

Melody of Dharma

❁ Life is Precious

A teaching by H.H. the Sakya Trizin

❁ The Practice of Guru Yoga

A teaching by H.E. Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

❁ On Pilgrimage with H.H. The Sakya Trizin

❁ Remembering Great Masters

King Ashoka



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Cover Photo: Ashoka's Pillar at Vaishali

From The Editors

Dear readers,

First of all, we would like to extend our wishes for a belated Happy New Year of the Water Snake. We hope that it has begun well for everyone and that it will continue to bring each one of you many days of happiness and fulfillment.

There is much to share with our readers in this issue. Foremost, an account of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's pilgrimage to the sacred Buddhist sites of India in the autumn, as we follow His Holiness, members of His family and a group of Sakya Centre monks on this extraordinary journey, as they celebrate the Sixteen-Arhat Puja in several of these holy sites.

We share in additional activities of our teachers, with Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche teaching home and abroad and conducting a unique Gutor ritual dance at the Sakya Centre, and with Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche representing the Sakya Dolma Phodrang at the International Buddhist Conference that took place in Patna last January.

These past months have also seen the birth of a new member of the Khön family. Her Eminence Jetsunma Kunga Chimey Wangmo Sakya was born on the 24th of January to Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and H.E. Dagmo Kushok Kalden Dunkyi Sakya. His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and His wife H.E. Gyalyum Chenmo are revelling in the joy that their four grandchildren are bringing to the Sakya Dolma Phodrang.

The new year made its debut with an exceptionally joyful Losar, with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's entire family in attendance, including H.E. Jetsun Kushok and her husband Sey Kushok.

And now our Teachers are away on their respective summer tours, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche currently in Europe, while Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche will be spending the coming months in East Asia. We look forward to relating their new activities in our next issue.

Until then, we hope that you enjoy these pages and that they fulfill to satisfaction their aim of keeping the Gurus and their teachings close by, even when we're not blessed by their physical presence.

Yours in the Dharma,

The Editing Team

SUMMER 2013 SCHEDULE FOR HIS HOLINESS THE SAKYA TRIZIN

DATE	PLACE	CENTRE	ACTIVITY
April 14	Walden, NY, USA	Tsechen Kunchab Ling	Grand Welcome Ceremony and Long Life Initiation
April 15-28	Walden, NY, USA	Tsechen Kunchab Ling	Hevajra Empowerment and Teachings on the Ngondro Preliminary Practice
May 5, 12, June 2,9, 16, 23	Walden, NY, USA	Tsechen Kunchab Ling	Jewel Garland by Chogyal Phagpa
May 19	Walden, NY, USA	Tsechen Kunchab Ling	Jambala Initiation and Advice to Himalayan People
May 25-27	Walden, NY, USA	Tsechen Kunchab Ling	Vajrapani Initiation and Meditation Instruction
June 30	Walden, NY, USA	Tsechen Kunchab Ling	Manjushri Initiation, Refuge Ceremony and Advice to Families
July 4	Walden, NY, USA	Tsechen Kunchab Ling	Sapan Manjushri Guru Yoga Initiation and Practice Instruction
July 26	Minneapolis, MN, USA	Minnesota Sakya Center	Welcome Dinner Reception followed by Public Talk: "How to Face Difficult Circumstances from a Buddhist Perspective"
July 27-28	Minneapolis, MN, USA	Minnesota Sakya Center	Kalachakra Empowerment
August 12	Arcadia, CA, USA	Tsechen Chokhor Ling	Dharma Talk: "Nature of Mind"
August 13	Arcadia, CA, USA	Tsechen Chokhor Ling	Tara Initiation
Aug 7-12	Singapore	Sakya Tenphel Ling	Pujas
Aug 17	Rajpur, India	Sakya Centre	Annual Vajrakilaya Puja

KHÖNDUNG RATNA VAJRA RINPOCHE 2013 SUMMER SCHEDULE

DATE	PLACE	CENTRE	ACTIVITY
Mar 26 - May 22	Taipei, Taiwan	Sakya Manjushri Vajrayana Center	Lamdre Re-Teaching
May 24 - July 7	Singapore	Sakya Tenphel Ling	Lamdre
July 12 - 26	Kathmandu, Nepal	IBA	Shantideva's 'Bodhicaryavatara'
Aug 17	Rajpur, India	Sakya Centre	Annual Vajrakilaya Puja

Ashoka's Pillars



Ashoka's pillars could easily be described as the emblem of Buddhist pilgrimage in India. Their presence is a testimony to the importance that Buddhism held in the region for centuries, and to the expansion that it achieved beyond its original frontiers.

Erected by the Mauryan king Ashoka during his reign in the third century BCE mainly to promulgate Buddhist principles among his subjects, the pillars are of great significance not only as historical milestones but also as religious icons.

King Ashoka was one of the most influential rulers in recorded history, whose legacy of incorporating religion and moral principles into civil legislation set an unparalleled precedent that was to radically influence the governance not only of India but also that of its many surrounding regions which, largely due to Ashoka, adopted Buddhism as their main religion.

Whilst Ashoka's pillars were built primarily as tokens of religious belief, they were also a means to demarcate the king's territory as well as vehicles



Pillar at Vaishali

for promulgating edicts that the king introduced for the better guidance of his subjects. These were mostly moral in content, and inherently based on the Buddha's Dharma. Although legend has it that Ashoka erected 84,000 pillars, some 150 have so far been found.

In their majority around 15 meters high, the pillars were carved from stone quarried in the area of Varanasi and dragged to their destinations in different parts of the subcontinent. Such were the superior quality of the stone and the expertise of the craftsmanship that were used in their making that some of the pillars still retain their mirror-like lustre in spite of the passage of time. The pillars were of outstanding beauty, with sculptures of one or more



Inscription on Kaushambi pillar



Kaushambi

noble animals as their capitals. Sadly separated from its supporting pillar, the lion capital at Sarnath is of such majesty that India has adopted it as its national emblem. Some of Ashoka's pillars still remain almost intact, such as the alluring column at Vaishali, which is crowned by a single lion that faces north to Kushinagar, as if bidding farewell to the Buddha as He undertook His final journey there.

Although only ten of their kind remain in existence today, it is believed that a great number of these pillars were engraved with edicts that are considered the earliest decipherable documents in India and that constitute the first concrete evidence of the existence of Buddhism. They represented a means of communication through which King Ashoka expressed to his subjects how he cared for them as his own children and described to them the good works that he had undertaken to ensure their welfare.

More importantly, though, they were a means of educating them to the importance of the Dharma and an exhortation for them to behave according to its principles.

It would be difficult to overstate the significance that King Ashoka's pillars hold as living testimonies of the passage of the Buddha on earth. As our world becomes increasingly lost in materialistic concerns, such icons are there to remind us of the core values

that are humanity's patrimony and that constitute the only real path to true satisfaction and happiness.

The memory of this extraordinary ruler and practitioner lives in the legacy that he has left to mankind, and those of us who have the good fortune to go on pilgrimage and come across Ashoka's pillars, are reminded that we owe this benevolent king a great debt of gratitude.

Remembering Great Masters

KING ASHOKA



Although there is no indication that King Ashoka was a highly realised master, his role in upholding and spreading the Dharma during his reign was by all means extraordinary and deserves

him special mention in the context of Buddhist pilgrimage.

Interpretations of Ashoka's life vary according to different texts, but it is accepted as fact that he was

the third king of the Mauryan dynasty which, with Magadha as its base, ruled the Indian subcontinent from the fourth to the second centuries BCE. Legend has it that, as a young man, Ashoka was of a ruthless nature and whoever crossed him was unsparingly dispatched to his torture chamber. He is said to have had all his brothers but one killed, and to have punished those of his wives guilty of deriding him by having them burnt to death.

When his father King Bindusara died, Ashoka had his older brother the heir apparent killed and proceeded to usurp his throne. The years following his enthronement in 269 BCE saw him expanding his empire, making it the world's largest of its time. Eight years into his reign, Ashoka set about subduing the state of Kalinga in what is now modern-day Orissa. The Battle of Kalinga was to radically change the king's fate as well as that of the country that he ruled. On inspecting the battleground and witnessing the ravages that the war had occasioned, with a tally of over 100,000 deaths and 150,000 deportations, the King reportedly experienced a kind of apotheosis, and as a consequence fiercely embraced Buddhism as his core belief, making the Dharma the essence and moving force of his kingdom.

A reformer to the core, he used the twenty remaining years of his reign making social changes that were all-embracing in their scope. His edicts, carved into pillars and large rocks, speak of what might be described as state morality and individual morality, both based on the Buddhist values of compassion, moderation, tolerance and respect for all life. The king gave up the expansionist policy that had previously characterised the Mauryan dynasty, reformed the judicial system, used state resources for public works, sponsored religious organisations, founded universities and promoted the education of women, created hospitals and set up protective

policies for the weak and infirm, and put in place legislation protecting wildlife, including the banning of sport hunting, animal castration and branding.

He had the happiness of his subjects at heart. In his own words: "All men are my children. I am like a father to them. As every father desires the good and happiness of his children, I wish that all men should be happy always." Everything points to the fact that King Ashoka was true to his word, and his good works bore witness to this. The king did not limit himself to ensuring the happiness of his subjects in this world, but rather strongly encouraged them to cultivate sufficient merit in this life to gain them the attainment of heaven in the next.

In his view, the practice of the Dharma crossed all boundaries of race, caste and religion. While himself a Buddhist, he judged that all faiths shared a common essence of goodness, and he encouraged tolerance of all religions, while encouraging everyone to exert themselves with strict vigor in the practice of their own belief. He sent missionaries abroad to carry the message of the Dharma as far afield as Greece and Southeast Asia, and organised large interfaith gatherings that crossed national boundaries, so that a pure Dharma could be extracted from its different manifestations and become a common foundation for all people to base their lives on.

And so, whilst not a great master himself, King Ashoka is worthy of praise as one of the most important champions of the Dharma to have ever lived. His memory survives in the pillars that he erected and the edicts that he promulgated through them.

The Importance of Pilgrimage

An Interview with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin



“Going to the holy places of the Buddha is very important. The Buddha Himself said that ‘after my entering into parinirvana, the sons and daughters of my followers should visit the four places’. By these four places, the Buddha was referring to Lumbini, the place where He was born, Bodh Gaya where He became enlightened, Sarnath where He first turned the Wheel of Dharma and Kushinagar, where He entered into Parinirvana.

And so, by visiting these places and remembering the infinite qualities of the Buddha, everyone can become purified and gain great merit, even those who have committed heinous crimes. This is why they are

called the four great shrines. There are also four minor shrines, Sravasti, Rajgir, Sankassa, and Vaishali. These are referred to as the four minor places, and one can also gain great merit by visiting them, particularly if one makes material offerings such as butter lamps, flowers, water, incense and food. More importantly, if while visiting these places, one bears in mind how the Buddha loves every sentient being as if they were His only child and one generates loving kindness and compassion along with the enlightenment mind, then with every single moment, one gains immeasurable merit. And therefore it is extremely important to visit these holy shrines.

I myself visited them for the first time in 1956. We especially came from Tibet at that time, because that year was the celebration of the Buddha's parinirvana according to the Theravadan tradition and so there were special concessions given to travel to India for pilgrimage. We visited the four main places and then returned home. Then, in 1959, the troubles started in Tibet and we had to escape, and so we came to India. In 1960, we visited almost all the holy sites and also went to Nepal for the first time.

Since then, we've been living in India, and I've been a number of times to some of the holy sites, especially Lumbini, since we go there almost every year for our annual Mönlam. But in the past years, I haven't been to any of the holy places apart from Lumbini, and so last year I decided to visit them partly because of all the suffering that is going on in the world, especially the self-immolations in Tibet and natural disasters everywhere, with so many people dying. Also, I visited Taiwan last year and many people gave me offerings to pray for the deceased. I thought that the best way to help them was to visit the holy places, and so we went, not only with my family but with a group of monks from the Sakya Centre so that we could perform grand rituals in these holy places.

Quite a long time ago, I had visited the four major shrines and had performed the grand Sixteen-Arhat Puja in each of them for the sake of the Buddhadharma as well as for the benefit of all beings. I had also performed the shorter Sixteen-Arhat puja in the minor shrines. And now, I wanted to do this again.

Although we couldn't do the same in some of the places, like Sankassa, because they were too difficult of access, we did perform the grand Sixteen Arhat Puja in Sravasti, Vaishali, Varanasi and even a three-day one in Bodh Gaya. We also celebrated a one-day Vajrayogini feast puja in Varanasi, as it was the 10th

day of the lunar month when we were there. We went to Nalanda and also to Vikramshila, which was a very important centre of Higher Buddhist Studies, like Nalanda, and was the seat of many masters like Atisha and those of the Lamdre lineage. The first Tibetan lama to receive the Lamdre was Drogmi Lotsawa Sakya Yeshe, who travelled all the way from Tibet to India to study Buddhist Philosophy, and most of his studies were done at Vikramshila, and so I wanted to go. It was a difficult journey, but it was worthwhile. We couldn't perform the long puja there, but we did perform the short one. It was my first time there, as well as in Kaushambi; otherwise I had been in all the other places, although I hadn't been to Vaishali in a long, long time – 1956.

And so my main purpose for going on pilgrimage was to pray for the deceased. For their sake we performed all these grand pujas and also we did Mahakala tormas offerings in cemeteries. Apart from this, I recited 100 times the 'Aspiration of Samantabhadra' prayer as part of my own daily practice.

And so our pilgrimage went very well, there weren't any problems. Everyone was in good health and enjoyed visiting these holy sites and we all received many blessings. We prayed that the Buddha's teachings would spread all over the world, and especially that Vajrayana Buddhism would continue to thrive in Tibet, alongside all the other traditions, Mahayana and Hinayana."

The Three Kinds of Pilgrim

by Kathok Situ Chökyi Gyatso
(1880-1925)



Without desires, attachment or any particular agenda or itinerary,
With no selfish concerns, simply roaming freely from place to place
For the sake of others, benefitting impartially those to be trained-
This is the way of the very best type of pilgrim.

Following holy masters who are non-sectarian and free from faults,
Receiving their Dharma teachings without sectarian bias or conflict,
And gathering virtue in sacred places without partiality or attachment-
This too is the way of the superior pilgrim.

Through devotion for the representations of enlightened body, speech and mind,
Tirelessly amassing merit in every monastery, hermitage and sacred site,
With pure perception and without ever quarrelling or losing heart-
This is the approach of the middling type of pilgrim.

Firstly making grand promises and plans to travel the globe,
Then passing by sacred sites which are reached by uphill roads,
In the end, being content with having 'been there' and 'done that'-
This is one aspect of the meaningless type of pilgrimage.

Never seeing the virtues of the sangha, but noticing their each and every fault,
Never coming close to sacred images and texts, but viewing them from a distance,
Requesting souvenirs when others are around and stealing them when they are not-
This is the second way in which a pilgrimage becomes nothing but an evil outing.

Developing wrong views towards a sacred place when feeling tired,
Or visiting a temple one day and forgetting all about it in the next,
Getting angry along the way and considering it a sign of courage-
Avoid all such 'pilgrimages', which are merely futile forms of exertion.

In India, the sacred land of the Aryas,
Many masters still remain, hidden and apparent,
And so, filled with faith and devotion,
I prostrate and make prayers and aspirations.

*Translated by Adam Pearcey, Rigpa Translations, 2006
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Kathok Situ Chökyi Gyatso was a nephew and spiritual heir of the great Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and a teacher of Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö and many other important masters. He is well known for his pilgrimage guide to Central Tibet.

Global Environment from a Buddhist Perspective

A Teaching by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin



Life is precious. Life is what is most precious to each one of us. We always worry about losing this life; we worry about anything that might happen to us that could take it away. We make every effort to keep it safe. Just like us, every single being sees life

as what is most precious and does everything possible to protect it.

What's more, we and all other beings wish our lives to last a long, long time. If we are to be granted a long life, then we need to establish the conditions that will make this possible. We first need to realise that everything is interconnected and that the way we treat our environment will affect how long we live. It's very important that we think about this.

Buddhist teachings, especially Mahayana teachings, say that we are made up of body and mind. The body is easy to describe. We know where it came from, how it was formed and how it developed. The body is something visible. We can describe its size, colour, shape, aspect, and so on. When we leave this world, our body will be disposed of in one way or another. But the mind is something quite different. Neither can we see it with our eyes, nor can we touch it with our hands, nor can we describe its size, colour or shape. Yet mind is more powerful than anything else. Without the mind, our body is no more than a corpse. It's the mind that does everything.

Everything works with the mind. It's the mind that does all good things and it's the mind that

does all bad things. It's the mind that experiences happiness and it's the mind that experiences suffering. So the mind is the most important thing.

Where does the mind come from? How is it formed? According to the teachings, mind has no beginning as such – and so we refer to beginningless time. We cannot say that someone's mind begins at any particular time. Mind is intangible, indescribable and continuous. It has its own kind of continuity. From this, one can establish that there was life before our present life. The body from that previous life was disposed of. But the consciousness of its mind continues in our present body. Our mind is currently residing in our body, and when we leave this world, our body will again be disposed of, but there will be no way in which our mind can be disposed of. Because it's intangible, we won't be able to cremate it or bury it. Because it's intangible, we can't make it disappear. And so this powerful mind again continues and enters into another life.

And this happens over and over again. We are all familiar with what we call the 'Wheel of Life'. The 'Wheel of Life' means that the wheel turns once, and then again, and again. It has no beginning and it never ceases. It is the same with life. Life has no beginning as such, it just goes on and on. And so we have been born innumerable times since beginningless time until now. And we will continue to do so again and again until we attain liberation, or enlightenment.

Life is ceaseless. Furthermore, there is not one single place where one hasn't been born. Everything keeps changing. Wherever the winds of our karma take us, that is where we'll be. We have no choice. There nowhere in the universe where we haven't been born. Even more, there is not one single sentient being who has not been our parent, our friend, our partner, our child, and so on. But due to the change of life, we don't recognise each other. And we see

some beings as our friends, some as our enemies, and some we see with indifference. In reality, every single being is our very dear one, but we can't recognise each other. Even our most hated enemies are also our very dear ones, although we can't recognise them as such.

And so therefore, life is not only precious to us, but it is precious to every living being, from the tiniest insect to the highest god. Every life is precious. This is the most important thing that we must realise. Life is what is most precious not only to ourselves, but also to every single other being. And so, when we experience our own feelings, we can remember how every individual also has the same kind of feelings.

We have to always remember how precious life is and how we need to protect its many forms. In order to protect life, we also need to protect the environment that harbours it. No one can live in a place where there is no water, where there are no trees, and so on. Our lives are completely dependent on our environment.

We might say that Lord Buddha was the founder of environmentalism. His Vinaya – the code of behaviour that the Buddha instituted for monks and nuns – stipulates that "You cannot cut trees; you cannot cut leaves; you cannot cut flowers; you cannot disturb the forest; you cannot foul the river; you cannot foul the grass." Already in His time, the Buddha had instructed His Sangha to observe the same rules that are nowadays set down by environmentalists.

The Buddha also said that every living being has at one time been our parent, and that we must repay the love and kindness that we have received from them. Even our worst enemies, people who cause us harm and create obstacles for us, even they are our very own dear ones. Because we didn't recognise them as such during our many lifetimes and didn't

pay back their kindness but rather treated them with anger, now they appear to us as enemies. According to Buddhist teachings, love and compassion are described as infinite. They make no exceptions. We must love everyone, near ones, far ones, beings we know, beings we don't know, dear ones and hated ones. We should feel equal love and compassion toward every sentient being.

Today, our world is experiencing serious environmental problems. I have many friends who are very worried about the environment. They say that eventually the earth will become like a desert; there will be no water, no trees, no rain. Pollution will be so severe that it will even be difficult to breathe, and people will have to carry oxygen bottles around with them. Many people worry about this. And so we need to think about the future, about the beings who will inherit our earth, our children, our grandchildren, and everyone else. We have to think about the problems that they will face. We need to ensure that the earth will be a suitable place for them to inhabit.

Buddhist teachings have much to offer in making the world a better place. Their reach somehow goes beyond human effort, however worthy the latter may be. They go deeper, and they are all-inclusive. They include everything. Buddhist practitioners mainly devote their time and energy to inner practice, like meditation and rituals and so on, and so outwardly they don't seem to be performing useful activities. Although in comparison to environmentalists, who are very active in trying to save our earth, practitioners don't seem to be doing much, their influence reaches deeper and wider.

Environmentalists are to be highly lauded for all the work that they do to help. Their accomplishments are vast. And yet, they are not all-embracing in their philosophy. If we take as an example the case of wild animals in India, which is a great source of worry.

It is said that India used to have some 40,000 tigers, but their numbers have drastically dropped. There are now only 14,000. Tigers are very beautiful and powerful, and so everyone wants to protect them. There is much worry about endangered species. Like the tigers, other species of animals are protected by environmentalists. For example, the deer in India have become rare and no one is allowed to shoot them. Whoever shoots one is severely punished. This kind of initiative is very beneficial and deserves everyone's support.

But on the other hand, it is not only rare and beautiful animals that should be protected. Life is for everybody. But there are no environmentalists who say that we should protect mosquitoes. This is because mosquitoes are ugly, because they are noisy and annoying, and because they bite us and not only cause us pain but also carry disease, such as malaria. Therefore many people think that mosquitoes should be destroyed. But mosquitoes are also living beings. All forms of life are precious. Some animals are precious to humans, either because they are beautiful or because they're useful. People love birds because they're beautiful to look at and they sing lovely songs. And so they must be protected. But mosquitoes are noisy and they annoy us; we worry about them breeding in ponds because they carry disease, and so no one talks about protecting them.

Buddhist teachings take a very different stand. They say that every living being needs to be protected, whether they are beneficial or harmful to us, whether they are beautiful or ugly, rare or abundant. In India, it is allowed to shoot certain wild animals because there are many of them. From a Buddhist perspective, this is not correct. In practical terms, non-Buddhists won't agree with us, but as we are looking at the environment from a Buddhist point of view, this is an important point to make.

The main thing, though, is to realise how precious life is. It's precious to us, but it's also precious to mosquitoes. Their own lives are very precious to them. But a mosquito's life is short. Its life is short, just a few days, and even then many don't manage to survive their natural lifespan. Whenever people see a mosquito, their reaction is to kill it. People don't feel compassion toward mosquitoes and don't realise how important their lives are to them.

So here lies the difference. The Buddhist idea of love and compassion, that all beings should be protected, goes deeper and wider than ordinary considerations. And yet, practitioners don't actively go out and help beings. They meditate and recite prayers such as: "May all sentient beings be happy and be with the causes of happiness". But when they come near animals that are suffering, they don't necessarily help them. On the other hand, whereas animal lovers and environmentalists may not meditate or say prayers, they do step in and help animals that are hungry or sick, or in any kind of pain.

The ideal thing would be to combine these two attitudes, the Buddhist practice of compassion and the environmentalist one. This would be enormously beneficial to our world.

Right from the beginning, the Buddha Himself taught that life is precious. According to the Buddha's law, monks are not allowed to chop trees, pluck flowers or cut grass. Actually, the Buddha was a precursor of the environmentalists. Buddhism teaches us that we should make this world beautiful, free and clean, not only for human beings but for every living being that inhabits it.

There is a story that tells of a bald monk who was sitting in meditation under a banana tree. At some point, a large leaf fell on his head and interrupted his concentration. He became very angry and crushed the leaf into pieces, thinking "Why did the Buddha make

such strange rules that we can't pluck flowers or leaves?" And he even became angry with the Buddha.

As a result of this, he was reborn in his next life as a naga, with a huge tree growing from his head. This seems strange, but there are such beings that we can see for ourselves, for instance corals. Corals look like plants, like small trees, but they are actually animals. And so this tree was growing on his head and digging its root inside it, which was very painful.

One day, the Buddha was travelling with a king, and they came across this unfortunate being. The king asked the Buddha why this person had a tree growing out of his head and seemed to be in such pain, and the Buddha explained how in his previous life he had been one of the Buddha's monks and had disrespected the Buddha's rules, causing him to be reborn afflicted in this manner. In a way, this story illustrates the concern that the Buddha had for all forms of life, including trees, grass and flowers.

And so it seems to me that modern environmentalists could learn something from the Buddha's teachings, especially the rules of the Vinaya. By incorporating these to their own philosophy, environmentalists might enrich the latter and make its scope deeper and broader. It's impossible, of course, to protect everything and everyone. But we do as much as we can. And the work of protecting the environment cannot be left to just a few people or organisations. It's everyone's responsibility. It's very important that everyone becomes aware of its importance and realises how things might turn out to be on our earth if we don't take care of it.

It is impossible to fix everyone's problems, everywhere. But if many people make an effort, then certainly this will make a considerable difference. And so, whatever we do, it is important to fully appreciate that life is precious and that we must all do

something to preserve it and to make it fruitful and long-lasting. We need to this for our own benefit but, even more, for the sake of future generations.

Already, things are changing a great deal. Many of my friends from Tibet tell me how the climate there is changing dramatically, especially the snow mountains; they are melting, some at a very rapid pace. Not only the mountains, but also the rivers, forests and the earth itself are affected by pollution, deforestation and mining.

We Tibetans believe that it's not only the visible aspect of nature that is affected. There is also an invisible dimension to it that we are not always aware of. In Tibet, every mountain has its own local deity that resides in it. According to our ancient beliefs, these deities are also affected by these changes, and this makes them unhappy, which leads to the occurrence of natural disasters. Due to people's greed, chemical refuse is thrown into rivers, forests are decimated and the ground is carved to extract valuable minerals. All these aspects of nature are home to deities, and when they are violated in this way, so are its resident deities. Many people don't believe in gods, local deities and other invisible beings. But I believe that they do exist and make a substantial difference to how things are.

These visible and invisible aspects of nature are intrinsically linked to each other, and as a result of their being affected, many disasters arise, such as floods, earthquakes, tsunamis and hurricanes. And so, in order to remedy this state of affairs, I believe that we need to adopt a two-pronged approach.

Not only do we need to follow the directives of environmentalists on how to physically take care of our world, but we need to perform protective and rejuvenating rituals such as bathing rituals, incense offerings, treasure vase burying rituals, and so on. I truly believe that these rituals have a concrete effect

on things.

Japan and Taiwan, for instance, lie on an earthquake zone. They are often afflicted by earthquakes and typhoons, sometimes very severe ones. Lately, many of the Taiwanese Buddhist masters have begun performing offering, fire, bathing and treasure-vase burying rituals, and I'm told that since then the natural disasters have been less frequent and less devastating.

Not everybody believes in this sort of thing, but I think that by trying from every angle, everybody in their own way, things will definitely improve. It seems to me that it's very important that everyone play a part in taking care of our earth, and not only a few individuals or organisations. It's everyone's responsibility. We are all part of the human race and we have to think of its future, of the human beings that will follow us. If we don't act now, they will have to live in a sort of hungry ghost land, which would be very sad.

And so it's important that we endeavour with all our strength to make things better, and for this, we first need to deeply realise how precious life is, how important it is to make this life healthier for all, happier and longer, and how crucial it is that we create a sustainable environment.

It would be equally important to incorporate the teachings of the Buddha in this effort. The Buddha possesses omniscient wisdom. His wisdom is infinite. He sees the past, present and future as we see the palms of our own hands. He sees every effect to every cause and every cause to every effect. And so His teachings are authentic and wondrous, and they lead us to work for the benefit of beings, the world and the environment.

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Oral Instructions on the Practice of Guru Yoga

A teaching by H.E. Chogye Trichen Rinpoche
(part 3)



Guru Yoga: The Descent of Blessings

In the biographies of the great masters, it is

often said that they would supplicate the Guru until tears would pour from their eyes and the hairs on their bodies would stand on end. These are signs of fervent devotion, which gives rise to ever

greater faith. In order to receive blessings, the most important quality one needs is faith (*depa*). As in the famous story, if we have faith, even the tooth of a dog can become a relic.

Whatever your prayer, such as the taking of refuge or the Yoga of the Guru, more important than just visualizing well and chanting properly is to have the quality of devotion (*mogu*). This is also true when you offer prayers of love, compassion, and Bodhicitta. By contemplating and understanding suffering, and generating loving kindness and compassion, once again, tears may flow. Tears do not come ordinarily, but they may come when one really experiences compassion and the wish to help suffering beings. We can feel empathy for their suffering, and sincerely wish to save them.

The key point is that in all of these moments, such as: a moment of intense devotion (*mogu dragpo*); a moment when we experience the descent of primordial wisdom (*yeshe bab*) during empowerment; or when we enter the stream of blessings (*jinlab kyi gyud*), during Guru Yoga practice; and also, at the time of being overwhelmed with compassion (*nyingje*); in each of these cases, the experience is similar. These are different causes that give rise to the same experience, the experience of Guru Yoga: The Descent of Blessings (*jin bab; byin babs*).

Remembering the kindness of our mother, and if she is suffering, feeling compassion for her and trying to help her, is the beginning of developing compassion. Knowing that all beings have been our mother, this becomes a cause for developing love and compassion.

When you reach the point of being overwhelmed with love and compassion, it is a sign of the descent of the blessings of great compassion (*thugje chenpo; thugs rje chen po*), a sign that the blessings of the

Bodhisattvas are falling upon you. When you feel kindness and compassion toward all beings as if they were your own mother and understand their suffering, you will be blessed by the Bodhisattvas, and the experience of their blessings will be born in your mind.

Some are moved to tears because of their previous practice of meditation on emptiness. Seeing for oneself the suffering of beings in the lower realms can also move one very deeply. Through our own compassion for all beings, the blessings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are able to flow to all beings. It is the same as other kinds of prayer, where blessings are invoked on behalf of all beings. There is no question that sentient beings are benefitted when one genuinely gives rise to compassion.

For example, during our practice of Guru Yoga, there is the kusali offering, where one offers one's body to the Gurus and to the sources of refuge. One also offers to the guests of compassion, sentient beings who require blessings and a variety of benefits. This is a practice of faith and devotion as well as of compassion and sacrifice (*lo tangwa; blos btang ba*). It is a very powerful practice for receiving blessings that definitely benefit sentient beings. Faith, devotion, and compassion enable us to receive blessings, and this is what helps sentient beings.

The signs of receiving blessings are for example that we may cry spontaneously, the hairs of our pores stand on end (*ba pu langpa; ba spu langs pa*), there might be a trembling sending chills through our body, and so on. Our heart may be flooded with powerful feelings of renunciation, faith, devotion, and compassion. These are signs that we are receiving the blessings of the Guru and the lineage masters, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They are signs that we have experienced faith and devotion, genuine love and compassion for sentient beings,

and so on. One may feel deeply moved from within, and this gives rise to different vivid experiences.

At these moments, it is most important to remember the Guru's introduction to the nature of mind, recognize and continue in the sustaining of the View. The nature of mind is introduced very directly through blessings. It is realization of the nature of mind that will accomplish one's own benefit. Receiving blessings accomplishes the two benefits, the benefit of others as well as one's own benefit.

Guru Yoga: The Descent of Primordial Wisdom

If we would ask whether one can receive the same blessings and recognize the nature of mind during the course of one's own practice, the answer is that yes, one may. This is especially true of the practice of Guru Yoga. When the Guru dissolves into our heart, and our mind merges with the mind of the Guru, we remain in this state of emptiness. This is simply a less elaborate form of what takes place during empowerment, the method by which blessings may be received and recognition of the nature of mind may occur.

If we have more time and wish to practice Guru Yoga somewhat more elaborately, then when supplicating the Guru, we may call to mind all of the sublime qualities of the Enlightened Ones. To review in our mind all of the Guru's spiritual qualities is very powerful for arousing our devotion. We may remember the master's attributes, remember situations where we witnessed his qualities for ourselves. We may rejoice in the Guru's immeasurable qualities, and delight in our own good fortune to have a relationship with our Gurus, to be their disciples and follow their teachings.

This will help us to have a positive attitude toward ourselves as practitioners, as well as generating faith and devotion toward the Guru. We rejoice in our good fortune and strive to emulate the Guru's noble qualities and benefit sentient beings.

Through the practice of Guru Yoga, our faith will continue to increase. In practicing Guru Yoga, first we generate faith by contemplating the qualities of the Guru, of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. Then through faith and devotion, we receive blessings, and blessings give rise to experience. Having received blessings, we are able to experience the meaning of the teachings through our own practice, which in turn will greatly increase our faith.

The most important point is that when we dissolve the Guru into ourselves, we must have full faith in and devotion to the Guru. It is not just a matter of going through the motions of visualizing and reciting everything properly. We need to really feel from our hearts that this is the authentic Guru and lineage masters who are dissolving into us, who are bestowing their blessings upon us.

Once we are accustomed to this practice, the experience of blessings does not disappear within our recognition of the View of emptiness. In fact, as we remain with the recognition, even more blessings will arise, and at the same time, our recognition of the View will become more and more sustained. Resting within the view of emptiness, faith and devotion continue to increase, blessings continue to be received, and the View continues to become more and more stable.

This is a very important point for our practice of Guru Yoga. It is said that as blessings descend from above, realization (*togpa*; *rtogs pa*) blazes up from below.

"Realization blazes up from below" means that our faith and devotion increase, and that our

recognition of the View becomes more vast (*gya chewa*) and sustained. It is not only that faith and great devotion increase; our mind merges with the Guru's mind and we are face to face with the unmistakable View (*lta ba ngor 'khrul med pa*), which is unchanging empty awareness (*rig tong gyurwa mepa*).

These two mutually benefit one another: the more blessings descend, the more our faith, devotion, and realization of the View blazes up. The more our faith, devotion, and realization of the View blazes upward, the more blessings will descend. This is the process that leads to great realization.

The Meaning of Guru Yoga: Unifying with the Body, Speech and Mind of the Guru

I will repeat once again a few of the key points of Guru Yoga, so that you may learn them well. In the practice of Guru Yoga, the unification with the Guru, first we have to visualize and pray to the Guru. Next, we visualize that all phenomena dissolve into the form of the Guru, and then the Guru dissolves into our heart. Our mind and the Guru's mind are indivisibly mingled (*yermey du drepa; dbyer med du 'dres pa*).

Now we rest body, speech, and mind naturally, and remain with the recognition of emptiness. Whatever we see around us is created by our mind; all that appears and exists (*snang srid thams cad*) is the manifestation of the mind. Other than mind, there is nothing outside of us.

Whatever phenomena we can perceive, we should regard them as being the same as our Guru. This is something we can practice night and day.

All appearances are the nature of the deities,

inseparable from the Guru. Knowing this with confidence, then we dissolve all phenomena into the Guru, and the Guru into ourselves. All phenomena have dissolved into emptiness, we see that the Guru is no other than our own mind.

Thus, once we are able to understand the true nature of this mind, emptiness, then we pray to the Guru and dissolve the Guru into our heart, dissolving the blessings into ourselves (*jinlab rang la tim; byin rlab rang la thim*).

Dissolve the Guru into your heart, and merge your mind completely with your Guru's mind, so that you and the Guru are indistinguishable from one another. Now remain in the View without grasping. This means to allow your body, speech, and mind to rest naturally. These are some of the key points of Guru Yoga, which you should keep in mind.

--Letting Body, Speech and Mind Be at Rest

In the Guru Yoga instructions, we are told to let our body, speech and mind rest naturally (*nal du bapa; rnal du dbap pa*). What does this mean? The basis for meditation practice in the Vajrayana tradition of secret mantra (*sang ngak*) is the three key points of body, speech, and mind. The key point of the body is to place our body in the proper physical posture. Along with this, the key point for the speech is that the eyes must assume the proper gaze. The key point of mind is that the mind comes to rest, relaxed but attentive, in the thought-free state (*tog may ngang; rtog med ngang*).

The practice is to simply allow your three gates (*go sum*) of body, speech, and mind to be left as they naturally are (*rang lug su zhag; rang lugs su bzha*), at rest in naturalness. This means to simply

let your body, speech, and mind be, without altering or modifying anything.

In general, our actions of body, speech, and mind have been a great waste of time. Despite all of our endless actions throughout beginningless time, we have wasted all of our opportunities up to the present time. As we are still ordinary sentient beings, nothing of real consequence has been achieved through our worldly activities.

There is no benefit that comes from allowing our body, speech, and mind to roam through the desire realm (*dod kham*). But, if we give up all of these meaningless activities, then we can certainly gain realization and sublime joy, great bliss (*dewa chenpo*). By this, all of our afflictions, such as those of our elements, bodily constituents (*kham*), and emotions, can be brought to an end.

For our body, this means not only giving up bodily movements and sitting still in one's meditation posture, but giving up all thoughts concerning possible activities, such as "I should do this, I shouldn't do that...." Our body is left free from activity.

For our speech, we let our breathing be natural, and also maintain the proper gaze, without saying anything. This includes thinking about what we would like to say or about what we should not say.

For our mind, we leave the mind free of any activity. There is nothing to think about, nothing to apply our mind to other than resting in the gap between the past and future thought.

We are abandoning all activities of body, speech, and mind. Rather than perform any activities, we simply sit in the meditation posture. When the body is straight, our channels are straightened and our mind will become stable. In this way, we are able to leave our body at rest.

Our breathing is relaxed and natural, and we

maintain the focus of our gaze. Practicing the gaze correctly is very powerful for removing all kinds of inner disharmonies of our elements, winds, and so on. If our eyes frequently change focus and our gaze moves about, this can disrupt meditation. The eyes are focused forward into space along the direction of the gaze, straight ahead and slightly upward. This is the practice for letting one's speech be at rest.

As we practice the gaze, our mind should not be focused either too far into space, or too close to our body. The teachings mention the length of the span of a bow, about four to six feet. We gaze normally without forcing it, without any strain. We are simply looking along the direction of our gaze, without effort.

Our mind rests in emptiness, in the gap between past and future thoughts. There is nothing else to do. The key point of mind is to have nothing in mind.

While we are maintaining attentive presence (*dran shes*) with effort, we do not concentrate too sharply, nor do we leave the mind so loose that it sinks into dullness (*gopa*).

The mind is left without a reference point, meaning that our mind is not placed anywhere and is not focusing on anything. In fact, our mind is not making efforts of any kind. At the same time, this is not a blank emptiness. We are present, attentive, and are able to know whatever is taking place.

*Translated by John Deweese and Guru Rinchen Chodar
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Dharma Activities

Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche in Ladakh



On the 20th of September 2012, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche travelled from New Delhi to Leh, Ladakh, where he was to spend the following ten days teaching and bestowing initiations in different schools and monasteries.

He was greeted at the Leh Kushok Bakula Rinpoche Airport by religious and social representatives of the Ladakhi capital. After a short stay in Leh, during which Rinpoche visited the new Chok Ts'al Sakya Nunnery, and the Leh Johkhang, where

he bestowed the Hayagriva, Garuda, Vajrapani initiation to a congregation of devotees from the four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, he made his way to the Matho Monastery.

Some twenty-five kilometres from Leh, Matho Gompa was until recently the only Sakya Monastery in Ladakh, known for its annual Matho Nagrang Festival that takes place during the first Tibetan lunar month and that features the participation of two oracles who predict the fortunes of the nearby villages for the ensuing year.

Rinpoche was to spend most of the remainder of his stay in Ladakh at Matho Gompa. The day after his arrival, he bestowed a *Tsewang* (Long-Life Initiation) to the public, an event that attracted thousands of followers. Rinpoche also blessed the new temple and consecrated its statues.

Over the time of his stay at Matho Gompa, Rinpoche was to give empowerments and valuable

counsel to members of the local community, particularly students who sought his advice on a variety of Dharma topics and went away with enough food for thought to ponder upon until Rinpoche's next visit.



With the majority of Ladakh's population belonging to Tibetan Buddhism, today's youth is yearning for a deepening of its teachings, and Rinpoche's enlightening answers to their queries went a long way in nurturing this vital interest.

On Pilgrimage with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin



On the morning of 1st October 2012, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin stepped on board the Dehradun 5:10 Janshatabdi train to Delhi. His Holiness and the party that accompanied Him were to spend the following three weeks on pilgrimage, visiting the major sites in India that had, in days of old, been sanctified by the Buddha's presence and by His teachings.

His Holiness' arrival in



Departure from Dehradun



Delhi was greeted by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, freshly returned from his teaching visit in Ladakh. The group was now

complete, some thirty-five people strong. It comprised His Holiness and Her Eminence Gyalyum Chenmo, Khöndung Ratna Vajra

Rinpoche and his family, members of the Sakya Dolma Phodrang household including its two senior members Lama Rinchen Sangpo and Somo Drölkar la, and monks from the Sakya Centre, including its directors, Khenpo Jamyang Lekshey and Lama Sonam Chogyal.



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche joins the group in Delhi

The logistics of the journey were intricate, to say the least. Not only did they involve providing basic necessities for the group members over the course of the following weeks, but they also



entailed being equipped with the necessary ritual instruments to carry out Sixteen-Arhat pujas in each of the holy sites that would be visited, as far as this would be physically possible. The participation of two seniors and two small children in the expedition lent an added dimension to the preparations.

After a short lunch stop in Delhi, the group boarded the bus that would, through thick and thin, carry them on their odyssey to the sacred Buddhist sites of India.



The journey begins

What was to predominate during those days on the road was the simplicity and good humour that prevailed throughout, in spite of the rudimentary conditions and jarring rides that were on offer. His Holiness seemed as comfortable, composed and pleasant-humoured in the front seat of this no-frills vehicle as He does on His own throne, and never ceased to make everyone feel joyful and blessed at every moment.

The first stop on the pilgrimage was Sankassa, the place where the Buddha returned to earth after teaching His mother the Abhidharma in Tushita heaven. The event is celebrated at Lhabab Düchen, one of the four Buddhist festivals commemorating the most significant happenings of the Buddha's life, and it is considered to be one of the eight great deeds of the Buddha.



Sankassa

According to the texts, Sankassa is one of the immutable places in the world, where all the Buddhas descend to the human realm after preaching the Abhidharma in celestial realms.

Buddhist scriptures have it that the Buddha descended to earth in Sankassa on a jewel-bedecked ladder crafted by Viswakarma, the god of machines. To its right was a gold ladder for the gods and to its left a silver one for Lord Brahma and his retinue.



Shrine commemorating the Buddha's descent in Sankassa



His Holiness prays at the shrine

Sariputra was the first to welcome the Buddha, following which the Master bestowed a teaching on the multitude that had assembled to greet His return. A small shrine is said to stand on the spot where the Buddha's foot first touched the ground.

It is thought among Tibetan Buddhists that the effects of positive or negative actions are multiplied ten million times during the day that commemorates the

Buddha's descent to earth, and so when His Holiness led the Sixteen-Arhat puja at Sankassa, the first among the several that were to be held during the pilgrimage, this moment was indeed replete with merit.

The puja, as would the others that followed during the journey, involved a trek, in this case up a hill, carrying musical instruments and assorted offerings, as well as supplies for the time-honoured

custom of serving tea to puja participants. Once the ritual was over, His Holiness and Ratna Vajra Rinpoche offered devout prayers and khatas before beginning the climb back down the hill.

The visit to Sankassa concluded with His Holiness and Ratna Vajra Rinpoche paying their respects at the pillar erected by the great king Ashoka to honour the site's significance, the first of several such pillars that were to be



Puja at Sankassa





Ashoka's pillar at Sankassa

a staple throughout the pilgrimage.

And so the journey continued, with the next stop at Sravasti, where the Buddha spent most time during His adult life and gave most teachings, principally at the Jetavana monastery. Capital of the ancient kingdom of Kosala, whose king Pasedani was a disciple of the Buddha's, it counted some of the most powerful among the Buddha's patrons.

It was here that, in order to

bolster the faith of disciples, the Buddha performed the Twin Miracle, causing flames to blaze from the upper part of His body and streams of water to gush out from the lower part, then alternating between these, and then doing the same with the right and left sides of His body.

His Holiness and His group stayed two days in Sravasti, during which time they celebrated the grand Sixteen-Arhat Puja at the Gandhakuti, the remains at Jetavana of what had been the Buddha's hut, where the Great One had spent twenty-three rainy seasons.

Preparations for the puja got under way in the early morning of the second day, with monks busy garnishing the walls of the Buddha's hut and its surrounding stupas with a profusion of flowers, fruit, tormas, incense, scented water and other offerings. Flowers were never in want of as, every time a puja was scheduled, young boys would appear out of nowhere with bunches of freshly-picked lotus flowers, which they would only part with after a rigorous session of masterful haggling.



Offerings at the Buddha's hut in Sravasti



Puja at Sravasti



Finishing touches

As His Holiness and His family arrived and the puja began, local Theravadan monks reverently joined the proceedings – this would be a recurring feature throughout the journey- while finishing touches were put on the decorations.

The day ended with a visit to Angulimala's stupa, arguably the most notorious of the Buddha's converts who had, before he met the Great One, been the terror of



His Holiness with family and Yang Dol Tsatultsang (Dagmo Kalden's mother)



His Holiness and Ratna Vajra Rinpoche at Angulimala's stupa



Ashoka pillar at Kaushambi

the land, responsible for the death of nine hundred and ninety-nine people, whose little fingers he wore as a collar around his neck.

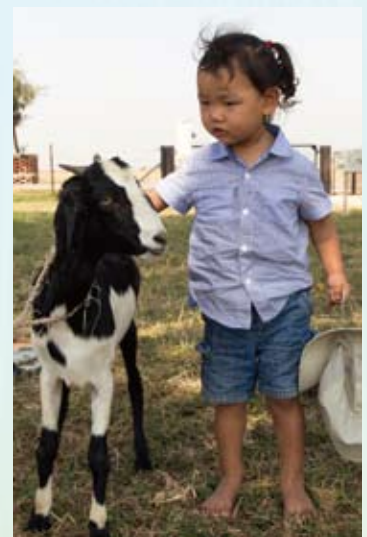
And so the journey continued, this time to Kaushambi, a major city at the time of the Buddha, whose king Udayana was one of His disciples and an *upasaka*. The Buddha visited Kaushambi and taught there many times after His Enlightenment. It says in the texts that King Udayana was the first to commission an image of the Buddha. King Ashoka chose Kaushambi as one of the sites for his pillars to be erected.

Conditions only allowed for a minor puja to be performed, but

alms were distributed and new friends were made.



Encounters at Kaushambi





Dhamek Stupa in Sarnath



Puja at the stupa

uniformly clad in white, as they circumambulated the stupa, while monastics in varying hues of greys, yellows and browns ambled about the surrounding grounds in deep reverence. A handful of foreign tourists joined in the puja, some of them familiar with His Holiness and delighted by the auspicious circumstances that created this singular

opportunity.

The next stage on the journey was to take place at one of the four major Buddhist pilgrimage sites: Sarnath, where the Buddha first turned the Wheel of Dharma some five weeks after His Enlightenment. The group spent four days there, guests of the Central University of Tibetan Studies (CUTS), where both His Holiness and Ratna Vajra Rinpoche were to give Dharma talks to the campus students over the course of their stay.

It is said that Sarnath, short for Saranganath which means ‘Lord of the Deer’, owes its name to the story of the Buddha who, in a previous life as a deer, had offered His life to the King to save the doe

that the latter was about to kill. The King was so touched by this gesture that he made the park a refuge for deer. Also known also as Isipatana, it is said to be one of the four immutable places, the one where all the Buddhas preach their first sermon.

The dominant structure at the deer park in Sarnath is the monumental Dhamek Stupa, which marks the spot where the Buddha first taught the Four Noble Truths. It is at its foot that, the day following their arrival in Sarnath, His Holiness and His group gathered to celebrate the Sixteen-Arhat Puja.

The ritual attracted some curiosity from lay pilgrims,

The following morning was spent at the small Mahabodi Society of India temple, where a major Sixteen-Arhat Puja was held. This was attended by several members of the Tibetan community, who seemed overwhelmed by their close proximity to revered teachers.



Puja at Mahabodhi Society temple in Sarnath

There is a moment during the puja when members of the congregation stand up on their seats and sing the *Neten Chak Chö*, or prayer for the long life of the Buddha's teachings. Already touching in itself, the recitation of this aspiration prayer in the birthplace of the Buddha's teachings lent an added dimension to its significance.



Neten Chak Chö

The afternoon was dedicated to a short puja held in the shrine of the Mulaganda Kuti Vihara, a handsome temple in Deer Park, erected in the 1930's by the Mahabodi Society of India and featuring murals depicting the principal episodes of the life of the Buddha. His Holiness had last prayed at this temple almost three decades ago, when he had taken Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche on pilgrimage with Him. Rinpoche was at that time not much older than is now his own son Dhungsey Akasha Vajra Rinpoche.



Mulaganda Kuti Vihara in Sarnath revisited



That evening, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche gave a Dharma talk at CUTS to a group of university students, during which he stressed the importance of right motivation in spiritual practice and in life in general. First established in 1967, the Central University of Tibetan Studies at Varanasi was a joint initiative spawned by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru designed

to ensure the education of Tibetan youth in exile and the preservation of Tibetan culture and religion in general. The institution gradually grew beyond its initial remit and became a prominent centre of excellence for Tibetan studies, opening its doors to monastics and laypersons alike. Its library boasts vast resources that marry ancient wisdom with modern technology and provide an important source of



Ratna Vajra Rinpoche gives a talk at CUTS, Sarnath



Group photo at Dhamek stupa



Vajrayogini tsok



Visit to the CUTS library



His Holiness gives a talk at CUTS

material to other institutions and individuals who wish to deepen their knowledge of Tibetology and religion.

The last morning in Sarnath was dedicated to the celebration of the Vajrayogini *Tsok* at the Mahabodhi temple, followed by a group photo session at the Dhamek stupa, while in the afternoon His Holiness was guided around the vast CUTS library before delivering a Dharma talk to an assembly of its students and members of the local community.

The second half of the pilgrimage began with a visit to Vaishali, ancient capital of the Licchavi, a thriving state in its time and one of the earliest republics on record in the world. The Buddha

visited Vaishali several times, and it was here that He gave His last sermon, announcing His upcoming Parinirvana before He made His last journey to Kushinagar. The site is also associated with the Buddha being offered a bowl of honey by the local monkey king.

Here, His Holiness and Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche conducted a Sixteen-Arhat Puja under the shade of a tree, across a pond from the Kutagarasala Vihara, where the Buddha spent most of His time while in Vaishali. The spot is of exceptional beauty, boasting the most handsome and best-preserved Ashokan pillar among its peers. Nearby is a stupa containing some of the Buddha's relics. The scriptures recount that after the

Buddha passed into Parinirvana, His ashes were divided into eight parts, which were distributed among His main devotees. One portion of these was given to the Licchavis, ardent followers of the Great Master, which are the ones



Ashoka pillar at Vaishali



Puja at Vaishali



Buddha Relics stupa

found at Vaishali.

The next two stops on the journey were at Nalanda and Vikramshila, peerless centres of learning of ancient India, akin to our Oxbridge, from where originated much of what we know today about the philosophy and practice of Mahayana and Tantrayana.

The first of these two, the superlative Nalanda, was created in the state of Bihar in the fifth or sixth century CE and thrived as a paramount centre of higher learning until the twelfth century, when it was ransacked and set fire to by invading Turkic Muslims, who slaughtered a considerable number of its resident monks. Chronicles have it that its library was so vast that it took the flames three months to reduce it to ashes.

In its heyday, Nalanda housed some ten thousand students and two thousand faculty members at any given time, attracting scholars

from as far afield as Tibet, China, Japan and Greece. Its campus was of gargantuan proportions and of

extraordinary beauty, adorned by an abundance of parks and lakes, and buildings of arrestingly



Remains of Nalanda University



In the footsteps of past masters



Puja at Nalanda

handsome architecture. Its library occupied three multi-storeyed buildings and was responsible for the preservation, reproduction and translation of hundreds of thousands of volumes embracing not only Buddhist philosophy but every field of knowledge available at the time.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the influence that Nalanda had on the elaboration and spread of Buddhist thought. Tibetan Buddhism, for one, describes itself as belonging to the Nalanda tradition and owes the greater part of its Dharma treasures to the 'Seventeen Nalanda Masters', namely Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Chandrakirti, Shantideva, Shantarakshita, Asanga and Atisha, to name but a few.

And so, His Holiness and His party were in good company as they walked down the campus alleyways among the ruins of its premises and sat in their midst to



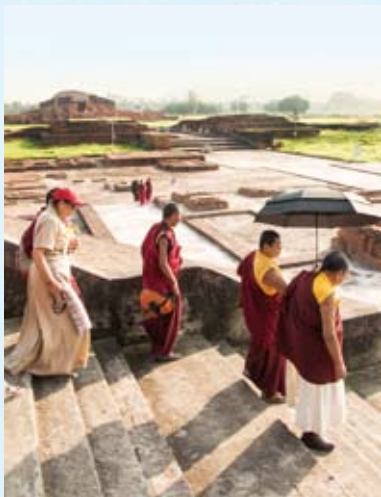
Shariputra stupa

celebrate the Sixteen-Arhat puja. Aptly, also lying in these illustrious grounds is Shariputra's stupa, which harbours the remains of one of the Buddha's two closest disciples.

The day's excursion was inspiring, to say the least, and the one that followed it the next day was a fitting sequel to it. Although the drawn-out trip along a maze of

backwoods roads to Vikramshila was long and arduous, it was every bit worth the hardship that it entailed.

Established on the banks of the River Ganges in Bihar by King Dharmapala in the eighth century AD, Vikramshila reigned supreme alongside Nalanda as a paragon of Buddhist learning for several centuries.



Stately stairway down to the Vikramshila campus



Vestiges of past greatness

Part of a sisterhood of similar institutions, a sort of ancient Ivy League within which teachers and students circulated freely, Vikramshila distinguished itself in all subjects, but its true field of excellence was Tantrayana. Its faculty included some of the most

accomplished tantric masters of the past, including the great Naropa and Jetari, while Atisha features among its most illustrious abbots.

Like its counterpart Nalanda, Vikramshila was a vast compound, spreading over one hundred acres and comprising a profusion of

structures, many of them still clearly distinguishable as temples, stupas, monks' cells and a library.

At its heart lies a large stupa, accessed by a broad and well-kempt entranceway, which was the votive hub of the university. It is here that the group settled for the



Imposing approach to the stupa



Central stupa



Puja at Vikramshila stupa

celebration of the Sixteen-Arhat Puja.

Time constraints didn't allow to linger, as night was falling and there was a long drive ahead, this time to Rajgir.

One of the Buddha's favourite retreat places, Rajgir was the first capital of the ancient kingdom of Magadha. Surrounded by mountains that boast stunning views and considerable historic significance, its name translates as 'Home to Royalty'.

Perched on the heights that dominate the town is Vulture's Peak where, according to Tibetan Buddhism, the Buddha first preached the Heart Sutra. It isn't difficult to imagine why the Buddha chose to spend a long time in retreat there, in a place that seems to belong more to the sky than to the earth.

And so the next day, with little



Vulture's Peak

rest for the weary, His Holiness and His party undertook the long and steep climb to Vulture's Peak. No small feat for a normal person, the challenge was met sturdily by both the younger and elder members of the group.



A challenging climb

As the top of the mountain was reached and His Holiness and Ratna Vajra Rinpoche made offerings before the small altar that

looks into the horizon, the sense of awe was overwhelming both for the sheer majestic beauty of the place and for the story that it told.



His Holiness prays at the altar on the summit



His Holiness on a previous visit to Vulture's Peak



Puja at the Boar's Grotto



After the more nimble among the group had climbed from crag to crag leaving in their trail festoons of prayer flags fluttering in the wind, the party made its way a few steps down to the Boar's Grotto to celebrate the Sixteen-Arhat puja.

According to legend, the grotto was originally dug by a boar to make it its lair. With time, the monsoon rains gradually enlarged it, until it was eventually carved further by human hands and made into an ideal meditation cave. It was here that Shariputra attained enlightenment, and here that many of the Buddha's sermons were delivered.

The following day offered an even more challenging climb, this time to the Sattapanni Cave, where the First Buddhist Council was convened by the Elder Mahakassapa soon after the

Buddha's Parinirvana in order to preserve and protect His teachings. Five hundred fully enlightened Arhats participated in the council, whose focus was placed on the preservation of the Vinaya rules established by the Buddha. All the sermons given by the Buddha were reviewed and committed to memory by those monks endowed with special mnemonic capabilities.

The climb to the Sattapanni cave is demanding enough that a litter service is available for those little inclined to physical exertion. Whatever temptation the sight of tourists leisurely being carried up and down the mountain this may have aroused among the group, it was never uttered, as its members, young and old, staunchly persevered in their uphill hike.



Another demanding climb





Puja at Sattapanni Cave

The summit was finally won, and Sattapanni Cave came into sight. Like Vulture's Peak,



A more leisurely walk down

it commands an imposing view over the vast valley below, and it is small wonder why the site had been chosen to host the First Council. At every step of the way on the Buddha's trail, a Sixteen-Arhat Puja was being celebrated, and each one had its own unique significance. And now this one was being performed where five-hundred Arhats had sat to preserve and protect the legacy that would so greatly benefit future generations.

Once the ritual was over,

the group made its way back down to the valley below, where their steadfast bus was waiting to take them to the last stop on their pilgrimage: Bodh Gaya, where the Lord Buddha gained Enlightenment.

Initially known as Uruvela, Bodh Gaya is home to the Mahabodhi Stupa, which marks the place where Gautama Buddha became enlightened under the Bodhi tree. As such, it is the most sacred destination of all for Buddhist pilgrims. It is believed that it is the navel of the earth, the last place to disappear at the end of a *kalpa*, and the first one to appear



The Diamond Throne



Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya



Ashoka's pillar at Bodh Gaya

at the emergence of a new one. It is also believed to be the ultimate Vajra Seat, where all Buddhas past, present and future attain final enlightenment.

The original stupa is said to have been built by Emperor Ashoka, who also erected one of his hallmark pillars on the site, as well as a 'diamond throne' on what he estimated was the exact spot of the Buddha's awakening. Throughout the centuries, the temple's condition echoed the ups and downs of the Buddhist faith in India, with its complete annihilation at the time of the Turkic invasion in the twelfth century and restoration to its initial splendour at the hands of the British Raj in the nineteenth.

Whatever vicissitudes the Mahabodi temple may have undergone throughout its long history, it still exudes the rarefied



Past and present: His Holiness and Ratna Vajra Rinpoche together at Mahabodhi

quality proper to sacred sites. This is presumably not only due to the Buddha's sanctification of it, but

also to the blessing that the faith, devotion and meditation that its millions of pilgrims from all over





the world have injected into it over the centuries.

His Holiness and His party spent four days in Bodh Gaya, and held the Sixteen-Arhat Puja over three consecutive days of their stay. Each day, His Holiness' arrival at the Mahabodhi complex was greeted by the familiar sound of *gyalings* as He made His way to the altar that had been prepared under the Bodhi tree and would act



His Holiness arrives at Mahabodhi

as shrine to an improvised open-air temple during His Holiness' visit.

And each day, His Holiness would cross the threshold into the inner courtyard surrounding the temple where sits what is arguably the most holy Buddha statue of all, and would make an offering of a new set of robes to the Buddha.

Each day a monk is assigned to tend to the statue and never leaves its side from dawn till

dusk. As pilgrims bring fresh robes, the monk on duty enters the glass casing that houses the precious statue and proceeds to remove the stole that drapes it, to then meticulously dress it anew with the pristine robes that have been offered. This ritual is repeated several times each day, as benefactors are rewarded with the previous set of robes worn by the statue.



His Holiness bows at the altar



His Holiness offers a new set of robes and watches as they are wrapped around the statue





Sixteen-Arhat Puja at Mahabodhi



After paying their respects to the Buddha in His inner sanctum, His Holiness and Khöndung Ratna Rinpoche would lead the monks back to the altar, and would begin the Sixteen-Arhat puja.

As the celebration went on, pilgrims would slowly begin to settle down close by and assimilate the ritual with their own practice. The common bond that brought pilgrims to this sacred place dissolved any kind of religious or





Tea was served for everyone.

cultural constriction that might have arisen, as all were embraced in a shroud of serenity and openness.

With the puja over, His Holiness and Ratna Vajra Rinpoche would once again cross the gateway into the inner courtyard and would circumambulate the

temple. As they ambled along their rounds, stopping here and there to have a closer look at a statue or at an inscription, pilgrims would instinctively stand aside and give way, in a mix of devotion and curiosity. For Tibetans whose destiny had placed them there at this auspicious moment, this

constituted a blessing that would accompany them for the rest of their lives.

And each day, as He circled the temple, His Holiness would stop at the feet of a small statue, where He would remain for some time



His Holiness circumambulates the temple



Praying at the statue



in deep prayer. This was the Tara statue that had spoken to Atisha and had instructed him to practise Bodhicitta as the most efficacious way to attain enlightenment.

Several visits were made to the inner sanctum, as an abundance of gifts were placed before the statue. Bouquets of flowers, overflowing bowls of fruit, bunches of incense sticks, sheeny khata of various colours and immaculate robes, solemnly blessed by His Holiness

during the puja, were devoutly offered to the Buddha by His Holiness and members of His family.

The party also made other visits including one to Sujata Garth, the stupa erected to honour the home of the girl who offered the Buddha a grain of rice when He decided to break His long fast. His Holiness led Mahakala pujas in a local cemetery for the benefit of the souls of those buried there and



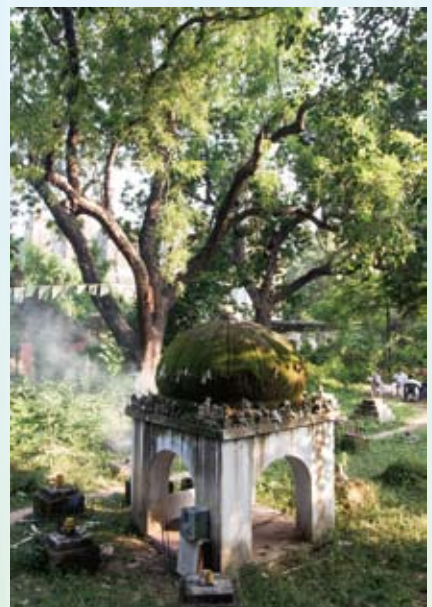
Sujata Stupa



Puja in cemetery



Puja at retreat cave



Cemetery



Retreat cave

in a cave dedicated to longterm retreatants.

On 22nd October, His Holiness and the group of monks that had formed His entourage over these extraordinary three weeks parted ways. While His Holiness and family extended their travels for an additional two days to visit Kushinagar, where the Buddha passed into Parinirvana, the rest of the group made their way back to



Dehradun, filled with indelible memories.

But on that last day, early risers who might have made their way to the temple to do their morning practice, would have been treated to a unexpected sight: sitting on their own

under the Bodhi tree, in deep meditation, were His Holiness and Ratna Vajra Rinpoche.

His Holiness, His family and each member of the group that accompanied Him during the pilgrimage, drew it to a close by dedicating with great fervour whatever merit might have been gained through it to the enlightenment of all beings.



Khenpo Title Conferment Ceremony at the Sakya Centre

On the 26th of October 2012, a ceremony was held at the Sakya Centre wherein His Holiness the Sakya Trizin conferred the title of Khenpo to Acharya Jamyang Lekshey, Acharya Chenyang Gyatso and Acharya Thupten Norbu. His Holiness also extended the title of Pönlop to Loppön Rinchen Yambay, Loppön Sherabla and Loppön Yonten Sangpo.

There was much warmth and glee among the assembly as His Holiness spoke words of commendation for each of them, describing the qualities and accomplishments that deserved them this accolade.



Three new Sakya Khenpos



Newly appointed Pönlops

Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche was also present at the ceremony, as well as Their Eminences Gyalyum Chenmo and Dagmo Kalden Sakya, who led the

congregation in making offerings of khatas, statues and flowers to the new appointees.

We add our warm and sincere wishes to these.

H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche's 83rd Birthday

The 29th of October 2012 marked the 83rd birthday of His Eminence Luding Khenchen Rinpoche.

It was celebrated at Ngor

Monastery in Manduwala, where Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche led an assembly of well-wishers in celebrating this special day with His Eminence. In attendance were

also H.E. Khangsar Shabdrung Rinpoche and H.E. Luding Shabdrung Rinpoche.

The number of decades that His Eminence has spent working

tirelessly for the good of beings everywhere haven't taken their toll on his demeanour. Although his stride is slow and prudent, his countenance has lost nothing of its fierce compassion and intelligence.

His Eminence Luding Khenchen Rinpoche is one of the most loved and respected Lamas of the Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism. Not only did he bear the full responsibility for the Sakya Ngor branch as its throneholder and abbot for nearly half a century but also, over the course of those years, he ceaselessly travelled the world giving teachings and empowerments to his numerous students abroad and personally



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche

ordained some ten thousand Sakyapa monks and nuns.

We pray that he may continue

to bear the torch of the Dharma for many more years to come.

Sakya Mönlam 2012

The 2012 Annual Sakya Mönlam prayer festival for world peace took place in Lumbini, Nepal, between the 22nd of

November and the 1st of December and was, as usual, attended by thousands of monastics and lay followers.



Many combined prayers



Many butter lamps to keep alight



And many mouths to feed



Mönlam at Tashi Rabten Ling

His Holiness the Sakya Trizin presided over the proceedings, held at the Tashi Rabten Ling Monastery, and was accompanied by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche and his family, H.E. Abhaya Vajra Rinpoche, H.E. Gyalum Chenmo and several eminent Lamas.

Over and above the 100,000 recitations of the Aspiration Prayer of Samantabhadra, the King of Prayers, that are performed each year at the Sakya Mönlam, a grand Sixteen-Arhat puja was celebrated by His Holiness and the congregation of Lamas, monks and



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche offers the universal mandala during the Tenshug ceremony held for His Holiness



His Holiness leads the Sixteen-Arhat Puja in the Mahadevi gardens



Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche and family at the Mahadevi Temple

nuns in the Mahadevi gardens of Lumbini, a few metres from the birthplace of the Buddha. With the prayer festival being held in the wake of His Holiness' pilgrimage to the holy Buddhist sites of India, this formed part of His aspiration to hold a grand Sixteen-Arhat puja in as many of these holy sites as possible.

His Holiness and a small

entourage also made a private visit to the Nigrodharama at the village of Kudan near Kapilavastu, where a residence was offered to the Buddha by a follower called Nigrodha on the occasion of the Buddha's visit after His enlightenment.

His Holiness recited prayers while members of His entourage distributed alms to the poorer among the villagers.

Again this year, two medical teams from Taiwan and Singapore were on hand to administer treatment and advice to local villagers and to the thousands of monastics who had converged on Lumbini from all parts of Nepal and India to attend the gathering.

There was a certain poetry in the fact that the year of His Holiness' historic pilgrimage of India's holy sites should end in



Free medical treatment for all who sought it

the place of the Buddha's birth, an invitation to reflect on the endless cycle of rebirth and on how we, we, by following the Enlightened One's teachings, can also transcend it.



Food and blankets are distributed in Kudan

Tara Thread Diverting Ritual for World Peace

From the 8th to the 12th of November 2012, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin presided over a five-day Tara Diverting ritual at the Sakya Centre in Rajpur, whose aim it was to promote universal peace and harmony and to pacify all obstacles to the long life and fulfillment of the noble aspirations of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and of all great Dharma holders.

Its purpose was also to appease all the disease, conflicts, disasters and calamities that affect our world and to create auspicious causes for deep happiness to embrace all the beings that inhabit it.

Dominating the entrance to the temple was an intricately woven thread structure designed to divert obstacles and negative influences, the crafting of which had been the centre of attention in the temple courtyard over the week or so preceding the celebration.

At the front of the temple, stood on a platform, were effigies representing His Holiness the Dalai Lama and His Holiness the Sakya Trizin along with the Sakya Dolma Phodrang Dhungseys, Jetsunmas and Dagmos. Throughout the five days of the ritual, the Sakya Centre monks prayed for their teachers' long life and good health, and for the success of their enlightened activities.



Tenshug for H.H. Dagchen Rinpoche



On the 6th of December, an elaborate Long-Life ceremony was held at the Sakya Centre in honour of H.H. Dagchen Rinpoche, head of the Sakya Phuntsok Phodrang that has its main monastery in Seattle, U.S.A. H.H. Dagchen Rinpoche was accompanied by his son H.E. Zaya Vajra Rinpoche and by his wife, H.E. Dagmo Kushok Sakya.

The ceremony was highlighted

by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche rendering an explanation of the mandala and Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche making an elaborate offering of the auspicious long-life symbols and substances, while His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and H.H. Dagchen Rinpoche exchanged mandala offerings and took turns to address the assembly.

H.H. Dagchen Rinpoche was also presented with mandala

offerings by H.E. Luding Khen Rinpoche and H.E. Khangsar Shabdrung Rinpoche, after which members of the Sakya Dolma Phodrang paid their respects, including H.E. Jetsunma Ngawang Tsejin Lhamo Sakya and Their Eminences Gyalyum Chenmo and Dagmo Sonam Palkyi Sakya.

This was a rare reunion of senior Khön family members, and an occasion to remember.

Tenshug for H.H. the Sakya Trizin at the Sakya Centre



Explanation of the mandala

His Holiness expressed His most sincere thanks to Kalon Pema Chhinjor and to the Central Tibetan Administration for their kind gesture, after which everyone present paid their respects to His Holiness.

On the 17th of December, Kalon Pema Chhinjor offered a Long-Life prayer ceremony for His Holiness the Sakya Trizin on behalf of the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan Administration. The Tibetan Government representative was accompanied by members of his family.

During the ceremony, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche offered an explanation of the mandala, sided by Kalon Pema Chhinjor. Also in attendance was H.E. Loden Sherab Daggyab Rinpoche, founder of the Tibet

House in Frankfurt, Germany, who was visiting Dehradun at the time.



Kalon Pema Chhinjor and H.E. Daggyab Rinpoche

Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche at Sakya Institute Manduwala



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche bestows the precious teachings

From the 10th to the 26th December 2012, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche bestowed the collection of the Lamdre Nyaakma at the Sakya Institute of Vajrayana in Manduwala.

Attending the teachings were H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche, H.E. Luding Khenpo Rinpoche and H.E. Khangsar Shabdrung who, along with two hundred monks, greeted Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche with a grand welcome ceremony.

The teachings, which find their origins with the Sakya Founding Master Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, concluded with a three-day Long-Life ceremony offered to Ratna Vajra Rinpoche by H.E. Luding Khenpo and the two abbots of the Institute.



H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche and H.E. Luding Khen Rinpoche



H.E. Khangsar Shabdrung offers the explanation of the mandala

H.E. Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter's 6th Birthday



On December 27th 2012, the Parinirvana Anniversary of Sakya Pandita, Her Eminence Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter Sakya celebrated her 6th Birthday at the Sakya Nunnery in Dekyiling, Dehradun.

A ceremony was held to mark the occasion, conducted by Jetsunma's father Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and her paternal uncle Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, and attended by most members of both Jetsunma's paternal and maternal families, as well as H.E. Khangsar Shabdrung. Jetsunma was presented with a mandala offering from H.E. Gyalyum Chenmo on behalf of the

Sakya Dolma Phodrang, among others.

Also present to offer their good wishes were all the resident nuns at the Nunnery, of which Jetsunma is eventually due to

become the spiritual head. She shows the qualities of kindness, good judgment and leadership that will serve her well when the time comes for her to assume her responsibilities.



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche thanks his daughter Jetsunma for her mandala offering

International Buddhist Sangha Conference in Patna, Bihar

On 5th January 2013, His Holiness the Dalai Lama inaugurated a three-day International Buddhist Conference at Buddha Smriti Park in Patna, Bihar, where vital issues on the future of Buddhism and its role in the global community were discussed by delegates from numerous countries and all traditions of Buddhism. Representing the Sakya Dolma Phodrang, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche was among the chief guests at the conference.

Organised by the Bodh Gaya Mahabodhi Temple Management Committee, in cooperation with the Bihar administration, the convention was attended by hundreds of scholars, religious leaders and political delegates from the world over, as well as Indian dignitaries including the Chief-Minister of Bihar Shri Nitish Kumar.

The purpose of the conclave was to bring together all the different strands of Buddhist traditions and to create an united front in addressing the problems that afflict modern society, while



His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche and Hon. Nitish Kumar at the Conference



Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche and entourage with local delegates at the Pataliputra Karuna Stupa

determining ways in which Buddhism can play a significant role in remedying them and in establishing a society based on morality, knowledge and spiritual pursuit.

The conference also highlighted the importance of

pilgrimage and of the conscientious maintenance of holy sites, many of which are threatened to disappear as a result of negligence.

Smriti Park was a well-chosen site for the conference. Not only is Patna one of the main destinations for Buddhist pilgrims, but the park

itself had been inaugurated two years earlier by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to celebrate the 2550th anniversary of the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha. The recently erected Pataliputra Karuna Stupa in the Park, named by His Holiness the Dalai Lama after the ancient seat

of King Ashoka and the Mauryan Empire that ruled India for several centuries, contains relics of the Buddha donated by six different countries, including some of the Buddha's ashes.

The gathering was reminiscent of the early councils that had

gathered to consolidate the Buddha's teachings and, hopefully, its influence will carry their same significance and set a precedent for an ongoing dialogue between the different schools of Buddhism that can make a substantial contribution to making the world a better place.

H.E. Jetsun Kushok in Frankfurt

Her Eminence Jetsun Kushok spent two days in January 2013 at the Sakya Kalden Ling centre in Frankfurt, Germany. Gabriele Piana describes his weekend in her presence:

"On 12th January, Sakya Kalden Ling in Frankfurt was privileged to receive a visit by H.E. Jetsun Kushok Chimey Luding who, over the course of the weekend granted the Green Tara, Avalokiteshvara and Vajrasattva initiations to a group of grateful students. Many people participated, relishing in the atmosphere of great peace and joy that Her Eminence's presence brought. These two days spent with her were incredibly intense and wonderful. Over and beyond bestowing these three initiations, Her Eminence explained in an extraordinarily



clear and essential way how to practise their sadhanas. Those present also had the good fortune to receive precious teachings on the importance of motivation and of

the cultivation of the enlightenment mind, as well as on purification and on the nature of mind."

A New Jetsunma is Born



On the evening of 24th January, Jetsunma Kunga Chimey Wangmo Sakya was born in Dehradun, India, the youngest child of Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and Her Eminence Dagmo Kalden Dunkyi Sakya. Her arrival to

this world was swift and without complications, and brought delight not only to her parents, but also to her grandparents, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and Her Eminence Gyalyum Chenmo, her maternal grandparents and great-

grandparents, her elder siblings and everyone at the Sakya Dolma Phodrang.

His Holiness' fourth grandchild, Jetsunma Kunga Chimey Wangmo is an exceptionally beautiful baby, and is revealing to be a true bundle of joy for her elder brother and sister, Dhungsey Akasha Vajra Rinpoche and Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter. Everything leads to believe that the new Jetsunma will follow in their footsteps in spreading joy, kindness and radiance wherever she is.

We wish Jetsunma a long and happy life.



His Holiness with His new grand-daughter



Little Jetsunma is in good hands

Gutor

This year, the week-long Gutor festival that precedes the Tibetan New Year was celebrated at the Sakya Centre between the 3rd and the 9th of February. Throughout the week,

pujas were held in the temple, conducted by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and attended by the assembly of Sakya Centre monks.

The ritual culminated on the 9th with the traditional Black Hat Dance which, this year, was performed by Lama Paljor from Monthang Monastery in Upper Mustang. Lama Paljor is one of the most experienced Vajra dancers within the Sakya school and was responsible for teaching the Sakya Centre monks how to perform the special *Cham* dance that had taken place at the centre the previous day (*see box*).



His Holiness and Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche preside over the ritual



Black Hat dancers perform the *thale*



Lama Paljor as Vajra Master



The Vajra master purifies the *linga*



Vajrakilaya's 'retinue'



A *Gharpa Sarpa* provides light entertainment



Amrita is offered to the deities



The ritual continues at the casting ground



The cleansing *Serkhyem* ritual



The effigy and its impurities are committed to the flames

CHAM DANCE AT THE SAKYA CENTRE



This year's celebration of Gutor was a very special one, as it featured a sacred '*Cham*' Dance with Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche as Vajra Master, that involved the participation of some thirty of the Sakya Centre monks.



Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche as Vajra Master

It was the first time that this ritual dance was being performed at a Sakya monastery outside of Tibet, and the monks had been taught its intricacies over the preceding weeks by Lama Paljor from Monthang Monastery in Upper Mustang, one of the most experienced Vajra dance masters in the Sakya school, Lama Paljor acted as surrogate to the Vajra Master, performing most of the ritual activities on Rinpoche's behalf.

Much like the Black Hat Dance that was to be performed the following day as a conclusion to Gutor, the *Cham* dance was conducted as a purification ritual to destroy all negativities accumulated over the past year and to clear the way for a new year to begin afresh.

The subject of the purification ritual is an effigy representing all beings bound by the *maras*. During the course of the ceremony,



Ratna Vajra Rinpoche performing the *thale*

the effigy is purified of all its obstructions and negativities, which are transferred into the *linga*, an amorphous substance laid on a triangular salver, upon which mudras and mantras are performed that eradicate the *maras'* power.

Throughout the ceremony, the Vajra Master and his assistant alternate between performing purification rituals on the effigy and the *linga* and leading the *thale*, or wrathful dance, performed by the group of monks around the courtyard designed to expel any negative forces that might linger there and obstruct the performance of the ritual.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Vajra Master's retinue gathers around him and lends its support to the extrication of the last persisting impurities from the effigy, and to the annihilation of any of the *maras'* power remaining in the *linga*. The assistant then surrenders the effigy and *linga* to the dancers, who whisk them away to be buried outside the temple precinct.



Purifying rites are performed on the effigy



The retinue gathers to annihilate all remaining impurities

The ceremony was a privilege to witness, both as a religious experience and as an historical event. Its deep significance cannot but affect the spirit of whomever is present at its performance, and it is said that whoever has the good fortune to do so is freed from rebirth in the lower realms.

On a more tangible level, the ritual was unique not only in that it was conducted by Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche but also in that it reinstated in India what had for centuries been an important practice at Sakya monasteries in Tibet, and in that it would serve as a precedent for it to become a mainstay of the annual celebration of Gutor at the Sakya Centre.

Losar at the Sakya Dolma Phodrang



This year's celebration of Losar at the Phodrang was a joyous occasion, to say the least. Not only was it enlivened by the arrival of the newest member of the Khön clan, Jetsunma Kunga Chimey Wangmo, but it was also graced by the presence of Her Eminence Jetsün Kushok and of her husband Sey Kushok, who had come to spend the festive season with Her Eminence's family.

There were smiles all around...





Guru Rinpoche Wang for the Public



On the morning of 20th February, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin bestowed a Guru Rinpoche Initiation at the Sakya Centre. Thousands of followers filled the courtyard as His Holiness conferred the two-hour long empowerment and gave an explanation of its significance.

Both Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche were there to receive the initiation, as were several eminent Lamas.

Among the thousands of devotees who attended the initiation, hundreds had travelled from different parts of India and

Nepal to be there and, over the following days, were to swell the queues of faithful that line up every morning at His Holiness' palace door to receive His blessing or seek His advice before returning to their dwellings.



Chamsig Puja at the Phodrang



Every year, a week-long Chamsig puja is held in the Sakya Dolma Phodrang shrine room in celebration of Zimara, the palace's main protector deity. This year, the ritual began on 23rd February, led by Lama Ngawang Lhundup as Vajra Master. Lama Lhundup was among the initial group of monks to do solitary practice in His Holiness' retreat centre adjacent to the Phodrang and, having completed a retreat concentrating on Zimara, he was chosen to lead the ritual. The puja culminated in a ceremony conducted by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche.

The Zimara puja is an age-old celebration, and it is customary

that other Sakya institutions and followers send offerings to be blessed during the ceremony. These occupy a substantial part of the shrine room throughout the proceedings at the end of which, imbued with blessings, they are given back as *tsok* to their respective sponsors.



Much like the Gutor ceremony, the Chamsig is a ritual of purification and its proceedings are similar to it, with the Vajra Master reciting mantras and performing



special mudras with specified ritual instruments over the *linga*, which represents all obstacles and negativities.

Also like the Gutor ceremony, the Chamsig puja involves the carrying of an effigy to the casting ground, where further rituals are performed and the effigy is committed to the flames, bringing about its complete purification.



H.E. Dungsey Akasha Vajra Rinpoche's 3rd Birthday



On the 24th of March 2013, the Parinirvana Anniversary of Drogon Chogyal Phagpa, Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche presided over a ceremony held at the Sakya Centre to celebrate the third Tibetan birthday of his son, H.E. Dhungsey Akasha Vajra Rinpoche.

His Eminence Dhungsey Akasha was presented with mandala offerings from his sister H.E. Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter Sakya on behalf of the Sakya Dolma Phodrang, as well as from H.E. Jetsun Kushok, H.E. Luding Shabdrung Rinpoche and Sakya College abbot Khenpo

Gyatso. Also in attendance were H.E. Jetsun Kushok's husband Sey Kushok, as well as Dhungsey Rinpoche's maternal great-grandparents.

Each year sees His Eminence grow and with him the promise of a great teacher gradually taking his place among the ranks of past and present Khön masters.



H.E. Jetsunma Palter Sakya makes a mandala offering to Dhungsey Rinpoche

H.E. Jetsunma Ngawang Tsejin Lhamo's 2nd Birthday



On the 1st of April 2013, Her Eminence Jetsunma Ngawang Tsejin Lhamo Sakya celebrated her 2nd Birthday at the Fundación Sakya in Spain, where His Holiness the Sakya Trizin was bestowing a series of initiations as part of His European teaching tour, accompanied by his younger son Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche.

Daughter to Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche and to H.E. Dagmo Sonam Palkyi, Her Eminence was well surrounded as she blew her two candles, as not only her paternal grandparents His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and H.E. Gyalum Chenmo, but also her maternal grandparents, Ashi Sonam Deki and Urgen Khamritshang, were joyfully there to celebrate this special day with her.

Auspiciously, the birthday celebration coincided with His Holiness' bestowal of the Tara Initiation, with whom Jetsunma appears to have a special

link. H.E. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche had commented on this when she arrived at Bir with her parents on the day of the Dakini initiation during the *Dam Ngak Dzod* empowerments given by

Khyentse Rinpoche last year.

Already at her young age, Jetsunma brings delight and radiance wherever she is and, in spite of her dainty appearance, is of a determined nature. With the celebrations over, and His Holiness having left the hall, the remaining sangha members were delighted to see Jetsunma resolutely climb onto His empty throne, resisting her mother's futile efforts to bring her down. A true Khön family member, Jetsunma instinctively seems to recognise it as her destiny to be a spiritual leader.



Jetsunma with her parents and grandparents.

Front: His Holiness, Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, Jetsunma, Mr. Urgen Khamritshang
Back: H.E. Gyalum Chenmo, H.E. Dagmo Sonam Palkyi, Mrs. Ashi Sonam Deki

Year of Water Snake

2140 Calendar of Events 2013-14

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 – (February 11th 2013 - March 2nd 2014)

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 (February 11-February 25)

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 25)

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

3. Chökhör Düchen: 6-4 (July 12)

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 24)

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.

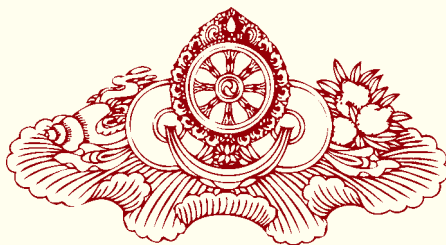
❁ NB: Lamp offerings in the monastery or food offerings to the monks are welcome during all important pujas and ceremonies. If you wish to make any offerings, please contact the Sakya Centre in Rajpur Dehradun directly (contact details on the last page)

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

Holy Days

TIBETAN	WESTERN	HOLY DAYS
1-3	Feb 13	Parinirvana Day of Dagshul Thinley Rinchen (Grand-father of H.H. the 41 st Sakya Trizin)
1-21	Mar 3	Parinirvana Day of Kunkhyen Gorampa Sonam Senge & Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo
2-8	Mar 19	Parinirvana Day of Yabje Kunga Rinchen (Father of H.H. the 41st Sakya Trizin)
2-12	Mar 24	Parinirvana Day of Jetsun Drakpa Gyaltsen & Khangsar Shabrun Ngawang Lodro Tenzin Nyingpo
2-23	Apr 3	Parinirvana Day of Khenchen Dorje Chang Jampa Jampal Sangpo
2-26	Apr 6	Parinirvana Day of Khuwo Rinpoche Kunga Gyaltsen
2-30	Apr 10	Parinirvana Day of Jamgon Loter Wangpo
3-15	Apr 25	Parinirvana Day of Phende Khenchen Ngawang Khedup Gyatso
3-18	Apr 28	Parinirvana Day of Dezhung Tulku Kunga Tenpei Nyima
3-25	May 4	Parinirvana Day of Gongkar Dorje Denpa Dzongpa Kunga Namgyal
3-29	May 8	Parinirvana Day of Gatön Ngawang Lekpa, Luding Khenchen Jamyang TUEpten Lundok Gyaltsen
4-12	May 22	Parinirvana Day of Khenchen Dhampa Dorje Chang Ngawang Lodoe Shenpen Nyingpo
4-23	Jun 1	Anniversary of Mahasiddha Virupa's attainment of the First Bhumi
4-25	Jun 3	Parinirvana Day of Ngorchen Dorje Chang Kunga Sangpo

TIBETAN	WESTERN	HOLY DAYS
5-2	Jun 10	Parinirvana Day of Sachen Kunga Lodro
5-6	Jun 14	Parinirvana Day of Khyentse Dorje Chang Jamyang Chokyi Lodro
6-20	Jun 27	Parinirvana Day of Ngawang TUEtop Wangchuk
6-29	Aug 5	Parinirvana Day of Dorje Chang Ngawang Lodro Rinchen
7-14	Aug 20	Parinirvana Day of Ngakchang Kunga Rinchen
7-15	Aug 21	Parinirvana Day of Tsarchen Losal Gyatso
7-19	Aug 24	Parinirvana Day of Ngakchang Kunga Tashi
9-14	Nov 16	Parinirvana Day of Bari Lotsawa, Khön Konchok Gyalpo & Sachen Kunga Nyingpo
9-21	Nov 23	Parinirvana Day of Ngorchen Konchok Lhundrup
10-8	Dec 10	Parinirvana Day of Munchen Konchok Gyaltsen Sempa Chenpo
11-10	Jan 10	Parinirvana Day of Jamgon Ameshab
11-11	Jan 11	Parinirvana Day of Lopon Sonam Tsemo
11-14	Jan 14	Parinirvana Day of Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen Pal Sangpo
11-22	Jan 23	Parinirvana Day of Drogön Chogyal Phagpa & Dezhung Anjam Rinpoche
11-23	Jan 24	Parinirvana Day of Khenchen Appey Rinpoche
12-4	Feb 3	Parinirvana Day of Chogyé Trichen Dorje Chang Ngawang Khyenrab Lekshey Gyaltsö



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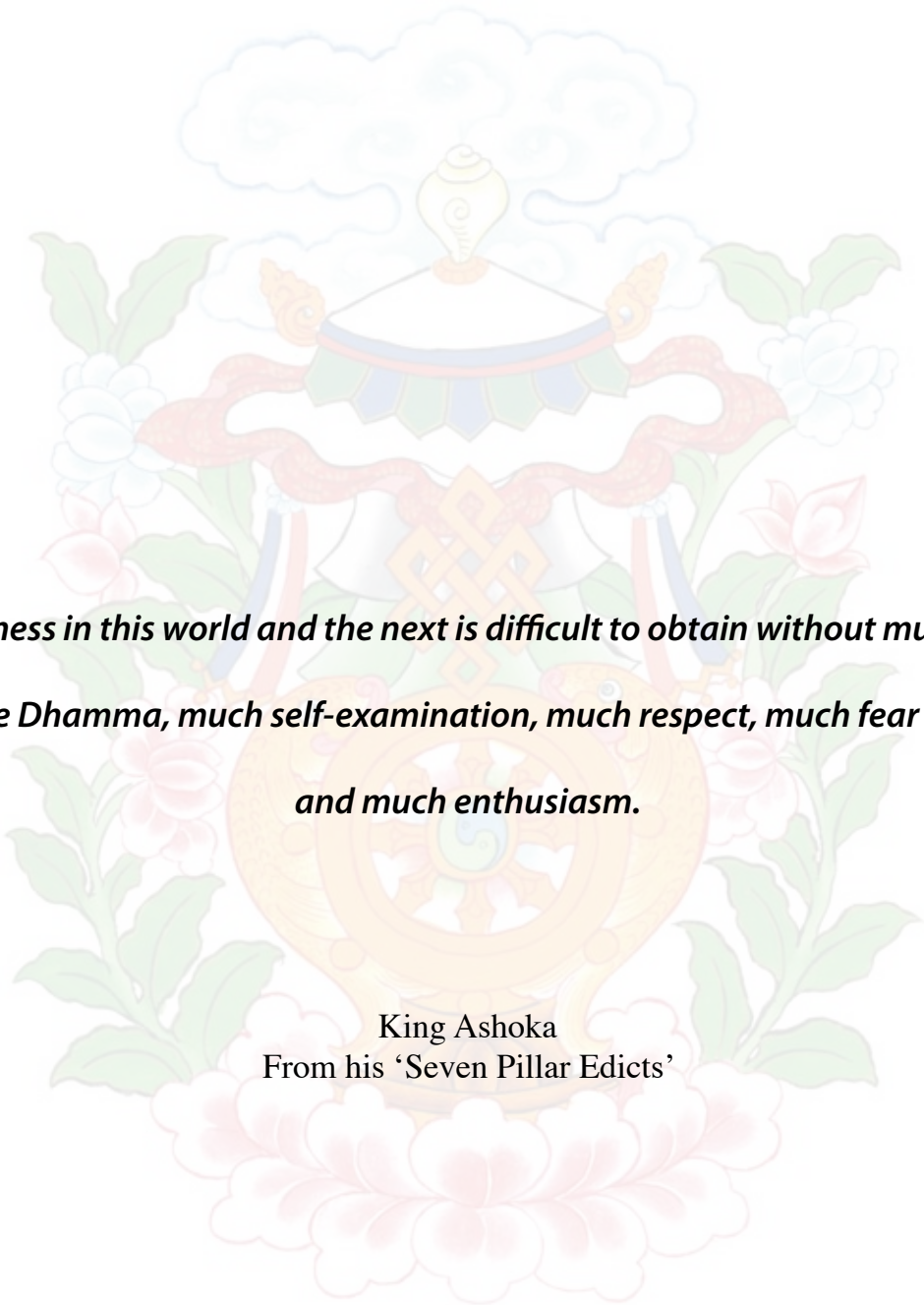
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***Happiness in this world and the next is difficult to obtain without much love
for the Dhamma, much self-examination, much respect, much fear of evil,
and much enthusiasm.***

King Ashoka
From his 'Seven Pillar Edicts'



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