: it has acquired selflessness which is the quality of love and compassion.

Jor means concentration. Consciousness enters the meditative state.

Nal-jor, also expresses all the different aspects of the Buddha, for example, Manjushri - the wisdom aspect, Avalokiteshvara - the loving compassion aspect, Tara - activity, or Vajrapani - wrathfulness.

The practice of the four classes of Tantra also comes under *nal-jor*, (See chapter 5).

A *nal-jorma* or a *nal-jorpa* is a woman or a man who has experience in the development of the mind.

SAMADHI

Samadhi or yoga (Tibetan: *ting nge dzin*) has many meanings. It means great concentration coupled with insight. It also refers to yoga exercise as well as

the higher practice of a person with great development.

All the paramitas are necessary for yoga practice: in other words, if we wish to practise correctly we need to know and exercise all six or ten paramitas. This lessens the non-virtuous part in us and increases our feelings of joy. The non-virtuous part covers negative thoughts, doubt, lack of faith, of love and compassion, as well as a lack of interest in virtue.

As soon as non-virtues disappear, the mind becomes as clear as the sun or the moon in a cloudless sky. These are the distinguishing marks of inner development. If we have produced this clear mind we are liberated from the two root illnesses, egoism and attachment.

Sometimes we wonder what it feels like to be free from ego, or we might ask: what is ego, what is consciousness?

Ego and consciousness are totally opposed. Ego is the error through which we are enchained to this world and the sufferings of samsara. Ego means selfishness, that is, me-only. It causes wrong activity, keeps thoughts concentrated upon oneself, limiting them severely. It is only without ego that they can open up and we can develop a feeling of the importance of other living beings.

We need to know exactly what ego is and what it means in order to develop good practice. First there is ego, and through ego, attachment. The two together confine us within narrow limits and until we have eliminated them, we can have no freedom. In our ordinary state, so long as we do not know our own mind, we often cannot tell if we are acting rightly or wrongly. We suffer from innumerable doubts, make many mistakes and become more and more uncertain.

Through practice, study, and attentive listening to Dharma teachings, we gradually get to know ourselves. In this way the hold of the ego lessens. However, theoretical knowledge is not enough, we have to develop compassion. Our wrong dealings are then

reduced, our knowledge of the Dharma increases, and our nature becomes gentle. In this way we gradually gain faith and confidence in ourselves and find the path which leads us out of the sufferings of samsara.

Unlike the ego, consciousness exists individually and continually, both in samsara and in nirvana, and it continues to exist unchanged even beyond the point where Buddhahood is reached.

In other words, all enlightened beings keep their own specific characteristics, but they are free from ego, attachment, and ignorance, while the ordinary mind is constantly mixed up with disturbances and ignorance. One could say it still possesses positive and negative karma. Through practices such as yoga we can purify all non-virtue and ignorance. We become filled with inner clarity, compassion and wisdom. We have no more ego and attachment, only pure, clear awareness. We reach a higher state and find the path to enlightenment.

Samadhi means skillful yoga. This kind of meditation brings great joy. With our fully transformed perception, we can carry our development, through method and wisdom, even further, that is, we can practise still higher samadhi, like the great Mahasiddhas, Nagarjuna and Virupa. In this way we reach Mahamudra. We act only for the benefit of other living beings. This is yeshey, the virtuous mental quality. It signifies freedom from ignorance and the attainment of shunyata.

At this point we can recognize more clearly our own precious consciousness, the pure Buddha-nature within us. We experience this moment as great joy, like that of parents when a long-absent and deeply loved child returns home. Even this example does not sufficiently express the deep-felt joy, for this is our own original consciousness that we had lost and have now found. The mind can now be compared to a palace, full of joy. In religious terms, we say that the mind is like a mandala. In this state there is no difference between samsara and nirvana, all is nirvana. This

too is a characteristic of Mahamudra.

When we listen to descriptions of this kind, we might think that Mahamudra is beyond our reach and unattainable. Indeed, Mahamudra is a very high state, but it is not outside us, on the contrary, it is within us. It is true however that it is not easily achieved.

THE BODHISATTVA PATH

In Mahamudra practice, which has now been explained up to its highest stage, we can use any type of meditation whose goal is enlightenment. This is Mahamudra. In Buddhist philosophy, the Hinayana path is said to lead to enlightenment in eleven bhumis; Mahayana takes thirteen. Bhumis are stages on the path of mental development.

The eleven stages or bhumis on the Bodhisattva path in Hinayana are as follows:

First the bhumi of the supreme joy Second the bhumi of the stainless Third the bhumi of the luminous Fourth the bhumi of the radiant Fifth the bhumi of the very hard to conquer

Sixth the bhumi of the directly facing Seventh the bhumi of the gone far Eighth the bhumi of the unshakeable Ninth the bhumi of wisdom mind Tenth the bhumi of the cloud of Dharma (Dharma-essence) The eleventh stage is enlightenment, (Buddhahood).

In Mahayana there are thirteen bhumis. Those who practise its essence, that is, Bodhicitta and Mahamudra, can reach the thirteenth stage, either in this life or at least in the bardo, the intermediate state between death and re-birth.

The thirteenth stage is the quality of Buddha Vajradhara. Buddha Vajradhara includes the qualities of all five Dhyani Buddhas: Aksobhya, Amitabha, Amoghasiddhi, Ratnasambhava and Vairocana to which is added the quality of Buddha Vajrasattva, who has the spiritual power to purify.

5. TANTRA

In this context the question now arises: how can

we reach Mahamudra in a single lifetime?

This possibility does exist in Mahayana through the practice of Tantrayana or Vajrayana. Vajrayana is also called the swift vehicle since it can take us to enlightenment in one lifetime. Tantrayana is divided into four classes:

THE FOUR CLASSES OF TANTRA

Kriya-Tantra Caryā-Tantra Yoga-Tantra Anuttarayoga-Tantra

The four classes exist because people have very different dispositions. For some, Kriya-Tantra is the most appropriate practice for reaching enlightenment. For others it may be Caryā-Tantra and some yogis and yoginis practise all four classes on their way to enlightenment. The choice of method arises naturally out of our practice and through our own consciousness.

However, we need a qualified guru if we wish to take this swift path.

THE GURU

A good guru is very important for Mahayana practice since we cannot directly perceive the Buddha. We can, however, receive his teachings through the guru. A guru needs to have the right qualities; not everyone is eligible. For this reason we should not be hasty, but give ourselves time to seek out a suitable person and, before taking refuge with someone, make sure they have sufficient experience, knowledge, and above all, compassion. Only a guru who has these characteristics can show us the way. All true gurus have the ability to awaken in us Bodhicitta thought through their compassion and wisdom. A teacher and a guru are not the same. A teacher can give us knowledge, but a guru changes our nature (body, speech and mind) through the initiations given to us. When we are in a position to represent the guru's qualities, we can see the guru as Buddha Vajradhara. We can take refuge with a guru of this kind. We develop faith and trust, show respect and keep good *tamzig*. *Tamzig* means mutual respect

for the secrecy of the teachings and respect for the relationship between guru and disciple. Out of compassion and at our request, the guru gives us the four consecrations of body, speech, mind, and wisdom. During the consecrations the guru develops great power to help disciples realise their own nature.

YOGA PRACTICE

Yoga practice means observation of our own mind and the accumulation of experience of its purity. For this, our nature needs first to be gentle, clear and supple. In addition, we need the strength of virtue.

In the first place, we should practise developing loving compassion, Mahakaruna, relative and absolute Bodhicitta.

Those who are engaged upon this path are called yogis or yoginis. Yogis and yoginis can be recognized by the fact that they practise correctly and act impartially for themselves and for others.

Without practice we experience how joy and sorrow, peacefulness and aggressiveness alternately arise in our minds. Through the practice of Mahamudra our mind is calmed and we recognise that our original mind is clear light; this state is called *gyuma yeshey* in Tibetan. This is the wisdom aspect of the mind, completely free of all ignorance.

Several names are given to this high development, for example, *chöying yeshey* (Tibetan). Translated, this means: the mind is very spacious. It is free from ego and has the same characteristics as Buddha Vairocana. This quality can also be called *dorje sem*. Dorje means vajra and vajra stands for unchanging, unshakeable plenitude of power. The mind is so powerful that ignorance cannot disturb it.

Yogis and yoginis who reach Mahamudra in one lifetime no longer have normal bodies, but unchangeable, powerful vajra- bodies. They can work with the energy of their chakras. Chakras are energy centres, the most important of which lie inside the body near the spine. Working with energy means that the veins

are not blocked, the yogis'/yoginis' consciousness is full of Bodhicitta and Shunyata qualities and they have deep faith in the guru. We hope with the guru's blessing to take on the characteristics of Vajradhara.

To work with the chakras without thorough directions from our guru can entail danger to the mind and body. However, if we have received sufficient training from our guru and have developed the necessary understanding, these exercises allow us to make rapid progress.

Human beings are made up of five elements: earth, water, fire, air and space. Among these, the air element is especially important as it is directly related to our consciousness. In addition, it is the element which allows us to move our bodies. In order for us to work with all the chakras and the veins, the connection between the wisdom-air element and our body must be maintained. In ordinary people the air element is not pure, but a yogi/yogini can change it into the wisdom element (Tibetan: *yeshey lung*) through correct practice.

Teachings on this subject are not given publicly, but through direct contact with an experienced guru.

If we practise further on this path we obtain the Dharmakaya. This is the state of knowledge which Bodhisattvas possess. It is one of the four kayas: Nirmanakaya, Samboghakaya, Dharmakaya and Buddhakaya.

Buddhakaya signifies enlightenment, Samboghakaya is the form that is active under many different aspects, and Nirmanakaya is the conscious higher state of great knowledge, higher than Dharmakaya. There is a great difference between normal and enlightened knowledge, as also between Bodhisattva-knowledge and Buddha-knowledge. Only a Buddha has at his disposal the eighty different spheres of knowledge.

The goal is Mahamudra, enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings.

Dharma Activities

Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche in Hong Kong and Singapore

On the 30th of September 2014, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche arrived in Hong Kong where, invited by Sakya Rig Zin Ling, he led an intensive ten-day programme that included the bestowal of the Chakrasamvara initiation, the Vajrayogini blessing and the Kurukulle Fire Puja.

It was Rinpoche's third visit to the city, where he has in a short time gained a considerable following of eager devotees and is regarded as an accomplished

Dharma teacher. His growing skills in the Chinese language also go a long way in winning him the admiration and amity of the local sangha.

The second part of Rinpoche's Asian visit took him to Sakya Tenphel Ling in Singapore, where Rinpoche arrived on 10th October to conduct a programme entitled 'Unravelling the Wheel of Time'. The main programme, as its title aptly describes, was dedicated to the bestowal of the Kalachakra initiation, along with

an explanation of its short sadhana. In addition, Rinpoche conducted several other activities, including the Tsimara Kangsol puja and the Medicine Buddha empowerment.



Rinpoche giving the Chakrasamvara empowerment in Hong Kong



Tsimara Kangsol puja and tsok

All too soon, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche's days in Singapore came to an end and, on the 21st of October, Rinpoche left for India, where many more Dharma activities awaited him.

Singapore photos: Dorzang



Rinpoche arrives at Sakya Tenphel Ling



Rinpoche bestowing the Kalachakra at Sakya Tenphel Ling



Boat trip to fish farm in Changmi and release of life ceremony



Lamp Offering Puja



Bidding farewell to Rinpoche

Annual Grand Hevajra and Chakrasamvara Pujas at Sakya Centre



On the 30th of October, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin initiated the celebration of the eight-day Annual Grand Hevajra Puja at the Sakya Centre, and the following day, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche began leading the Annual Chakrasamvara Puja in the small Sakya Centre shrine room. This ritual is normally held each year on the 9th day of the 11th lunar month of the Tibetan Calendar (30th December this year). This year, however, its celebration was held earlier, in order to accommodate the upcoming oral transmission by H.H. the Sakya Trizin of the Sakya Kabhum, also to take place at the Sakya Centre.



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche in Bodh Gaya

On the 7th of November, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche led a group of students in a three-day Ushnishavijaya Puja at the Mahabodhi Stupa in Bodh Gaya, during which over a hundred students took their refuge vows under the Bodhi Tree.

While at the holy site, Rinpoche met with H.H.

the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa at Tergar Monastery, where he was received with high honours. Rinpoche's visit to Bodh Gaya also coincided with that of H.E. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, with whom Rinpoche shared some precious moments.





Golden Jubilee - Sakya Centre, Rajpur



On the 13th and 14th of November 2014, Sakyapas from all corners of the globe gathered at the Sakya Centre in Rajpur in order to celebrate together the fiftieth anniversary of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's main monastery outside of Tibet.

Sakya Centre had lavishly embellished itself to welcome the eminent guests who had come to pay tribute to His Holiness on this joyous occasion. His Holiness was surrounded by His family, including all three generations of the Sakya Dolma Phodrang. The occasion was also graced by the presence of His Eminence Ngor Luding Khenchén Rinpoche, and that of Their Eminences Avikrita Vajra Rinpoche and Asanga Vajra Rinpoche from the Sakya Phuntsok Phodrang.

Among the notable guests were also the Representative of the Office of H.H. the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, the Most Venerable Professor Samdhong Rinpoche; the Speaker for the Tibetan Parliament-in Exile, Mr. Penpa Tsering; the Honourable Minister of





Religion and Culture, Kalon Pema Chhinjor; MP for the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, Ven. Geshe Gashi Tseringpo, and Professor K. N. Mishra from Banaras University.

The first day of the celebrations, which took place on the auspicious day of Lhabab Düchen, was marked by cultural performances and expressions of devotion to His Holiness the Sakya Trizin, followed by speeches delivered in Tibetan, English, Hindi and Sanskrit.

The second day of the celebration was dedicated to a religious programme, consisting in the bestowal

by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin of the *All-Encompassing Jewel Empowerment* on the numerous assembly. The day closed with an open-air dinner at the Sakya Academy Project Site, hosted by Her Eminence Dagmo Sonam Palkyi Sakya and Khenpo Jamyang Lekshey.

The Sakya Centre was founded by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin on the 16th of March 1964, five years after His Holiness' arrival in India from his native Tibet. The monastery's first years saw dire hardship, as barely sufficient financial resources were available



Sakya Academy



H.E. Dagmo Sonam Palkyi and Khenpo Jamyang Lekshey welcoming guests at Sakya Academy

even for survival. Notwithstanding, greatly thanks to an openhanded loan from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin was able to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles, as He undertook the construction of the Sakya Centre. The monks collected funds by selling *thukpa* made with a newly purchased noodle machine.

Once construction was completed, additional funds were gathered to obtain statues and other holy artifacts to bless the temple; monks were now able to dedicate themselves to their religious studies. In

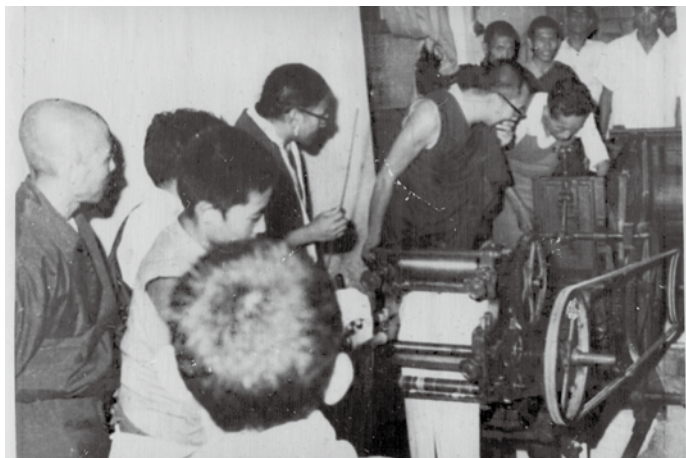
1975, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin bestowed the Holy Lamdre at the Sakya Centre and in 1988 His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave teachings at the monastery.

In 1991, construction of the current temple began, with all able-bodied monks participating in the building effort; and in 1995, His Holiness the Dalai Lama attended the new Sakya Centre Opening Ceremony.

The Sakya Centre has since then come leaps and bounds to take its place as the hub of the Sakya Tradition outside of Tibet. It has hosted numerous spiritual leaders, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and



His Holiness with the first group of Sakya Centre monks



His Holiness the Dalai Lama surveying the noodle machine

His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, and it has been the cradle of limitless initiations and teachings conferred through the years by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and by his sons Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche. Since its inception, it has served as spiritual home to the thousands of Tibetans living in India and the Himalayan region, as well as to Sakyapa followers all over the world.

As His Holiness the Sakya Trizin so wisely pointed out, the Sakya Centre's Golden Jubilee not only offered a pause to evaluate what has been accomplished over the past fifty years but, more importantly even, it provided the opportunity to gauge what needs to be done over the coming fifty years.



First Lamdre at the old Sakya Centre



Construction of the new Sakya Centre



H.H. the Sakya Trizin offering the mandala to H.H. the Dalai Lama



H.H. the Dalai Lama offering the first butter lamp

SAKYA KABHUM

Oral Transmission by H.H. the Sakya Trizin



Over the space of five weeks beginning on 16th November, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin conferred upon an assembly of Sakyapa monastics and lay followers the oral transmission of the *Sakya Kabhum*, a collection of all the works composed by the Five Founding Masters of the Sakya Order. It was the first time that His Holiness was bestowing these jewel-like

teachings.

The *Sakya Kabhum* comprises fifteen volumes of some 400 two-sided pages each. The transmission required His Holiness to read to the assembly relentlessly and at vertiginous speed for some six hours a day over the span of five weeks. With a hiatus of two weeks during which His Holiness presided over the Sakya Monlam in Lumbini and bestowed an initiation to His Holiness the 17th Karmapa in Bodh Gaya, the transmission lasted until the 11th of January.

Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and Khöndung Gyana Rinpoche were there to receive these precious teachings along with their respective families, as were His Eminence Asanga Vajra Rinpoche, and several of the highest Sakya Lamas. These included H.E. Dezhung Rinpoche, from whose predecessor His Holiness the Sakya Trizin had initially received the Sakya



H.E. Dezhung Rinpoche offered the mandala to His Holiness for the teachings received, and Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche offered to Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche for his birthday

Kabhumi transmission in Seattle nearly four decades ago.

The significance of the occasion was added to by the celebration on 27th November of a Long-life Puja for Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche's 41st birthday according to the Tibetan calendar, with Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche offering the mandala along with other high lamas.

Among the priceless works contained in the Sakya Kabhumi are *Sachen Kunga Nyingpo's* Praise to Virupa, which is invariably recited to this day during the precious Lamdre teachings, as well as his authoritative explanation of the Holy Lamdre contained in the *Asingma*, the *Lamdre Donduma* and the *Nyagma*. Equally found in the compendium are the four lines that *Sachen Kunga Nyingpo* received directly from *Manjushri*, which constitute the root of the essential *Parting From the Four Attachments* teachings.

The collection also features the inestimable *Door to the Dharma*, *Sonam Tsemo's* flawless outline of the complete Buddhist doctrine and

teachings, which he received directly in visions from *Mahasiddha Virupa* and other tutelary deities. Another important contribution by *Sonam Tsemo* to the collection is the *Schematisation of Tantra*, on which *Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche* was to give a teaching at *Sakya College* in March 2015.

Jetsun Dragpa Gyaltsen's contribution to this precious collection is copious and is highly valued by all sects of Tibetan Buddhism, notably his *Song of Experience of Mind-Training and the View*, universally regarded as one of the jewels of Tibetan Buddhist literature.

Sakya Pandita's renowned *Sakya Lekshey*, also known as *Elegant Sayings*, also forms part of the compendium, as does his pivotal work *Elucidating the Sage's Intent*, a conclusive description of the stages of the Mahayana path to enlightenment.

Finally, the works of *Drogon Chogyal Phagpa*, which constitute a considerable part of the Sakya Kabhumi, embrace not only root texts and commentaries on sutra

and tantra, but also a variety of subjects that include the introduction of the Phagpa script for the Mongolian language and verses of praise to yaks and to beer.

It can easily be said that the Sakya Kabhumi is to be revered as one of the most valuable Dharma treasures extant today, and those who had the good fortune to receive its transmission from His Holiness the Sakya Trizin on this occasion, have been blessed with an invaluable gift of enlightened wisdom.

The celebration of this unique religious event concluded with a *Tenshug* ceremony, in immense gratitude to His Holiness for the invaluable Dharma treasure that He had dispensed on the assembly. With H.E. *Luding Khenchen Rinpoche* in attendance, *Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche* offered the *Mandal Tensum*, followed by mandala offerings by *Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche*, H.E. *Asanga Rinpoche*, H.E. *Thartse Rinpoche* and other lamas.



Tenshug in gratitude to His Holiness for the teaching bestowed

SAKYA MONLAM



This year, the celebration of the Sakya Monlam Prayer Festival was held in Lumbini, Nepal from the 4th to the 14th of December 2014.

As every year, this was a joyous occasion, bringing together thousands of Sakyapa monastics and lay followers from all parts of the world. For the first time, the gathering was held in the grounds contiguous to the Mayadevi gardens, whose proximity suffused the occasion with further blessings.

This year, the Sakya Monlam took on singular significance owed to a groundbreaking announcement made by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin on the 11th of December. His Holiness made public a resolution reached by the Sakya Dolma Phodrang and the Sakya Phuntsok Phodrang, to be effective in 2017,

concerning the future role of the Sakya Trizin, Head of the Sakya Order of Tibetan Buddhism.

The tenor of this resolution is contained in a letter signed both by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and His Holiness Dagchen Rinpoche, and it has the blessing of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In it, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin proposes that the position of Sakya Trizin be assumed in turns by both generations of the Khön lineage for a period of three years each, according to seniority of age. The role of Sakya Trizin will carry with it strict conditions and responsibilities that will ensure that, under each designate's leadership, the Sakya Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism will, in the best way possible, honour its sacred role as vehicle of the Holy Dharma. His Holiness the Sakya

Trizin points out that this is an opportune time to introduce these changes, while He and his peers are still active in their Dharma activities and can provide much-needed guidance to the new generation.

In his boundless compassion, wisdom and clairvoyance, His



His Holiness reading the announcement on the future role of the Sakya Throne Holder

Holiness the Sakya Trizin, is in this manner, ensuring a smooth transition of the Sakya School into a modern age filled with complexities. At this juncture, it is fortuitous

that our Sakya Dungeys are themselves great masters, immersed in the traditions of the Sakya Order, and yet completely in tune with the changing times. We are filled with

gratitude to His Holiness the Sakya Trizin for the unwavering guidance that He has provided us throughout the past decades and will continue to do so over the years to come.



THE DALAI LAMA

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ཆེད་འབྲས།

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The Sakya Trizin

A Private Discussion Between the Dolma Phodrang and Phuntsok Phodrang about a Resolution and New Directive Concerning the Future Role of the Sakya Trizin, the Head of the Sakya Order of Tibetan Buddhism

Based on the disposition, aptitude, and inclinations of individuals, the precious teachings of the Victorious One, the Incomparable Buddha, flourished in the Land of Snows as the source of the merit field for all. With this background, in the beginning, the Khön Könchog Gyalpo founded Palden Sakya and the Great Compassionate One, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, established it as an Order later to be known as one of the four major Buddhist Orders of Tibet.

Then Sakya Pandita, the uncle, and Chögyal Phagpa, the nephew, Dharma Masters, caused it to flourish extensively throughout Tibet, Mongolia, and China, and for the next 11 generations, the Khön masters presided over the great Dharma seat of the Sakya.

Later, the tradition continued to flourish under the spiritual leadership of four separate Labrang. Finally, from that time right up to the present day, the successive descendants of Dücho Labrang's hereditary lineage have assumed the role of both administrator and spiritual head of the Order.

Among these Dücho masters, Jamgön Wangdu Nyingpo had four sons. Two were renunciate monks, whose Labrang existed only during their lifetime, while the other two each held separate hereditary and spiritual lineages, which have come to be well known from that time until now as the Dolma Phodrang and the Phuntsok Phodrang, and the role of Sakya Trizin has alternately been assumed by one of these Phodrang, based on the seniority of the age of the designates.

At this moment, as if at a time of a new "age of perfection," when both Khön Families enjoy unprecedented harmony, pure in our samayas, while we have similar aspirations, and when both Khön dungseys have carried and are carrying on their extensive Dharma studies, I wish and thus suggest a change and an improvement in the designation of the position of the head of the Sakya Order based on mutual discussion and a resolution reached thereof. This assuredly will cause increased stability in the continuation of the teachings and administration of the Sakya.

Bearing in mind that while we the elder generations are still thriving and are thus able to take the opportunity to provide guidance, I suggest that both generations of Phodrang take turns in assuming the responsibility of the role of Sakya Trizin by seniority of age and with the required qualifications of the designate for a three-year term. This arrangement has great significance in that all members will have the opportunity to serve as Sakya Trizin.

The qualifications shall consist of the complete fulfillment of the studies of all the basic courses of Rites and Rituals of the Sakya; studies in all the major philosophies; having received empowerments, reading transmissions, and pith instructions; having studied the teachings of the ances-

tral Dharma teachings of both *Lamdre Tsögshey* and *Lamdre Lobshey*, along with other important teachings and Empowerments; and having accomplished the basic recitation retreat on Hevajra and other important tutelary deities.

This recommended duration of the term of the Sakya Trizin is based on an opinion of Vajradhara Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, who, as we have heard, suggested that “the post of Sakya Trizin be made like the four Labrang of the Ngor Monastery, which take turns every three years.” At the end of the three-year term, the post must be turned over to the next designate without fail.

During the term of each Sakya Trizin, his responsibilities shall include conducting any one of these major teachings of *Lamdre Tsögshey*, *Lamdre Lobshey*, the Collection of Sadhanas, and the Collection of Tantras; presiding over the important traditional annual *dücho*, the Commemorative Offering Ceremonies of the seat of the Sakya; overseeing the training and studies of the Sakya monasteries; seeking to find ways to promote and grow the Dharma teachings through study and practices; fulfilling the wishes of Sakya followers; and, last, it is extremely important he carry on exceptional work that includes the improvement of all the areas of Dharma, the monasteries, and the Sakya followers.

Ever since I assumed the responsibility of the leadership, just before the “change of time,” 1959—and a long time has passed since then—it may be possible that at times I, as Sakya Trizin, have been seen to have benefited from privileges. In reality, as soon as I assumed the responsibility, the “change of time” took place. When I arrived as a refugee, there was nothing in terms of monasteries and community in India that we could depend upon. For everything we needed or had depended upon, we had to ask of acquaintances and had to face many hundreds of difficulties for a long period of time. This is neither a “boast” nor have I anything to show of accomplishment, and yet, as all can see for themselves, I have at least maintained the presence and the name of the Sakya Order.

Seeing, at the moment, the importance of the need for directives for the future of the Order, I offer the gift of this suggestion for a new mode of selecting future Sakya Trizins. With the mutual agreement and decision reached by both the Phodrangs to this suggestion and with the blessed confirmation received from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, this new mode of selecting the Sakya Trizin will then be put into practice.

SAKYA PHUNTOK PHODRANG

Name

Dagchen, Jigdal Ngawang Kunga Sonam

Signature & Seal



SAKYA DOLMA PHODRANG

Name

Sakya Trizin, Ngawang Kunga Wangyal

Signature & Seal



May 8, 2014

ཨ་མ་སྐུ་ལྷན་སྐྱོང་།

DOLMA PHODRANG

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His Holiness The Sakya Trizin at Tergar Monastery, Bodh Gaya

On the invitation of His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin arrived at Tergar Monastery, Bodh Gaya, on the 18th of December 2014. His Holiness the Sakya Trizin was accompanied by His two sons Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche. His Holiness had come to bestow the Muni Trisamaya Vyuhā from the Krya Tantra class of empowerments. This was in preparation for the Chik She Kundrol series of empowerments that H.H. the Karmapa was to bestow over the next few days at the Kagyu Monlam Pavillion. An assembly of eight thousand devotees were there to receive these blessings, divided almost equally between monastics and lay people.

His Holiness and Their Eminences the Dungseys were given nothing short of a royal welcome as they arrived at Tergar, as was so eloquently described in an article featured on H.H. the Karmapa's website:

"The arrival of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin at Tergar monastery on December 18th, 2014 marked an historic re-connection between the Karmapa lineage and the Sakya Trizin. Previously the 16th Karmapa, Rigpe Dorje, nurtured the young Sakya heir when he first came to India, for which HH Sakya Trizin later expressed his gratitude in a letter.

For over an hour an estimated one thousand people stood patiently holding ceremonial scarves and incense as they lined both sides of the one kilometre road that leads to Tergar. The Karmapa made his own car available for HH Sakya Trizin and his two sons, Khondung Vajra Ratna Rinpoche and Khondung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, on their journey from Patna to

Bodhgaya. As the car approached Tergar Monastery, a procession befitting royalty escorted it. Monks and lamas bedecked in dazzling orange and red brocade played horns, blew the conch, beat ceremonial drums and held victory banners aloft. A monk walked beside the car, holding high the golden parasol. The car cleared the gates through banks of juniper smoke and came to a halt near the steps of Tergar. HH Karmapa in ceremonial dress with HE Jamgon Kongtrul and HE Gyaltsap Rinpoches came down to the stone plaza to greet their esteemed guests with long silk scarves. The two Holinesses gazed at each other with loving kindness and undisguised warmth as their hands touched. Under the shade of the fringed golden parasol, they entered the darkened temple, leaving crowds of enthusiastic devotees outside the heavy wooden doors.

His Holiness Sakya Trizin and his two sons went to the shrine, lit butter lamps and threw a katag up to the huge golden Buddha. Then escorted by HH Karmapa, they went upstairs for a private lunch; afterwards HH Karmapa brought them back to the car and their heads touched in parting.

On December 20th, HH Sakya Trizin will bestow a Kriya Yoga empowerment prior to the Chik She Kundrol, a series of empowerments that the Karmapa will be offering that afternoon and on subsequent days.

It marks the first time that the head of another lineage will give an empowerment at Tergar.

"There is a sectarian feeling that occurs in Tibetan Buddhism " said the Karmapa, "so (one of the reasons) we have invited His Holiness Sakya Trizin is



Photos: Courtesy of The Office of H.H. the 17th Karmapa

to decrease our sectarian feeling.”

(Source: kagyuoffice.org)

H.H. the Sakya Trizin speaks very fondly of the kindness shown to him by H.H. the 16th Karmapa. The two had met for the first time in 1955 at a conference held in Lhasa, attended by all the heads of Tibetan Buddhist schools. His Holiness the Sakya Trizin was ten years old at the time, representing the Sakya Order. H.H. the 16th Karmapa took him under his care, a gesture that H.H. the Sakya Trizin would never forget.

The two holy men’s paths crossed again several times in later years. Their last meeting was when H.H. the 16th Karmapa lay gravely ill in hospital, and H.H. the Sakya Trizin went to visit him. The latter had just received the *Collection of Tantras*, known in Tibetan as *Gyud-dye Kundue*, and H.H. the 16th Karmapa ex-

pressed the wish that his tulkus should receive these teachings.

And now, H.H. the 17th Karmapa had requested that H.H. the Sakya Trizin bestow the great *Trisamaya Vyuha* empowerment as an introduction to the *Gyud-dye Kundue*, echoing his predecessor’s wish. Because the Kagyupa and the Sakyapa schools were created within a short while of each other, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin described them as “children born at the same time”.

His Holiness described how the *Trisamaya Vyuha* had been originally given in the heavenly realms by the Buddha to an assembly of Bodhisattvas. His Holiness also pointed out that it was particularly auspicious that it was now being conferred in Bodh Gaya, as its main deity is Shakyamuni Buddha.

Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche Leads the Cham Dance at the Sakya Centre



respect revealed by their execution of the ritual.

Vajrakilaya is one of the most important deities in the Sakya Tradition, and it is unique in that its teaching lineage and the Khön hereditary lineage are almost undistinguishable.

In the Sakya tradition, the *Phurba* has two aspects: the upper action, concerned with the pursuit of enlightenment, and the lower action, concerned with the subduing of evil forces. Divided into fifty-two parts, this Vajrakilaya Cham belongs to the upper action class; it



involves an intricately detailed visualisation of the deity's mandala, along with his consort and retinue, for the monks to meditate on as they perform the ritual.

Over and above being a feast for the eyes, the Cham is bound to offer a deeply religious experience for anyone who has the good fortune to witness it.

On the 11th of February 2015, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche led a special *Phurba Cham* Dance, with the participation of some thirty-five Sakya Centre monks. It was the third year that this unique ritual was being performed at the monastery, and this year's rendition was even more captivating than the previous ones, in great part due to the elaborate costumes worn by the monks during the ritual.

Under the solicitous and expert tutorship of Lama Paljor from Monthang Monastery in Upper Mustang, the monks had spent several weeks preparing for the day, and their efforts were in every



Elaborate Consecration at the Sakya Centre



Among His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's last activities in Rajpur before He embarked on His international teaching tour, was the performance of an Elaborate Consecration ceremony on the 3rd of March, with Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche as Chant Master.

During this time, the Sakya Centre temple filled with statues and sacred objects of all sizes and styles, one more beautiful than the other. After receiving this most special of blessings, they would, in their majority, find their places in Sakya monasteries in Tibet.

The last day of this special puja broke a Sakya Centre record: the ritual began at six in the morning and ended at nine in the evening.



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche at Sakya College



On 15th March, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche conducted a two-week course at the Sakya College, Dehradun, on the *Schematisation of Tantra* by Loppon Sonam Tsemo, the second of the Five Founding Masters of the Sakya Order. The near two hundred students of Higher Buddhist Philosophy attending the College eagerly attended these precious teachings, wherein Sonam Tsemo describes in detail all the tantras that pertain to the Sakya School, elucidates the tenor of each of these and explains how to teach them.



Comings of Age

With the announcement in December 2014 by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin regarding the future of the Sakya Tradition, we follow with avid interest the development of the youngest generation of Khöns, whose responsibility it will eventually be to lead the Sakya School.

Over the first four months of the year, all five members of this new generation grew one year older and wiser.



H.E. Dungsey Akasha Vajra Rinpoche, son of Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and H.E. Dagmo Kushok Kalden Dunkyi Sakya, and eldest grandson of H.H. the Sakya Trizin, celebrated his 6th birthday according to the Tibetan calendar. For the traditional celebration at Sakya Centre, His Eminence wore for the first time the white *shemdap* representative of his position as a Khön lineage holder. His Eminence arrived at

the Sakya Centre with his father with great poise, which he retained steadfastly throughout the ceremony.

Some days earlier, H.E. Dungsey Sid-dharth Vajra Rinpoche, son of Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche and H.E. Dagmo Kushok Sonam Palkyi Sakya, had celebrated his 1st Birthday according to the Tibetan calendar, a particularly important passage in the Khön tradition. For the occasion, His Eminence sported the traditional ceremonial hat that His Holiness had donned as a child while on His throne. His Eminence very graciously accepted the mandala that was offered him by H.E. Luding Khen Rinpoche, and visibly relished the affectionate greeting extended by his *chola*.



The Khön Jetsunmas' birthdays were also celebrated, beginning with the eldest, Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter, who celebrated her 9th Tibetan Birthday at the Sakya Centre, while her cousin Jetsunma Tsejin Lhamo and younger sister Jetsunma Kunga Chimey Wangmo celebrated their 5th and 3rd respective Tibetan birthdays at Sakya Nunnery. All three Jetsunmas are extraordinary, each in their own way and, as they grow in years, they are all three bound to enrich the Khön lineage with their outstanding qualities.



Jetsunma Tsejin Lhamo



Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter



Jetsunma Kunga Chimey Wangmo



His Holiness the Sakya Trizin in the U.S.A.



On the 16th of March, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin arrived in New York, accompanied by Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche and Her Eminence Gyalyum Chen-

mo.

This was the beginning of a three-month teaching tour that would take His Holiness to the U.S.A., South Korea, Malaysia,



Indonesia and Singapore. His Holiness' first stop was in Walden, NY, where He would be bestowing the invaluable *Thirteen Golden Dharma*s initiation cycle to a group of over three hundred disciples who had travelled from some fifteen countries to receive this Dharma treasure. Everyone had taken along their warmest woolies for the occasion, while a blanket of snow covered the temple grounds.



Thirteen Golden Dharmas at Tsechen Kunchab Ling



Fundraising lunch – His Holiness with H.E. Jetsun Kushok; Khenpo Kalsang Gyaltsen with Khenpo Pema Wangdak



Mahavairocana Empowerment in New York



Long-Life initiation at Tsechen Kunchab Ling



Graciously hosted by Tsechen Kunchab Ling Abbot Khenpo Kalsang Gyaltsen and Secretary Ven. Chodrung Kunga Chodron, the event was blessed by the presence of Her Eminence Jetsun Kushok and her husband Sey Kushok, as well as that of H.E. Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche.

Originally conferred to a small, select group of practitioners, strictly within the walls of the monastery, the *Thirteen Golden Dharmas* cycle owes its name to the fact that so precious was its content that only gold offerings could ensure its bestowal. These thirteen initiations find their origins with the ancient tantric masters of India and entered

the Sakya School with Founding Master Sachen Kunga Nyingpo. They have since then been one of the mainstays of the Sakya Tradition. As a preparation to the *Golden Dharmas*, His Holiness granted the two-day Chakrasamvara Major Empowerment – a major empowerment is a requisite for receiving the *Thirteen Golden Dharmas*.

A hiatus was provided by a programme of initiations and teachings conferred by His Holiness to the Chinese Community of New York City. Over the weekend of 21st and 22nd March, His Holiness conferred the Mahavairocana Empowerment and the Amitabha Powa Oral Transmission to a large

and surprisingly young gathering of Chinese-American Buddhist devotees.

On the 28th of March, a few days shy of the conclusion of the Thirteen Golden Dharmas, His Holiness conferred a Long-Life Initiation to some 1,600 members of the Tibetan and Himalayan Community, who had made a long journey by road to fill the Tsechen Kunchab Ling hall.

On the evening of 21st of March, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche graced the New York City Tibetan Community with the bestowal of the Manjushri initiation and a public talk on daily Dharma practice:



"Because we haven't accumulated sufficient good karma throughout our lives, we are not able to meet with any of the many Buddhas. We are, however, very fortunate to meet with teachers like H.H. the Dalai Lama and H.H. the Sakya Trizin in bodily form, just like us. We are even more fortunate that we are able to receive empowerments from them.

When we have such an exceptional opportunity to meet these outstanding Gurus, we should make offerings to them. There are generally three kinds of offerings we can extend to our Gurus. The minor one among these is gifting money or property to them; the second is offering our body by serving them; and the third, the most valuable of all, is practising in our daily life the Dharma teachings that we have received from them, for example doing

the daily sadhanas of the empowerments that we have received from them.

In order to practise diligently, we don't need to go to the mountains and stay in a cave. We can be very good Dharma practitioners in our normal life, for example if we see suffering around us, we can cultivate loving kindness and compassion. Also if we see someone else doing good deeds for society, for other beings, for the environment, then we can appreciate their good deeds and rejoice in them, even though we cannot participate in them ourselves. This is an excellent way to create merit.

If we can practise in this way, it is very beneficial to our Gurus, and it even helps them to live a long life. The reason why teachers like H.H. the Dalai Lama and H.H. the Sakya Trizin came to this world is to help us sentient beings. And so we need to also do something for them, especially to help them live a long life. The best Long-Life prayer that we can dedicate to them is to put their teachings into practice. This is the best way to help them live a long life. It is the best Long-Life prayer.

If we're happy now, it is not merely because we enjoy favourable economic and material conditions. These are here today, but might be gone tomorrow. The real cause of our happiness is the Guru, and so it is important for everyone that the Guru should live long. For this, we should do our best to practise as well as we can; we should practise loving kindness and compassion for other beings, and in this way make our contribution to world peace and to the long life of our Guru.

At present, we can perhaps not meet with our Guru face to face, but if in the morning, before going to work, we can go into our shrine room and pay respect to our Guru, offer water bowls, pray, and create good motivation, this brings great benefit to our life.

As Buddhists, the clothes that we wear and the traditions that we follow are not important. But as Tibetans, it is important that we should maintain all aspects of our culture, for example by eating traditional food and wearing chubas, not only the women, but also the men and the children. The main thing however, is that we should practise the Dharma in our daily life by generating loving kindness and compassion and doing our very best to contribute to the long life of our Gurus, who live only to help us." (Translated from the Tibetan). "



His Holiness concluded His stay in the northeastern states with teaching programmes in New York City, Maryland and Boston, under the initiative of Khenpo Pema Wangdak, the New York Tsechen Tsokpa and Khenpo Migmar Tseten.

The DC Area Mongolian community also had a day with His Ho-



Medicine Buddha empowerment at NYU



Guru Rinpoche empowerment and Bhumi Tsog in NYC



Avalokiteshvara Major Empowerment in Maryland

liness, during which He gave a teaching on Chogyal Phagpa's Advice to the King, and shared lunch with the Mongolian Ambassador to the USA.

His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's last stop on the northeastern seaboard was Boston, where He was given an official welcome by the Harvard University Chaplaincy. His Holiness the Sakya Trizin had been invited by Khenpo Migmar Tseten, spiritual direc-



Mongolian Community receiving a teaching from His Holiness in DC



An interview with Voice of America in DC



Chakrasamvara Empowerment in Boston

tor of the Sakya Institute for Buddhist Studies and Chaplain of Harvard University, to conduct an intense programme of empowerments, oral transmissions and teachings. This included the Shri Chakrasamvara Body Mandala from the Ghantapada Tradition and the *Laghusamvara*, oral transmission of the entire Chakrasamvara Root Tantra. A truly rare and special blessing for all present, as this was only the second time that His Holiness had ever conferred this *lung*.

A student writes: "Over the course of the weekend, it was impossible not to be struck by the inexhaustible energy, generosity and enthusiasm displayed by His Holiness. His solo *Laghusamvara* chant (which closed the proceedings) lasted almost an hour, following the empowerment (which lasted four hours), plus who knows how many hours of prior preparatory ritual. Even so, (rather than retreating to a room for some well deserved rest) following all of this, His Holiness received all in attendance for a *khata* ceremony where he answered questions and bestowed individual blessings until everyone had an opportunity for a moment of personal contact."

His Holiness then travelled westwards to Minneapolis, invited by the Minnesota Sakya Center to bestow the *Rigsum Gompo*, or Empowerment of the Three Bodhisattvas Vajrapani, Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara. Almost a thousand people came to the



Teaching in Minneapolis

University of St. Thomas to receive this blessing from His Holiness. His Holiness also reserved some time for an explanation of the Khön lineage and of the significance of the changes in the succession to the Sakya Throne announced by Him at the end of last year.

Minnesota counts with a substantial Tibetan Community, who offered His Holiness a heartfelt and enthusiastic welcome, which included an exuberant cultural show and the presentation of a Lifetime Dedication Award by the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota.



The last stage on His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's US teaching tour was a visit to the Mountain and Western States, with stops in Boulder, San Francisco, Tehachapi and Los Angeles.

Hosted by the Tibetan Association of Colorado, His Holiness spent two days in Boulder, during which He gave the Manjushri and Long Life empowerments as well as a teaching on 'Compassion and Happiness in Daily Life'.

In an event organised by Ngor Ewam Choden, Lama Kunga Thartse's Sakya centre in the Bay Area, His Holiness gave the two-day Vajrakilaya Initiation at the Gyuto Foundation in Richmond, a Tibetan monastic and community centre.



Cultural Show in Minneapolis



(Photos: Chime Rabten)



His Holiness in Colorado





Vajrakilaya Initiation at Gyuto

His Holiness' next stop was at Ari Bhöd, "America's Tibet". Well esconced in the tranquil mountains of Tehachapi, California, Ari Bhöd is a retreat centre of the Nyingmapa tradition, which dedicates itself to the preservation of Tibetan Buddhist religion and culture. His Holiness performed a land blessing at the centre and bestowed the Longevity Empowerments of Amitayus and Hayagriva of the Thangton Gyalpo lineage. A *terma*, or hidden treasure, that was discovered by Apong *Tertön*, the Amitayus empowerment is said to grant its practitioners a lifespan of over a hundred years.



Teachings at Ari Bodh



His Holiness in Los Angeles

A three-day visit to Los Angeles was to close His Holiness' teaching tour of the USA. On the invitation of Tsechen Chokhor Ling, His Holiness gave the Amitabha Powa oral transmission as well as a public talk on the Four Noble Truths. His Holiness also granted the Avalokiteshvara Major Initiation, along with a teaching on its sadhana. And finally, on the 3rd of May, His Holiness granted the members and guests of the Tibetan Association of Southern California, the Triple Deity Empowerment of Hayagriva, Vajrapani and Garuda and led the assembly into prayer and meditation. His Holiness left the following day for South Korea.



His Holiness the Sakya Trizin in Asia



On the 4th of May, His Holiness and entourage travelled from Los Angeles to Seoul, in South Korea.

On the invitation of Ven. Jeok-Gyeong, Abbot of Bonginsa Temple, an important monastic establishment belonging to the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, His Holiness was to spend a week in the stunningly beautiful and serene mountains of the Odae-san National Park, to the east of Seoul.

His Holiness' visit to Korea was organised by H.E. Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche and Pema Wangyal Rinpoche, and was admirably managed on their behalf by Ven. Ngawang Ludrup. The latter writes of



His Holiness with His hosts and sangha

the event:

"His Holiness the Sakya Trizin visited Korea from May 5 to 11, 2015. He is the highest-ranking Tibetan teacher to visit Korea. This was one of the most significant events in the modern exchange between Korean and Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is quite new to Korea. The visit has a strangely powerful effect on the

hundreds of Koreans who attended the public teaching and the weekend Chenrezig retreat. Since the visit, so many Koreans have mentioned how powerful and lasting the blessings of His Holiness has been.

His Holiness arrived on the evening of May 5 in high spirits and good energy, despite the long trip from America. The following day, we went to the memorial of



At the Ferry Disaster Memorial Centre



A visit to Wutai-shan

the ferry disaster, which occurred in April of 2014. His Holiness very patiently met and listened to the parents of the high school students killed in the disaster. He offered prayers and words of encouragement. The power of his presence had a profound effect on the bereaved.

The next day, we went on a pilgrimage to Korea's Wutai-shan (Five-Peak Mountain of Manjusri, pronounced Odae-san in Korean). Here His Holiness met with monks and gave a talk to Buddhists who had taken temporary ordination (30 days). His Holiness toured Woljeongs Temple and Sangwonsa Temple with all the tradition and legends of Manjusri. His Holiness mentioned that the Korean temples were very similar to Tibetan temples, and that he felt at home.

Friday's public teaching on Compassion was attended by 500 people at Dong-guk University, a major Buddhist university. Almost all of the monks and nuns from the Tibetan centers in Korea came to the event. There are about 7 Tibetan centers in Korea. Then the weekend retreat was attended by 400 people on Saturday and





Teaching at Dong-guk University

about 600 people on Sunday. About 200 Nepalese and several Tibetans living in Korea came on Sunday. His Holiness bestowed the four-arm Chenrezig Jenang on Saturday and the elaborate two-arm Chenrezig empowerment (from the 5th Dalai Lama) on Sunday.

On a personal note, since I was able to drive His Holiness and be at his side for a week, I came to appreciate how truly kind and authentic he is. I felt like he didn't have the slightest negativity. It was so pleasant and edifying to be in his presence. He had a child-like purity and a very likable, simple



Chenrezig retreat

personality. It was just so nice to be with him. His warmth and kindness was only matched by his profound wisdom. He seemed to be completely aware of what was happening on a profound level. His blessings from that week continue to this day. I can see lasting changes in myself, although I'm not sure what happened. One thing for sure, I so much respect and like His Holiness, and want to be in his presence again very soon. Not only did I feel this way, but hundreds of Koreans were likewise blessed.

Now we eagerly anticipate the next visit of His Holiness. We pray that the glorious Sakya lineage make take root in Korea for the benefit of many. Koreans have a great deal of mental and emotional suffering. His Holiness' visit gave hope, and moved the hearts of so many Koreans who were fortunate enough to have met him. This may



Blessings

be a beginning of a wonderful change in the hearts of so many Koreans."

His Holiness very much enjoyed His stay in Korea, and was pleased to be part of such an interchange between these two traditions of Buddhism. It is devoutly to be wished that His Holiness may soon be able to return to Korea.

Korea photos: Courtesy of Hum, Carlos Quintas, Tenzin.

Lamdre in Kuala Lumpur



On the 11th of May, His Holiness travelled to Kuala Lumpur, where He had been invited to give the Holy Lamdre Tshogshey initiations and teachings in the vast meditation hall of the Sakya Lungtok Choling centre. Over 500 students, including more than 100 monastics were in attendance.

Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche expertly provided the traditional re-teaching, guiding the students into meditation on the most important visualisations of the Hevajra practice. While His Holiness bestowed the teachings in Tibetan, translations into Chinese and English were graciously provided by Phula Rinpoche and Lama Choedak Rinpoche respectively.

Phula Rinpoche writes of the event:



“After a long period of patient and eager anticipation by Malaysian Buddhists, on May 12, 2015, at the invitation of the devout Datin Sri Loo, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin, most beloved root guru and protector of all sentient beings, arrived at the Lotus



Mansion in Kuala Lumpur, capital city of Malaysia, to bestow the Sakyapas’ most precious Lam Dre teachings to some 500 lay disciples from 25 different countries and more than 130 tulkus, kenpos, and other members of the Sangha.

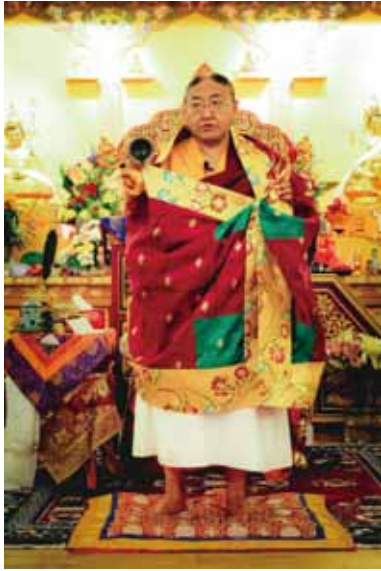
Lam Dre, the vajrayana

teaching that relies on Hevajra as its main deity, is a complete spiritual system consisting of base, path, and result, and it is a supreme method to enable a practitioner to progress step by step all the way to Buddhahood. It is the Sakya School's most precious treasure, and this is the first time ever that His Holiness bestowed Lam Dre in Malaysia, completing the entire teachings within the span of a month.

His Holiness the Sakya Trizin is one of the most important masters in the lineage of the Lam Dre teachings. In fact he is currently the lineage holder of Lam Dre, himself embodying its full realization and perfect fruition. Consequently, thanks to His Holiness' incomparable experience in the practice of Lam Dre and his compassion and generosity in bestowing so adeptly the pith instructions, and also thanks to Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche's meticulous review of the teaching and his patient guidance in the group meditation sessions, the entire sacred event became unspeakably beneficial and joyous.

The teachings and initiations ended on June 8th, with the entire congregation of devotees feeling inspired and rejuvenated, each heart filled with joy, gratitude, and a new determination to devote the rest of their life to diligent





Dharma practice. It has lasted only a month's time and yet, as they leave Malaysia for their respective homes in different corners of the

globe, each one is aware that they wouldn't have been blessed by such a rare opportunity to receive this most precious Dharma transmission, had they not sown meritorious seeds in previous lives. By the same token, each wonders

if and when such a Dharma opportunity will present itself, and whether they will have sown sufficient meritorious seeds whose ripening will allow them to be part of it."

Taiwan photos: Kuala Lumpur



Although His travels over the coming days were to have Him cross vast distances, His Holiness was able to do so in ease and comfort. Datin Shri Loo, Head of the Hai Tao Foundation, who had so munificently hosted the celebration of the Lamdre in the Foundation's palatial and awe-inspiring hall, very generously escorted His Holiness all the way to Penang, where His Holiness had been invited by the Penang Sakya Buddhist Association and the Butterworth Buddhist Association to bestow teachings and initiations.



His Holiness and H.E. Gyalum Chenmo with Datin Shri Loo



Dzongsar Fa-Hui Center, Penang

From there, His Holiness and His entourage continued their journey to Jakarta, where they met with Indonesian Buddhist Association head Tony Antonius and, the next

day boarded the latter's private jet on a thousand kilometre flight to Batam, one of the Indonesian Archipelago's 18,307 islands, some thirty kilometres from Singapore. A further four-hour boat ride took the party to their destination, where His Holiness was to bless a project site, before tracing their steps back to Jakarta.



His Holiness with Tony Antonius

His Holiness' last day in Indonesia was spent at the 9th century Mahayana Buddhist Temple of Borobudur in Magelang, Central Java, the largest stupa in the world. In an interview with the Jakarta Post, His Holiness mentioned that He had last been there in 1984. His Holiness considers Borobudur



His Holiness and entourage at Borobudur

one of the holy sites for Buddhists and observed that the great master Atisha himself had made a long and arduous journey to Borobudur and had spent a year in the process. And so His Holiness feels a strong connection with the site and found it very auspicious that He and His group should be able to mark the celebration of Vesak there.

On the 13th of June, His Holi-

ness and His entourage left Indonesia for Singapore, where He was to preside the following day over the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Buddha Sasana Society, Sakya Tenphel Ling.

To mark this memorable occasion, the centre's Exco Committee and dedicated members held an elaborate Tenshug ceremony for His Holiness, accompanied by a

succulent buffet dinner and a cultural show.

And on the 15th of June, His Holiness returned to India, concluding His 2015 International teaching tour, leaving hundreds of students in the U.S.A. and Asia basking in the light of His passage and immensely enriched by the wisdom of His teachings.



His Holiness in Singapore for Sakya Tenphel Ling's Golden Jubilee

Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche in East Asia



TAIWAN

On the 14th of April, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche left India for a *Phurdup* tour of Asian countries that was to last nearly four months. Accompanied by an entourage of ten monks, Rinpoche was to visit Taiwan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. In each of these places, Rinpoche was to conduct the Grand Vajrakilaya Ritual, one of the most important rituals in the Sakya Tradition. Also known as *Drupchöd*, it is an intensive and powerful communal practice that generally involves the preparation of a sand mandala, the intense and intricate performance of ritual mu-

sic and chanting, *torma* rituals and a fire puja.

The first stop on Rinpoche's journey was Taiwan, where he had been invited by the Vajrayana Sakya Manjushri centre to per-

form this extraordinary ritual. It was the first time that it was being performed there, and so members had been waiting with great anticipation for this moment. Rinpoche was given a warm welcome at Taoyuan International Airport by sangha representatives, accompanied by H.E. Thartse Rinpoche, who was also giving teachings in Taiwan at the time.

Four days later, the first Grand Vajrakilaya Puja on Rinpoche's tour began in earnest, with an early dawn start to the preliminary rituals.

Intensive days of group practice were to follow, as scores of devoted monastic and lay students gathered at the centre for the cel-



Rinpoche is welcomed at Taoyuan International Airport



First day of the Puja



celebration of the Grand Vajrakilaya Puja. Throughout those eight days, offerings were made to Vajrakilaya and his retinue, requesting their protection for our Gurus' Dharma activities and the fulfillment of the wishes of all beings.

Then came the time for the dissolution of the mandala, a poignant symbol of the impermanence of all phenomena. As the puja drew to a close, each one of the students present felt extraordinarily blessed by the ritual, with several members of the congregation commenting on the powerful effect that it had had on their body and mind.



The first of daily tormas blessing rituals



Dissolving the mandala



25 April – Last Vajrakilaya Puja

One of the last stages of the *Drupchöd* is the Vajrakilaya Fire Puja, during which offerings blessed by the Vajra Master are thrown to the flames, in propitiation to the deity and as an aspiration for purification. Several



Fire Puja

Photos: Dawa Dolma



Rinpoche bestows the Medicine Buddha empowerment at the Vajrayana Sakya Buddhist Institute



Rinpoche bestows the Black Manjushri and Lion's Roar Manjushri initiations at the Sakya Da-Huan Buddhist Association in Kaohsiung



Mahamayuri initiation at Tharig Centre in Kaohsiung



Bum Tsok ritual organised by the Lotus Light Centre



hundreds of devotees assembled at Sanxia Gyanyin for the occasion, amidst the lush greenery of the majestic range of mountains that neighbours Taipei.

During the course of his stay in Taiwan, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche was also to perform other precious Dharma activities, including bestowing initiations and leading lamas and monks from all four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism in reciting prayers for the

victims of the Nepal earthquake.

Rinpoche also took some time to cater to the needs of community members beset by difficult circumstances. An edifying teaching on karma and how to attain happiness at the Taipei Detention Center left the inmates visibly touched, while a visit to the Taipei General Hospital Hospice brought much-needed solace to the elderly patients that fill its wards. For most of these, their imminent demise is a source of daunting fear and helplessness, and so Rinpoche comforted them



Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche leads lamas and monks from all four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism in the recitation of prayers for the victims of the Nepal earthquake
(Photos Dawa Dolma)



Gyana Vajra Rinpoche at the Hospice



Rinpoche gives a teaching at Taoyuan Prison
(Photos Dawa Dolma)



Rinpoche visits the Southern Region Senior Citizens Home in Kaohsiung

with deep empathy and words of encouragement, giving each one a blessing. During his visit to Kaohsiung, Rinpoche spent some valuable time with the residents of the Southern Region Senior Citizens Home, dispensing precious blessings and soothing counsel.

Deeply moved by his visit to the Hospice, Rinpoche writes:

"I feel people should visit such places and experience them with their own eyes. There are millions of different living conditions in which we find ourselves in this world. Some are happy, some are sad. Some are miserable, some are confused. But then it is so essential

to realise, how precious life is. To be good to one another, to care for each other. To be conscious and aware of this.

The people I met today have serious diseases. Many of these have no antidote. It is heart-rending to see people suffering, knowing that there's no cure for them.

I feel admiration and gratitude to the doctors and the team there, and to those around the world who take such good care of ill people.

I believe that you will not be turned away if you bring an open mind and kind heart to any of these places. You will realise that you can make a great impact simply by



Rinpoche during a national TV interview

showing up and sharing a smile.

Life is unsure, and no one knows what tomorrow brings. To value life and the people around you, at each moment, and to appreciate small things in this busy, hectic life, I think this is something to really THINK about."

Taiwan photos: Dawa Dolma; Miao Ling

NEPAL

On the 14th of May, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche interrupted his teaching tour with a three-day visit to Nepal, in order to bring support and guidance to the team of Sakyapa monks intensely engaged in the earthquake rescue effort, and to assess the damage suffered by the major Sakya mon-



Rinpoche with the Gyalwang Drukpa (Photo: Office of the Gyalwang Drukpa)



Distributing aid material



Rinpoche with the then Prime Minister

asteries in Kathmandu.

Rinpoche's visit to Nepal coincided with that of the Gyalwang Drukpa, with whom Rinpoche shared the flight into Kathmandu.

Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche has personally assumed the responsibility of overseeing the rehabilitation of the damaged structures and other aspects of the rescue effort. On the very day of his arrival, Rinpoche visited badly struck areas and distributed aid materials to affected people, along with much-needed moral and spiritual support.

The following day, Rinpoche



Assessing the damage at IBA



A visit to Tharig Monastery

met with the then Prime Minister Sushil Koirala and presented him with a substantial donation for the country's reconstruction effort on behalf of the Sakya Earthquake





Blessing devotees



The one hundred thousand recitations of the Tara Prayer at Tharlam Monastery

Relief Team.

In accordance with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's instructions and under Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche's auspices, the *Drolma Yuldue* was performed at Thar-

lam Monastery during the days of Rinpoche's visit. This is a practice designed to avert obstacles caused by calamities such as war, famine and natural disasters.

HIS HOLINESS THE SAKYA TRIZIN

Pronouncement on the Nepal Earthquake Disaster

"The news of the earthquake, the loss of life and destruction in Nepal and the damage to the Great Stupa and monasteries amidst so much devastation have been very disheartening to me and to all of us. I extend my deepest condolences and sympathy to the monastics and to the people of Nepal. We pray and invoke the kindness of Three Jewels as we write. Even though the compassion, wisdom and power of the Buddhas are indiscriminate for all and at all times, our own karmic connections and aspirations do make a significant difference in the effectiveness of our prayers.

The people of Tibet and the Himalayan region have a special bond with Padmasambhava who, through his kindness, first established the Buddha's teachings in Tibet. At this very critical moment, I advise all to pray wholeheartedly to Padmasambhava whose kindness is swifter than that of other Buddhas. Read the "Sampa Lhundrubma" and "Barche Lamsel" prayers. I believe that this certainly will naturally pacify all the malevolent and obstructing forces.

We fervently pray for the deceased, that they may be free from the fears of lower birth and the state in between. May they obtain a life of leisure and well-being. May they traverse the stages of the path to enlightenment, and in the end achieve the state of Buddhahood. May all who are hurt, physically or mentally, quickly be freed from their pain and suffering, and may they have a long and meaningful life."

SAKYA EARTHQUAKE RELIEF TEAM

On the morning of the 25th of April, Nepal found itself mangled by an earthquake of cataclysmic proportions that was to take the lives of more than 9,000 of its inhabitants, leave over 23,000 injured and render hundreds of thousands homeless.

A makeshift rescue effort immediately got under way, with volunteers from every walk of life assisting the Nepali army in removing the debris in which victims had become trapped. Among these volunteers were monks and nuns from Sakya monasteries in Kathmandu.



It was the immediate recommendation of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin that all Sakyapas should come together in an effort to alleviate the suffering of the earthquake's victims. And so, under His auspices, the International Sakya Nepal Relief Fund was established, through which Sakyapas and other sympathisers from all over the world could make their contribution to this pressing cause.

In the meantime, under the guidance of Rinchen Paljor Rinpoche, the entire Sakya community of lamas, khenpos, monks, nuns and lay people in Kathmandu was joining hands to organise a rescue movement that was to take form as the Sakya Earthquake Relief Team. As financial resources from His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's Relief Fund began to pour in, the Sakya Earthquake Relief Team moved into action.

As aftershocks continued to convulse the land, the government relief effort had been critically hampered by landslides that made roads impassable, impeding the delivery of emergency materials to outlying villages. As a result, the latter had been abandoned to their fate as efforts were concentrated on more accessible areas. Consequently, the Sakya Relief Team made it their priority to succour these remote settlements, bringing them sufficient provisions to carry them through until government forces could come to their rescue.



Fortunate circumstances were thus created through which all contributions went directly to those who needed help, not only maximising the benefit to them, but at the same time bringing together Sakyapas worldwide in a common cause.



MONGOLIA

On the 17th of May, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche rejoined his entourage of monks in Mongolia for the celebration of a new *Phurdup*, to be held this time at the Sakya Pandita Dharma Chakra Monastery in Ulaan Baatar.

The latter is a fledgling centre but attracts a sizeable congregation of devout Sakyapas. The monastery is dedicated to the revival of the special relationship that sprouted between Mongolia and the Sakya School when





Founding Masters Sakya Pandita and Chogyal Phagpa became influential figures in the Mongolian Imperial Court in the 13th century. Their presence there gave birth to the ruler-guru relationship that bound the Sakyapas and the Mongolian rulers and established Buddhism as state religion. As a result, Mongolian culture became irrevocably linked with the Buddhistharma until the twentieth century, when communist rule repressed all religious expression. The Sakya Pandita Dharma Chakra Monastery is part of a renaissance



being experienced by Mongolians, where they are once again finding their spiritual roots in the Buddhistharma. And so visits by Khön

lineage holders are a priceless boon for the community that frequents this monastery.

Once the celebration of the *Phurdup* was concluded, Rinpoche and his group of monks set out into the vast Mongolian hinterland to bring a blessing to some of the many small settlements that fleck the landscape. This provided a fine opportunity for the group to share time with the local communities and to partake in their age-old way of life.



PHILIPPINES

On the 1st of June, Rinpoche and his entourage of monks left Mongolia for the Philippines. They had been invited by the Buddha Light Temple in Cebu City to hold the precious Grand Vajrakilaya Ritual at this centre.





Much in contrast with Mongolia, the Philippines is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, home to a copious array of different ethnic groups and languages. Although a secular state, it is predominantly catholic – a vestige of its days as a Spanish colony - with a minute but devout

niche for Buddhists. The country is blessed with deeply entrenched social values, foremost amongst which is social harmony and cordiality.

True to local customs, Rinpoche and his entourage of monks were given a warm and hospitable welcome throughout their days in Cebu. Their hosts, comprising Tibetan Buddhist monks and local lay community members, went to great lengths to ensure that everything was in place for the successful celebration of the Grand Vajrakilaya Puja, and for the pleasant and comfortable stay of their eminent visitor and his accompanying monks.

HONG KONG

The next stop on Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche's *Phurdup* tour was Hong Kong, where, on the invitation of Abbot Master Bei Yao, the Grand Vajrakilaya Puja was to be held over the following week at the stunningly beautiful Gig Lok Monastery. As Rinpoche arrived at the Hong Kong International Airport, a happy coincidence wanted that Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche should also find himself there on his way to India, and so the two Khön Rinpoches had the



A joyful chance meeting at the Hong Kong International Airport

fortunate opportunity to enjoy a well-timed, albeit brief, encounter.

And so, against a lavish backdrop provided by an opulent gilded throne, a wide array of precious statues, mural paintings and

thangkas, the Grand Vajrakilaya Puja got underway, with the eager





Rinpoche displaying a gift portrait of himself



Concluding the ritual – dissolution of the mandala

participation of nearly a hundred participants. For each one of these, the ritual brought a unique and powerful religious experience that they would treasure for a long time to come.

Following the conclusion of the ritual, Rinpoche and his entourage of monks made their way to the mountains, for an exceptional

visit of the Tsz Shan Temple in the Hong Kong district of Tai Po. The brainchild of Asia's richest person, the Buddhist temple nests in the verdant slopes of the Tai Po hills, an oasis of calm and tranquility, serenely overlooked by the superb 75 metre Kwan Yin bronze statue that towers over it. Rinpoche was



Rinpoche at the Tsz Shan Temple



Rinpoche with the Puja participants



graciously received by the temple's chief abbot, with whom Rinpoche interchanged ideas on a variety of topics. A visit of the complex proved to be one of the highlights

of Rinpoche's Hong Kong visit.

Thus ended Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche's stay in Hong Kong, with a promise to soon return. Rinpoche and his monks were



now to make their way to Singapore, for a new celebration of the *Phurdup*.

SINGAPORE

On the 17th of June, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche left Hong Kong for Singapore where, accompanied by his monks, he was to spend the following three weeks performing the Vajrakilaya *Drupchen* and giving initiations to the members of the Buddha Sasana Society, Sakya Tenphel Ling.

These were fortunate days for



Arrival in Singapore

Sakya Tenphel Ling members, who had been blessed with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's visit a few days earlier for the celebration of the

centre's Golden Jubilee.

And so, on the evening of 18th June, an expectant congregation sat in the centre shrine room, keenly awaiting Rinpoche's arrival for the bestowal of the Arapacana *Jenang*, the first religious activity that Rinpoche was to conduct there. Preceded by the sound of *gyalings*, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche entered the hall and, as he would





White Saraswati Jenang



be doing every day over the following weeks, circumambulated the mandala and took his place on the throne.

As a preamble to the *Phurdup*, several religious events were to follow, including the Dakini Kurukulle Fire Puja and the White Saraswati *Jenang*, along with a three-day celebration of the Damtsig Kangsol Puja.

Centre members had a rare opportunity for an intimate dialogue with Rinpoche in a question and answer session, wherein students were able to raise important topics for Rinpoche's consideration and were recompensed with sound and valuable advice.

On the 29th of June, the Grand Vajrakilaya *Drupchod* began in earnest, with the creation of the sand mandala. The following six days would be taken up with two intensive daily sessions of the puja, beginning in the morning and



Q&A at Sakya Tenphel Ling

ending in the evening, including the celebration of the Grand Vajrakilaya Torma Empowerment on 1st July.

Both Rinpoche's Tibetan and Western birthdays coincided with his stay in Singapore, the first of which was greeted with an offering of the mandala for his long life, and the second with warm and exuberant wishes of auspiciousness. On both occasions, Rinpoche was regaled with a sumptuous and sparkling birthday cake, to which Rinpoche responded with great delight and appreciation.



And, on the 5th of July, the *Drupchod* drew to a close with the dissolution of the mandala. Under



Grand Vajrakilaya Torma Empowerment



Grand Vajrakilaya Puja





Rinpoche's guidance, the *phurbas* were removed one by one, the mandala table meticulously wiped clean, as Rinpoche poured blessed nectar on its surface. Then, as Rinpoche regained his throne, the ritual concluded with the showering of flowers onto the mandala



table and an offering of the mandala in deep gratitude to Rinpoche for his invaluable Dharma gift. Tokens of appreciation were offered by all to Rinpoche and to the monks whose fervent assistance had played such a substantial role in the celebration of the *Drupchod*.

by since Rinpoche's arrival, during which Sakya Tenphel Ling members had basked in his presence. And now, all too soon, the time had come for farewells, as Rinpoche and his monks left Singapore for Malaysia, the last stop on their *Phurdup* tour.

Nearly three weeks had flown

Singapore photos: Dorzang



Celebrating Rinpoche's western birthday



MALAYSIA

Late in the afternoon of 9th July, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche arrived at Kuching International Airport, where he and his monks were given a gleeful welcome and taken to the Sakya ChospheLing centre, Rinpoche's first stop in Malaysia.

Early next morning, preparations got under way for the Grand Vajrakilaya Puja, as Rinpoche and his monks set upon drawing the geometric measurements

and designs that would be filled with different colours of sand, wherein the deity and his retinue would dwell throughout the *Drupchöd*. An intense programme followed that would bring the Kuching Sakya community together in holy activity during the course of the following week.





Fire Puja at Sakya Chosphe Ling



With the conclusion of activities at Sakya Chosphe Ling, it was now the turn of the Kuching Tzu



Rinpoche at the Tzu Bei Buddhist Association



A new Birthday celebration





Sakya Samdrup Ling

Visit to Bintangor

Bei Buddhist Association to be blessed by Rinpoche's presence. And so on the morrow of his arrival there, Rinpoche bestowed the White Mahakala Initiation and gave a Dharma talk to this centre's

members. To Rinpoche's delight, yet another celebration of his birthday was to follow the initiation, a happy occasion filled with choice food and joyous conversation.

On the 24th of July, Khöndung

Gyana Vajra Rinpoche travelled to Sibü, the last stop on his Asian tour, where he and his monks were to perform religious activities at the Sakya Samdrub Ling centre over the following week.



Vajrakilaya Increasing Fire Puja at Sakya Samdrup Ling





Yellow Jambala Water Offering Puja



Vajrakilaya Torma Throwing Puja

After a brief visit to the Bintangor Buddhist Association, Rinpoche and his monks performed the Vajrakilaya Increasing Fire Puja, the Yellow Jambala Water Offering Puja and the Vajrakilaya Torma Throwing Puja

And so, on the 30th of July, after nearly four months of travelling on their East Asia *Phurdup* Tour, Khöndung Gyana Vara Rinpoche and his monks boarded a plane to India, well on time for the upcoming Annual Grand Vajrakilaya Puja at the Sakya Centre.



Ending the journey



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche in Israel



On the 6th of May, on the invitation of the Dharma Friends of Israel, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche arrived in Tel Aviv, where he was warmly welcomed by his hosts. It was Rinpoche's first visit to Israel, and his first encounter with most of the students who were to attend his teachings.

Rinpoche's visit left a lasting impression on the small Israeli sangha. A member of the inviting group writes:

"When we were asked to write about H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche's visit to Israel we were going to title it: A dream comes true.

Why? Because when we asked H.H the Dalai Lama to advise us what would be the best spiritual direction for the Dharma Friends of Israel, his advice was to be non-sectarian. Ever since, it was our wish to receive Dharma teachings from the Sakya tradition.

You can imagine how excited we were, when Sharron, one of Rinpoche's disciples, asked us if we were interested in inviting H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche. Right away, with great excitement and hope in our hearts, we sent an invitation letter to H.E Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, requesting him to come and teach us in Israel. Gosh, we were so happy when Rinpoche accepted our invitation... Can you imagine? The first time a Lama from The Sakya tradition was about to come to Israel.

Only two days before Rinpoche arrived in Israel, we got a letter from H.H Sakya Trizin saying that he was happy that H.E Ratna Vajra Rinpoche was about to come. The level of excitement was high, and with much anticipation we counted the days for His Eminence's arrival, planning how to make the most out of these few precious days.



On the afternoon of the 6th of May H.E Ratna Vajra Rinpoche arrived with his attendant Venerable Dorje Puntzok. Shahar and Keren drove them from the airport directly to the Dead Sea, the lowest point on planet earth, where they spent their first night. On the following day, they visited Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, also known as the 'Holy City'. In the afternoon Rinpoche arrived at Shuki's house near Tel Aviv, where he stayed for the rest of the visit.

In the evening, after having some rest, Rinpoche was taken by Ven. Tekchok to Tel-Aviv, where he gave a public talk about "Buddhism and Family Life. We were interested to hear from Rinpoche how can one devote oneself to the Dharma while taking care of one's family; our questions poured like a waterfall... This was our first Dharma meeting with Rinpoche. By the end of the public talk, we felt so attuned to Rinpoche's teaching style that we felt we couldn't wait for the weekend course to begin.

In the next couple of days, May 8th and 9th, Rinpoche gave a two-day course in a place called 'Neve Shalom'(Home of Peace), giving us commentaries and explaining the traditional Sakya text entitled Parting from the Four Attachments". Rinpoche first explained the text based on Sakya Pandita's instructions and then, once again, explained at length the text composed by Jetsun Drakpa Gyaltsen.

At the end of the commentaries and explanations of the text, due to his great kindness, Rinpoche accepted our request to bestow the lung (oral transmission) of that text upon us, and together with that, Rinpoche also bestowed the lung for the Praise to Manjushri.

You can imagine how privileged we felt to experience two days of studying the precious Dharma from such a perfect teacher as Rinpoche. So by the end of this special two-day course, we felt spiritually uplifted.

Afterwards, we invited Rinpoche for a short evening walk by the shore in Jaffa's old city. Rinpoche, in his immeasurable generosity and kindness, invited some of the Dharma friends for a meal in Jaffa, and Sharron kindly sponsored it.

On the 10th of May a few Dharma Friends of came to the airport to bid farewell to Rinpoche, and then took the opportunity to thank Rinpoche once again and to

express just a fraction of our appreciation for his most valuable visit.

Right from the beginning, we were taken by Rinpoche's presence and felt a strong connection, which we hope will flourish in time to come. We believe and pray that this most valuable visit is like a door that we have opened for the precious Sakya tradition in Israel. We were very pleased and happy to hear Rinpoche saying that that was a 'Good Start.'

We would like, if we may, to take this opportunity to thank Rinpoche again for this perfect visit and to apologize for all the mistakes we might have made due to our ignorance.

We hope and pray that we will get to meet again H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche very soon here in Israel.

In the Dharma,

The Dharma Friends of Israel"



A stroll in old Jaffa



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche in Nepal



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche arrives at IBA



Puja for the deceased at Tharlam



Rinpoche meets with the Sakya Relief Team



Rinpoche signing a Sakya Earthquake Relief Fund cheque

On request of the Sakya Earthquake Relief Team, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche spent three days in Nepal performing religious activities for the benefit of the victims of the April earthquake, and distributing much-needed financial aid and blessings. Hosted by the International Buddhist Academy, Rinpoche arrived in Kathmandu on 13th June, and began his programme the next day at Sakya Tharlam Monastery. This included the Seventh Week Puja and the Grand Vairocana ritual for the souls of the departed, as well as a Long-Life initiation for the benefit of their families and community.

During his stay, Rinpoche met with the Chairman of the Buddha Development Committee and offered him a substantial donation towards the ongoing renovation of the Boudanath Stupa. Rinpoche spent his last day in Kathmandu

visiting affected communities, giving blessings and distributing financial aid.

On the 18th of June, Rinpoche left for India, leaving behind him precious solace to the grief-stricken people of Nepal and vital encour-

agement to their reconstruction effort.



Long-Life Initiation at Tharlam Monastery



His Holiness the Sakya Trizin in Dharamsala



Immediately upon His return from His teaching tour, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin travelled to Dharamsala in order to attend the celebration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Eightieth Birthday.

His Holiness the Sakya Trizin began His stay in Dharamsala with

a visit on 19th June to the TCV School, where He bestowed the Three Wrathful Deities (Hayagriva Vajrapani and Garuda) initiation to the school staff and to the 2,500-strong student body, as well as to a gathering of the local community.

The official programme began with the 12th Religious Conference of the Four Major Schools of Tibetan Buddhism and Bön Tradition, which lasted three days and brought together the heads and main representatives of these institutions, and dignitaries of the Cen-



His Holiness bestowing the Three Wrathful Deities initiation at the TCV School, Dharamsala



12th Religious Conference

tral Tibetan Administration. The third day of the conference was attended by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, whose address to the attendees stressed the importance of scrutinising the Buddha's words in order to extricate their essence and ensure that the latter remain pure as Buddhism grows beyond its traditional boundaries. His Holiness also placed great emphasis on the development of warm-heartedness and kindness as a means to grow spiritually and contribute to the betterment of the world.

The 21st of June saw the celebration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's *Gyatön* at the *Tsuglakhang*,

the latter's temple in McLeod Ganj. The function began with a Long-Life Offering, during which His Holiness the Sakya Trizin recited from memory the lengthy Eulogy and Request to live long, in conjunction with the offering of the mandala of the universe, which His Holiness performed alongside the Sikyong and the Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament.

The event closed on the 22nd of June as thousands of Tibetans, joined by Indian notables and devotees from different parts of the world gathered to celebrate this important event with the supreme leader.

Many speeches were pronounced, praising His Holiness the Dalai Lama's overwhelming qualities and gargantuan accomplishments while, as He took the podium, His Holiness reiterated his proverbial remark that he was just 'a simple monk doing his best all the time'.

On the same day, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin left Dharamsala for a very brief respite before embarking on a three-week visit to Ladakh.

Gyatön photos: Tenzin Choejor/OHHDL



His Holiness the Sakya Trizin in Ladakh



On the morning of 25 June, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin arrived in Ladakh, where He would be giving teachings and empowerments over the following three weeks in its capital Leh and in more remote parts of the region.



In spite of inclement weather, devotees had gathered in droves to welcome His Holiness, lining the

road as His motorcade wound its way to the Jokhang Temple in Leh, where an official ceremony was held to welcome His Holiness to Ladakh. His Holiness' motorcade then made its way to Matho, where His Holiness would be spending most of His stay in Ladakh.

On this His first visit to Ladakh since 1999, His Holiness had come on the invitation of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, Ladakh Gumpa Association and Matho Gumpa Culture & Welfare Society, to bless the region's overwhelmingly Buddhist population.

His visit was meticulously overseen by H.E. Luding Khen Rinpoche, who ensured throughout that every detail was looked after for His Holiness' visit to be as



Matho Phodrang and Monastery



Visit to Hemis Monastery

successful and comfortable as possible.

During His stay in Ladakh, His Holiness was to take up residence at the newly-built Ngonpar Gaway Phodrang, at the foot of the Zaskar mountains, on the left bank of the Indus River. Directly above the Phodrang, watching over it, is Matho Monastery.

A day's rest provided His Holiness and His entourage a welcome opportunity to acclimatise to an abrupt change in altitude – Leh sits at over 3,500 meters above sea level.

The following day, on the invitation of H.E. Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche, whose previous incarnation was H.E. Dagmo Kushok Sonam's grand-uncle, His Holiness visited Hemis Monastery, some forty kilometres from Leh. Auspiciously, His Holiness' visit coincided with the celebration of the

monastery's Tsechu Festival, held in honour of Guru Padmasambhava's Birth Day.

The abrupt change in altitude and climate took their toll, however, as His Holiness was affected by a sore throat and forced to take two more days' rest. And so, on 30th June, His Holiness made His way to Choglamsar, where a multitude of devotees was awaiting His arrival at the Jeva Tsal Peace Garden. His Holiness was to give the Rig Sum Gampo empowerment over the span of two days, and this first day was dedicated to the preparation for the empowerment. Assisted by H.E. Luding Khen Rinpoche, His Holiness undertook the intricate process of creat-



Preparation for the empowerment

ing the mandala for the following day's empowerment.

On the morning of 1st July, the Jeva Tsal Peace Garden filled with a swarm of humanity, as 30,000 devotees gathered to receive the





Rig Sum Gompo empowerment

precious Rig Sum Gompo empowerment from His Holiness.

Two days later the grounds filled again, as His Holiness bestowed the Long-Life Empowerment on the assembly of followers. A Tenshug ceremony followed, wherein His Holiness' hosts in Ladakh presented Him with an elaborate

Long-Life Mandala offering, on behalf of all the religious and lay communities in the region.

The following day saw the inauguration of His Holiness' residence at Matho, the new Ngon Par Ghaway Phodrang. This was accompanied by the performance of a ritual mask dance by the Ma-



Inauguration of Ngon Par Ghaway Phodrang

tho Monastery monks as well as a cultural show given by local and foreign performers.

The 6th of July was to mark the celebration of His Holiness the



Long-Life initiation and Tenshug



Brief pause at Rani Bagh on the way to Skitmand

Dalai Lama's eightieth Birthday at Jeva Tsal, with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin as Chief Guest. This was to be the last activity at Choglamsar, as His Holiness and His entourage were to leave the next day for Skitmang village in the Changthang area, a four to five hour drive from Leh. There, His Holiness was to give the Ta-chak Qungsum *wang* and a Long-Life empowerment as well as inaugurating a new Sakya monastery.

Whilst a subsequent visit to the Nubra Valley was cancelled due to bad weather, the rest of His Holiness' stay in Ladakh was filled with activities, including empower-



Matho Monastery Sangha



Matho community representatives



Team of doctors and nurses



Visit to Lamdon Model Senior Secondary School and public Talk in Leh



Security team



Members of the Muslim community

ments, blessings and public talks.

For His hosts, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's visit to Ladakh was an organisational feat, of which they acquitted themselves admirably. It involved the cooperation and dedicated work of several bodies, including that of the medical and security teams that tended to His Holiness throughout His trip. Even Christian and Muslim associations

extended their warm welcome to His Holiness.

On the 18th of July, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin left Ladakh for Delhi, from where He would regain His residence in Rajpur. This had been a memorable trip, which would live a long time in the memories of all those who had been touched by His Holiness' presence and blessings.

ANANDA HOME Palliative Care at Sakya Hospital



As part of the celebration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 80th Birthday, a centre for palliative care was inaugurated at Sakya Hospital in Dehradun. 'Ananda Home' occupies the top floor of the hospital and is designated to tend to the terminally ill whose families are no longer to

bring them the care that they desperately need. Fittingly, the centre bears the name of the Buddha's faithful attendant who cared for his master unsparingly until the last moment.

The inauguration took place on the 6th of July, and was attended by Her Eminence Dagmo Kushok

Kalden Sakya, Director of Sakya Hospital, and Tsering Luding, Assistant Director. Mr. Sanjay Gunjyal did the honours at the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the newly sculpted statue of the Lord Buddha, centrepiece and heart of the home, while Chiwang Tulku Rinpoche performed the blessing ritual.



Cutting the Ribbon Ceremony and Blessing



SAKYA MONASTERY KALIMPONG

Tsechen Thinley Darjay Ling



On the 9th of September 2015, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin arrived at Bagdogra Airport in West Bengal, accompanied by Her Eminence Gyalyum Chenmo, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche

and his family, and Her Eminence Jetsun Kushok and her husband Sey Kushok.

There to greet His Holiness and His entourage was Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, along with

local dignitaries and devout Sakya followers, who escorted His Holiness in a seemingly endless motorcade along the tortuous two-and-a-half hour drive to Kalimpong. The cortège's destination was Tsechen



(Photos: Ven. Ngawang Jungney)

Thinley Darjay Ling, whose inauguration ceremony His Holiness was to conduct five days later, on the 14th of September, marking His Holiness' 71st Tibetan Birthday.

Upon arrival at the monastery, the illustrious guests were greeted by Her Eminence Dagmo Kushok Kalden Dunkyi Sakya and, after a brief pause in the monastery courtyard where a group of local schoolchildren bade them a brief welcome in song, they made their way to their quarters on the upper floors.

Also known as Sakya Monastery Kalimpong, Tsechen Thinley Darjay Ling is the fruit of the infinite blessing of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and of the indefatigable efforts by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche over the past nine years to found a seat for the Sakya Buddhadharma in this remote region of the Himalayan range.



The monastery sits majestically on the mountainside overlooking Kalimpong town, and it is of breathtaking beauty. Starting from the tin shack that sheltered the monastery's humble beginnings, its complex of buildings climbs ten storeys up to the small rooftop lhakhang that crowns it. Below the latter, His Holiness' quarters and those of His family, as well as those of H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche, Phuntsok Phodrang Dungseys, H.E. Jetsun Kushok and heads of the different Sakya Labrang.

And below still, stands the magnificent temple, ushered in by exquisite *bas-reliefs* of offering goddesses, dragons, peacocks and tigers. Inside, a monumental golden statue of the Buddha, sided by precious *pechas* and statues neatly seconded in their niches, watches over the vast hall, from whose ceil-



ing hang superb *thangkas* of the Lamdre lineage masters.

Over the days leading up to the grand inauguration ceremony on the 14th, the monastery's bedrooms began swelling with Rinpoches, Khenpos and lamas from Sakya monasteries in India and Nepal, while local hotel rooms saw themselves overwhelmed with guests who had come from as far afield as Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Europe,





Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

The inauguration day began early morning with a ceremony held in the small *Lhakhang*, dedicated to the Long Life of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin, during which offerings of the mandala were presented to His Holiness by members of His family and of the monastic community.





At nine o'clock, the new temple saw its official beginnings as His Holiness the Sakya Trizin performed the ribbon-cutting ceremony and lit the first Butter Lamp, following which over eight hundred guests swarmed into the vast hall for the Inauguration Ceremony.



Songs of praise were sung and speeches were rendered, including a stirring one by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, for whom this moment represented the culmination of long years of strenuous exertion. Distinguished guests were also at hand to present their felicitations on this auspicious occasion. The



ceremony concluded with words of advice by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin.

A lunch break was followed by an exuberant cultural programme

featuring song and dance performances, both amateur and professional, provided by artists hailing from near and far. A delighted public greeted these with ebullient





Sakya Dolma Phodrang representatives congratulate the performers

cheer and applause, with occasional bursts of enthusiasm that drove admirers to make a rush for their favourite performers and wrap a khata around their neck in mid-song, so much so that by the end of their performance, some of the artists found their head engulfed in a mass of white silk.

An interval was provided in mid-afternoon for the celebration of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's 71st Birthday, with the ceremonial cutting of the cake by His Holiness and a hearty rendition of 'Happy Birthday' by artists and members of the public alike. As tea was served and all present feasted on their share of the succulent cake, the cultural programme resumed, regaling the audience until evening.

And so ended a memorable day for Tsechen Thinley Darjay Ling, for Kalimpong, and for everyone who had come to share in this auspicious celebration.

Two days later, on the 17th, the monastery temple was consecrated in a ceremony that lasted from early morning until evening. Conducted



(Photos: Dawa Dolma)

by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin, the ceremony counted with the participation of Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, Rinchen Paljor Shabdrung Rinpoche and Chogyé Shabdrung Rinpoche, along with several Khenpos and high lamas.

And on the 18th, His Holiness and His entourage left for Darjeeling, where His Holiness was to preside over the inauguration of the newly-built temple at Guru Sakya Monastery, Ghoom.



(Photo: Jamyang Choesang)



GURU SAKYA MONASTERY GHOOM



(Photo: Jamyang Choesang)

On the 18th of September, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and His entourage undertook another journey along the serpentine Himalayan mountain roads, this time to Ghoom, Darjeeling.

Their new destination was Guru Sakya Monastery, whose new temple His Holiness was to inaugurate two days later. This “Miniature Potala”, as it is sometimes referred to, occupies a vertical sliver of the

hill that hosts it. The steep climb that leads from the main street to its premises represents a challenge even to the seasoned walker, and a long-due accolade was given during His Holiness’ visit to the five workers whose responsibility it was to carry up the hairpin staircase all the material required for the building of the temple.

Another plaudit went to the monks and volunteers who laboured alongside the paid workers throughout the whole construction process, a task that included digging into hard rock, among other hardships.

The hospitality that the monks extended to their guests during His Holiness’ visit and the efficiency

with which they handled the event were inspiring, especially in the light of the inclement weather that beleaguered it.

The inauguration ceremony began early morning, with the lighting of the temple’s first But-



(Photo: Cristina Vanza)





(Photos: Dawa Dolma)



(Photo: Jamyang Dorje)



(Photo: Jamyang Choesang)

ter Lamp by His Holiness, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, followed by the celebra-



Khenpos Palden Phuntsok and Dakpa Woesser
(Photo: Dawa Dolma)

tion of the Sixteen-Arhat Puja.

After a short break, the proceedings moved outside for celebratory speeches recounting the history of Ghoom Monastery and distributing praise to all those whose contribution made its existence a reality. Special tribute was paid to Lama Dakpa Woesser, upon whom His Holiness conferred the title of *Khenpo*, a well-deserved



(Photo: Jamyang Choesang)



Khenpo Dakpa Woesser (Photo: Jamyang Dorje)

and timely honour. Khenpo Dakpa Woesser had for many years been intensely involved with Guru Sakya Monastery, and had come all the way from Switzerland to attend the celebration.

The afternoon saw the rendition of Cham dance and other cultural expressions. A slight drizzle accompanied the early performanc-



Enjoying the performance (Photo 1: Jamyang Dorje; photos 2 & 3: Dawa Dolma)

es, gradually gaining in vigour until the artists found themselves



The grace of youth (Photo: Dawa Dolma)



Khenpos looking apprehensively at the sky (Photo: Jamyang Choesang)



And the skies burst open.... (Photos: Dawa Dolma)

performing under an unforgiving deluge, their drenched clothes and hair clinging to their bodies as they swung to and fro. But if the down-pour was stubborn, the performers were doubly so and, undaunted, they carried on with unshakeable zest until the very end of their programme, further emboldened by the cheering of their audience, themselves huddling under a low ceiling of umbrellas.

Early the following morning, accompanied by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, His Holiness initiated the consecration ceremony, which was to last until evening. As it had in Kalimpong, this involved the performance of intricate rituals by specialised monks, including the preparation of sacred substances and their sprinkling upon different parts of the temple, while the assembly performed a special consecration puja.

The last day in Ghoom began with a Tenshug held for His Holiness, with Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche offering the *Mendal Tensum*.

After a brief pause for lunch, His Holiness performed the Thang-ton Gyalpo Long-Life Initiation on some six thousand devotees, young and old, who had braved the bleak weather to receive His Holiness' blessing.

Thus ended His Holiness'



Tenshug for His Holiness (Photos: Dawa Dolma)

memorable visit to Ghoom Monastery, leaving its monks filled with joy and renewed enthusiasm in the pursuance of their activities.



SAKYA CHOEPHELING INSTITUTE OF HIGHER BUDDHIST STUDIES Rimbick, Darjeeling

On the 24th of September, His Holiness and His entourage left Ghoom, as their motorcade made its way west through dense fog along sinuous mountain roads lined with a profusion of waterfalls and colonnades of conifers, alternating with cascades of giant ferns and wild flowers. It was now the turn of the Sakya Choepheling Institute of Higher Buddhist Studies to be blessed by the presence of His Holiness, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche.

Located in Rimbick, a picturesque village ensconced in the Singalila National Park of the Darjeeling District, Sakya Choepheling has come a long way since His Holiness' previous visit in 2011. It now boasts a small but handsome temple and a library that houses all the major texts that are necessary

to the pursuit of higher studies of Buddhist Philosophy, both witnesses to the exhaustive efforts of Khenpo Ngawang Gyatso, the *she-dra's* Principal.

Two days later, on the morning of the 26th, His Holiness performed a triple ribbon-cutting ceremony, beginning with the Institute's new pharmacy, continuing with the library and ending with the *lhakhang*. As its doors opened, the temple welcomed its first congregation for the celebration of the Sixteen-Arhat Puja, with Khenpo Ngawang Gyatso making the offering of the mandala to His Holiness.



Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche inaugurates the new office



Distribution of prizes



An early fascination with ritual instruments

ness. A short pause led to celebratory speeches and a brief Dharma talk by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, followed by words of advice by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin. A book was released and prizes were distributed.

In the afternoon, an ebullient cultural programme took place, uninhibited by the light drizzle that challenged it, with unanimous relief that it had been spared from heavy rains. Such enthusiasm reigned that, at its conclusion, the programme gave way to general merrymaking, as the spectators joined the performers in song and dance, pursuing their revelries well into the evening.



His Holiness with Khenpo Ngawang Gyatso



The next day saw the consecration of the temple, once again a ceremony that lasted from early morning until evening, with just a short break for lunch. And on the 28th, a three-day Tenshug ceremony began, with the celebration in the morning of the White Tara Puja.

In the afternoon, a hiatus to the religious programme was provided by a picnic at a nearby waterfall, a



welcome opportunity to enjoy the sunshine, after ten days of persistent rain.

The following morning, the *Tenshug* resumed, as a steady trickle of devotees began to fill the temple courtyard in anticipation of the Thangton Gyalpo Long-Life Initiation that His Holiness was to bestow later in the day.

And on the 30th came the third and final day of the Tenshug, with Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche offering the *Mendal Tensum* and

the auspicious symbols of body, speech and mind.

The following day, His Holi-



Long-life empowerment at Sakya Choepheling



ness and entourage travelled back to Ghoom, where they stopped briefly before returning to Kalimpong, on time for the celebration two days later of the Holy Lamdre at Tsechen Thinley Darjay Ling.

(Photos: Jamyang Choesang)

THE HOLY LAMDRE AT KALIMPONG



On the 5th of October 2015, Tsechen Thinley Darjay Ling Sakya Monastery in Kalimpong saw the first day of the celebration of the Holy Lamdre in its new temple.

These precious teachings were to be bestowed over the following two months by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche. Parallel to this, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin would impart the rare oral transmission of the “Eight Later Cycles of the Path”, and would act as Vajra

Master at the Grand Vajrakilaya Puja to be held later that month. Not only this, but nearly every day over the following weeks was to be filled with an extraordinary religious activity. This was truly an historic occasion.



The gathering was an organisational feat, beginning with the paperwork involved in registering the twelve hundred students and dividing them into groups for the different initiations, providing beds and three meals a day for all at-

tendees, stretching limited water and electricity supplies to meet everyone’s needs, and so on.

The programme began on the morning of 5th October with the conferral by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin of a triple empowerment: Ushnisha Vijaya, Parnasha-vari and Vajrapani Bhutadamara. In attendance were some of the highest Sakya lamas and the thousand plus monks and nuns who had gathered from Sakya monasteries from all parts of India and Nepal,





H.E. Jetsun Kushok surrounded by the student nuns



Monks filled the hall

as well as devotees from different parts of the world including Tibet.

The Lamdre teachings began in earnest, with Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche expounding the origin of the teachings and an account of how the Lamdre entered



Khenpo Jamyang Lekshey translated the teachings
(Photos: Dawa Dolma)



Khenpo Chenyang Gyatso gave the reteaching

the Sakya Order, while His Holiness related the hagiographies of the Lineage Masters. The teachings took place entirely in Tibetan, with a translation into English offered by Khenpo Jamyang Lekshey. The traditional revision was given in the evening in Tibetan by Khenpo Chenyang Gyatso in the main hall, and in English and Chinese by Khenpo Lekshey and Ven. Ngawang Jungney respectively in the small *lhakhang* upstairs.

On the 15th, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche led the assembly in the taking of the Bodhisattva vows, wherein every participant performs prostrations while reciting the



Bodhisattva vows

(Photos: Ven. Ngawang Jungney)

Thirty-Five Buddha confession prayer, in atonement for past negative deeds. This act of contrition is a necessary preparation for the Bodhisattva pledge to never forsake the Enlightenment thought.

The preliminary Triple Vision teachings followed, and continued until the 16th of October, when Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche entered the Supplementary Retreat that is required of the Lamdre Vajra Master before bestowing the Hevajra Cause Empowerment.



HIS HOLINESS THE SAKYA TRIZIN IN SIKKIM



Tsewang at Sa-Ngor Monastery



Inaugurational blessing of a local Mani Lhakhang

On the 11th of October, His Holiness and H.E. Gyalyum Chenmo travelled to Sikkim, where His Holiness had been invited to conduct a programme of initiations at Sa-Ngor Chotshog Centre, H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche's monastery in Gangtok. His Holiness was joined there a few days later by Khönd-

ung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche and his family, and by Phuntsok Phodrang Dungseys Khöndung Avikrita Vajra Rinpoche and Khöndung Asanga Vajra Rinpoche. His Holiness' programme also included the blessing of nearby temples and a public talk entitled "Precious Dharma Advice".



His Holiness giving a public talk on "Precious Dharma Advice"



Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche addressing the audience at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology



Khöndung Avikrita Vajra Rinpoche offering the mandala to His Holiness during the Tenshug ceremony at Sa-Ngor Monastery



Dhongtsang Shabdrung Rinpoche during the Tenshug offering

His Holiness was also to inaugurate a two-day seminar on the “Different Aspects of Buddhism”, co-organised by the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and the Dolma Phodrang Foundation, and chaired by Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche. The talk was aimed at the Sikkimese youth and focused on an introduction to mind-training meditation and on the relationship between Buddhism and the environment.

An important part of His Holiness’ visit to Sikkim was the bestowal of three initiations to the general public. On each of these occasions, well over ten thousand devotees gathered in the monastery courtyard, with many of them arriving early in the morning to ensure that they could be as near

as possible to their Guru when the initiations started in the afternoon.

Bordering Tibet, Sikkim was a Tibetan Buddhist enclave for nearly a thousand years, although over recent centuries, a steady population flow from Nepal gradually transformed its ethnic and religious profile. Tradition holds it that Guru Rinpoche blessed the land in the 8th century CE, meditating in several of its mountain caves and concealing hidden Dharma treasures in their fold. The state boasts a number of Buddhist temples of great beauty, many of them dating back several hundreds of years.

Sikkim has the unique claim of being the only fully organic state in all of India. And it is most likely the most sanitised, with an absence of the normally ubiquitous sights of self-relieving and expectorating in public places. An admirable ef-

fort is being made on the part of its administration to build holy statues and temples, including a colossal statue of Guru Rinpoche sitting atop a mountain in East Sikkim and another one of Chenrezig in the making.

On the 22nd of October, His Holiness and His entourage returned to Kalimpong, on time to preside over the performance of the Vajrakilaya *Cham* dance that Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and his monks were to perform the following day at Sakya Monastery.

While His Holiness and H.E. Gyalyum Chenmo returned to Kalimpong, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche and his family travelled to Dehradun to oversee the move of an initial group of 135 monks from Sakya Centre to the new Sakya Academy, and to conduct the ceremonies preceding the celebra-



(Photos: Dawa Dolma)

tion of H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche's 85th Birthday on the 26th. Also in attendance to celebrate this very special event were Phuntsok Phodrang Dungseys Khöndung Avikrita Vajra Rinpoche and Khöndung Asanga Vajra Rinpoche, as well as H.E. Luding Khen Rinpoche and other high lamas.

On the 23rd of October was the celebration of the first Vajrakilaya Cham dance to be held at Kalimpong Monastery, under the guidance of Lama Paljor and with Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche as Vajra Master. A sudden thunderstorm forced the performance of the



First Cham dance at Kalimpong Monastery (Photos: Carlos Quintas)

ritual from the monastery ample courtyard to the narrow and dimmed temple parvis, but this and intermittent power cuts by no means abated the devout fervour of the participants.

On the 24th, the first Grand Vajrakilaya Puja to take place at Kalimpong Monastery got under way, with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin as Vajra Master. As part of the first session, His Holiness performed a rare and precious Cham dance in the temple, which He had only performed once before. Before dawn the following day, His Holiness initiated the making of the sand mandala. This began with His Holiness carrying out a series of intricate rites around the circular structure that was to house it, after which a trickle of monks began to gather around it, as benches were brought in and bowls of coloured powder and instruments placed upon them. The monks began their composition in silent, flowing teamwork, fast and precise, as designs of intricate detail and exquisite beauty emerged as if by magical emanation. Their labour continued until well after sunset, without pause, as one monk indiscernibly succeeded another in the task. An enquiry as to whether they ever made mistakes was met with perplexity – this just didn't seem to enter the realm of possibilities. The mandala was then hidden from view for the duration of the puja.



(Photo: Tashi Nima)

At six in the morning over the span of the next six days, the temple filled with monks, nuns and laypersons, awaiting the sound of the *gyalings* heralding the arrival of His Holiness, His family and the high lamas for the beginning of the puja. Only after dark each day would the congregation emerge from the hall, many

displaying signs of stiff knees, but unanimously looking serene and fulfilled. On the 30th, the time came for the dissolution of the mandala, with the Khön family



Dissolution of the mandala

gathering around the platform to receive the traditional blessing of the *Phurbas*, as the mandala was dismantled and the seventy-two ritual daggers that stood on it were removed one by one and placed on each participant's head, beginning with His Holiness, then His family members, on to the high lamas and finally to everyone present in the temple and in the parvis.

Two days later, His Holiness bestowed a *Tsewang* on the congregation, as devotees from near and far gathered at the monastery for what was for them a truly rare and precious occasion. Shortly after the last participant had received his blessing from His Holiness, the long awaited arrival of H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche was heralded by the sound of long horns and ritual trumpets.



His Holiness in His audience room with H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche and H.E. Jetsun Kushok

On November 3rd, the celebration of Lhabab Düchen – the descent of the Buddha from heaven –





in the small *Lhakhang* upstairs. Rinpoche was to confer it upon some twenty groups over the span of twelve days. On 5th November, the last day, it was the turn of the Khön family, including its very youngest members, to receive the empowerment.

The next day saw a rare and wondrous occasion: the bestowal by H.E. Luding Khenchen



Celebration of Lhabab Duchen

was marked by a Long-life ritual conducted by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin.

In the meantime, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche had been bestowing the cause empowerment



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche confers the Cause Empowerment



H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche bestows the Vajrayogini blessing

Rinpoche of the Vajrayogini blessing.

On 7th November, a daily programme began that would last for over a week, wherein His Holiness the Sakya Trizin would bestow the oral transmission of the “Eight Later Cycles” in the morning, and Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche would give the Triple Tantra teachings in the afternoon. There are actually nine Cycles, and they include the Lamdre. Since the Lamdre is given on its own, the rest of the teachings are referred to as the “Eight Later Cycles”. Each one of these originates with a Mahasiddha, and each one has its own pith instructions, a short commentary by Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltsen, and a long commentary written later by Jamgön Kongtrül Lodro Thaye.

In attendance were Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, Khöndung Avikrita Vajra Rinpoche, Khöndung Asanga Vajra Rinpoche, Khöndung Akasha Vajra Rinpoche, Khöndung Siddharth Vajra Rinpoche, Jetsun Kushok, Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter, Jetsunma Ngawang Tsejin Lhamo, Jetsunma Kunga Chimey Wangmo, Luding Khenchen Rinpoche, Thartse Khen Rinpoche, Luding Shabdrung Rinpoche, Rinchen Paljor Rinpoche, Chogye Shabdrung Rinpoche, Lo Khenchen Shabdrung Rinpoche, Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche, Dezhung Rinpoche, Megen Tulku Rinpoche, Tharig Tulku Rinpoche Pema Wangyal Rinpoche, and a number of khenpos and high lamas. This was a demanding ex-



H.E. Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche offers the mandala for the teachings



(Photos: Dawa Dolma) (Photo: Sakya Monastery Kalimpong)

ercise for teachers and students alike, and it must be mentioned that all were in awe at the determination of the youngest generation of Lamas to sit through the day-long sessions.

On 14th November, a *Tenshug* ceremony was held for the long life of H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche, with Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche offering the *Mendal Tensum*.



Tenshug for H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche





*Tenshug for Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche
(Photos: Dawa Dolma)*



Two days later was the celebration of Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche's Tibetan Birthday. This was marked by a new Tenshug cer-

emony, this time with Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche offering the *Mendal Tensum*.

On the 21st and 22nd of No-

vember, Khöndung Gyana Vajra





(Photos: Sakya Monastery Kalimpong)



Rinpoche bestowed the two-day major Vajrakilaya empowerment

on the assembly.

Finally, on the 3rd of December, a *Tenshug* ceremony was held in immense gratitude to the kindness of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and the limitless spiritual gifts that he showered upon each

and every participant during nearly three months of teachings and initiations.

The *Mendal Tensum* was offered by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, while the auspicious symbols were offered by Khönd-





A farewell family portrait

ung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, Khöndung Avikrita Vajra Rinpoche and Khöndung Asanga Vajra Rinpoche.

Following the *tenshug* ceremony, His Holiness presided over the *Mahakala Tsok* ritual. The profuse abundance of the *tsok* offerings was representative of the plentifulness of blessings that had permeated the temple over the space of the previous weeks.



On the 4th and 5th of December, the Holy Lamdre teachings concluded with Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche's conferral of the Outer Guru Yoga initiation.

Every Lamdre is special in its way, but with this one an infinity of

auspicious circumstances gathered to make it an historic event in the annals of the Sakya School. The presence of the greatest Sakya masters, the arresting beauty of Kalimpong Monastery and the multitudinous numbers of monastics and lay students attending, coupled with the rare opportunity for nearly all participants to spend their days and nights in close proximity to their

gurus and to the temple, provided a sheathe wherein all was permeated by the sacred wisdom of the holy Lamdre teachings.

As impermanence would have it, the time came for dissolution, as all the participants went their own way, many of them to Lumbini, where His Holiness the Sakya Trizin would be conducting the Great Annual Sakya Monlam.



(Photos: Dawa Dolma)

Year of the Male Fire Monkey

Calendar of Events

Annual Grand Pujas at the Sakya Centre, Dehradun

Every year the Sakya Centre in Rajpur, Dehradun, holds various grand pujas:

1. Annual Grand Vajrayogini Puja 8 th of the 1 st lunar month for 3 days	7. Dhamtsig Kangso 25 th of the 10 th lunar month for 8 days
2. Annual Grand Vajra Nairatmya Puja 8 th of the 2 nd lunar month for 7 days	8. Annual Grand Cakrasamvara Puja 9 th of the 11 th lunar month for 7 days
3. Annual Grand Mahavairocana Puja 11 th of the 4 th lunar month for 5 days	9. Dochen Puja 23 rd of the 11 th lunar month for 7 days
4. Wrathful Guru Rinpoche Puja 10 th of the 5 th lunar month for 1 day	10. Gu-Tor 23 rd of the 12 th lunar month for 7 days
5. Annual Grand Vajrakilaya Puja 11 th of the 7 th lunar month for 11 days	11. Mahakala Day Each 26 th of every lunar month for 5 days
6. Annual Grand Hevajra Puja 8 th of the 9 th lunar month for 8 days	

Auspicious Dates

Six Auspicious Days

The 8th, 14th, 15th (full moon day), 23rd, 29th & the 30th (new moon day) of every month.

Losar – (Feb 19, 2015)

Losar is the Tibetan New Year. It starts on the first day of the first lunar month. It is said that, during this month, the effects of positive and negative actions are magnified 100,000 times, and that therefore the benefits of practice are hugely enhanced.

The Four Great Festivals (düchen)

These days commemorate great deeds performed by the Buddha. On these days, the effects of positive or negative actions are magnified 10 million times.

1. Chotrul Düchen: 1-15 (Feb 9-Feb 22)

Shakyamuni Buddha displayed a different miracle each day for 15 days in order to increase the faith and devotion of disciples. The 15th of the 1st month is called "Day of Miracles".

2. Saga Dawa Düchen: 4-15 (May 21)

The day Shakyamuni Buddha entered His mother's womb, attained Enlightenment and passed into Parinirvana.

3. Chökhör Düchen: 6-4 (August 6)

This celebrates the Buddha's first Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. It was only seven weeks after His Enlightenment that, exhorted by Indra and Brahma, He consented to teach the Four Noble Truths in Sarnath.

4. Lha Bab Düchen: 9-22 (November 20)

The day Shakyamuni Buddha descended from Tushita heaven and taught for three months in the Heaven of Thirty Three, where His mother had been reborn. This was in order to benefit the gods in the desire realm and to repay His mother's kindness by liberating her from Samsara.

❁ NB: Lamp offerings in the monastery or food offerings to the monks are welcome during all important pujas and ceremonies. If you wish to make any offerings, please contact the Sakya Centre in Rajpur Dehradun directly (contact details on the last page)

AUSPICIOUS BIRTHDAYS	TIBETAN (M/D)	WESTERN
Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter Sakya	11-14	Jan 2
Jetsunma Kunga Chimey Wangmo Sakya	12-13	Jan 24
Khondung Siddharth Vajra Rinpoche	1-18	Mar 19
Khöndung Akasha Vajra Rinpoche	2-12	Mar 27
Jetsunma Ngawang Tsejin Lhamo Sakya	1-29	Apr 2
Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche	5-10	Jul 5
His Holiness the Dalai Lama	5-5	Jul 6
His Holiness the Sakya Trizin	8-1	Sept 7
H.E. Jetsunma Ngawang Tsejin Lhamo Sakya	1-29	Apr 2
His Holiness the Sakya Trizin	8-1	Sept 7
His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Rinpoche	9-15	Nov 2
H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche	9-14	Oct 25
H.E. Jetsun Kushok Chimey Luding	9-22	Nov 14
Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche	10-5	Nov 19

Holy Days

TIBETAN	HOLY DAYS	TIBETAN	HOLY DAYS
1-3	Parinirvana Day of Dagshul Thinley Rinchen (Grand-father of H.H. the 41 st Sakya Trizin)	4-25	Parinirvana Day of Ngorchon Dorje Chang Kunga Sangpo
1-21	Parinirvana Day of Kunkhyen Gorampa Sonam Senge & Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo	5-2	Parinirvana Day of Sachen Kunga Lodro
2-8	Parinirvana Day of Yabje Kunga Rinchen (Father of H.H. the 41 st Sakya Trizin)	5-6	Parinirvana Day of Khyentse Dorje Chang Jamyang Chokyi Lodro
2-12	Parinirvana Day of Jetsun Drakpa Gyaltsen & Khangsar Shabrun Ngawang Lodroe Tenzin Nyingpo	6-20	Parinirvana Day of Ngawang TUEtop Wangchuk
2-23	Parinirvana Day of Khenchen Dorje Chang Jampa Jampal Sangpo	6-29	Parinirvana Day of Dorje Chang Ngawang Lodro Rinchen
2-26	Parinirvana Day of Khuwo Rinpoche Kunga Gyaltsen	7-14	Parinirvana Day of Ngakchang Kunga Rinchen
2-30	Parinirvana Day of Jamgon Loter Wangpo	7-15	Parinirvana Day of Tsarchen Losal Gyatso
3-15	Parinirvana Day of Phende Khenchen Ngawang Khedup Gyatso	7-19	Parinirvana Day of Ngakchang Kunga Tashi
3-18	Parinirvana Day of Dezhung Tulku Kunga Tenpei Nyima	9-14	Parinirvana Day of Bari Lotsawa, Khön Konchok Gyalpo & Sachen Kunga Nyingpo
3-25	Parinirvana Day of Gongkhar Dorje Denpa Dzongpa Kunga Namgyal	9-21	Parinirvana Day of Ngorchon Konchok Lhundrup
3-29	Parinirvana Day of Gatön Ngawang Lekpa, Luding Khenchen Jamyang TUEpten Lundok Gyaltsen	10-8	Parinirvana Day of Munchen Konchok Gyaltsen Sempa Chenpo
4-12	Parinirvana Day of Khenchen Dhampa Dorje Chang Ngawang Lodoe Shenpen Nyingpo	11-10	Parinirvana Day of Jamgon Ameshab
4-23	Anniversary of Mahasiddha Virupa's attainment of the First Bhumi	11-11	Parinirvana Day of Lopon Sonam Tsemo
		11-14	Parinirvana Day of Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen Pal Sangpo
		11-22	Parinirvana Day of Drogön Chogyal Phagpa & Dezhung Anjam Rinpoche
		11-23	Parinirvana Day of Khenchen Appey Rinpoche
		12-4	Parinirvana Day of Chogyé Trichen Dorje Chang Ngawang Khyenrab Lekshey Gyaltsö

Melody of Dharma

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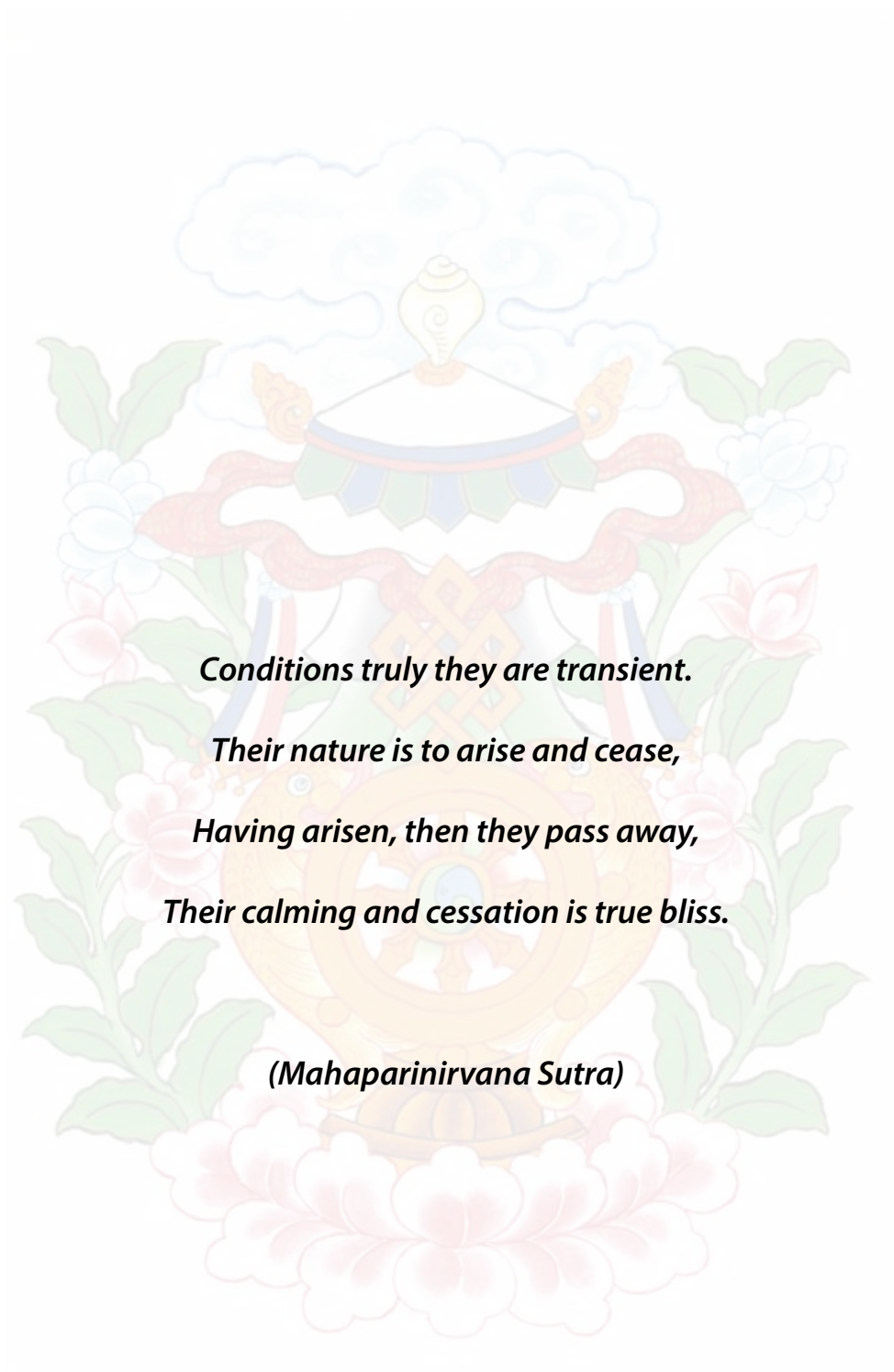
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Conditions truly they are transient.

Their nature is to arise and cease,

Having arisen, then they pass away,

Their calming and cessation is true bliss.

(Mahaparinirvana Sutra)



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