

Melody of Dharma

❁ **The Beginnings of Puruwala**
An Interview with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

❁ **Looking Into the Nature of Mind**
A teaching by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

❁ **Maitreya's Semtsema**
A teaching by The Most Venerable
Khenchen Appey Rinpoche



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HIS HOLINESS THE SAKYA TRIZIN

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LOSAR

Our summer issue already! True, for many of our readers, it does come in winter. Nevertheless, wherever you are, we hope that you are well, and enjoying a fruitful life.

The time is quickly approaching when His Holiness and Their Eminences will be embarking on their respective teaching tours, with His Holiness and H.E. Gyana Vajra Rinpoche visiting North and South America, and H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche teaching in Europe. Their activities will begin in June with His Holiness bestowing the precious Lamdre in New York, accompanied by both Their Eminences, a huge privilege for those who will be able to attend.

Until then, we bring you news of our Teachers' recent activities, beginning with the celebration of Gu-Tor, the Torma-Throwing Festival that takes place annually at the Sakya Centre. At the core of this Festival was the stirring performance by H.E. Gyana Vajra Rinpoche of the deeply sacred Black Hat Dance ritual. This was followed closely by His Holiness' visit to Tsopema, the holy site where Guru Rinpoche transformed his funeral pyre into a lake. Then, over the space of two weeks, His Holiness bestowed the Vajrayogini initiation and teaching at the beautiful Rinchen Choling Sakya Nunnery in Dekyiling to an assembly of over one thousand people. And last, but certainly not least, was the celebration at the Sakya Centre of the first birthday of His Eminence Akasha Vajra Rinpoche, His Holiness' grandson.

We also bring you the second part of His Holiness' teaching on "Looking into the Nature of Mind", in which He gives an explanation of insight meditation and the method with which best to practice it. You'll also find the second part of Khenchen Appey Rinpoche's teaching on Maitreya's 'Semtsema', a revealing description of the qualities of the Buddha.

We thank you for accompanying us on our journey, and hope that you enjoy this latest issue. We always welcome your feedback, so please write in for any query, comment or information that you would like to share.

Happy reading!

The Editing Team



Sakya Thupten Namgyal Ling

The Sakya Thupten Namgyal Ling monastery in Puruwala, Himachal Pradesh, was established in 1980 by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin in order to satisfy the need for providing further education to a growing number of young Sakyapa monks with superior intellectual capacities and dedication to the study of the Buddhist doctrine. This beautiful monastery, set in Puruwala, a wooded area of Himachal Pradesh, is currently home to some eighty monks, who are engaged in the advanced study of Buddhist philosophy.

The creation of the Sakya Institute, as it is also known, was the result of over a decade of painstaking effort and patience on the part of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin, as obstacle after obstacle beleaguered its establishment. Thanks to His Holiness' hard work and perseverance, it has finally borne fruit as a haven of Dharma learning and contemplation for those monks whose moral and academic qualities make them suitable for enrolment. Monks who meet the necessary requirements are recruited from Sakya monasteries in India and Nepal. They can choose to spend seven

years at the Institute working toward a Kachupa degree, equivalent to a B.A. in Religious Studies, or they can stay on for an additional two years and obtain a Loppon degree, equivalent to an M.A.

Like their colleagues at the Sakya College in Mussoorie, the monks are trained to become the future teachers and abbots of the Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism. The curriculum is intense, with little time off. Apart from a two-and-a-half-month summer break, the monks are hard at work every day from the early morning hours until late in the evening, with only half a day off per week. The core of the curriculum is the study of the eighteen most important texts of the Sakya tradition, along with their Indian and Tibetan commentaries. Ancillary subjects are also thoroughly covered, among which are Tantric studies, ritual practice, Tibetan grammar and English language. Each year, His Eminence Ratna Vajra Rinpoche dedicates several months of his time to teaching at the Institute, and has recently concluded a teaching on the explanation of the Hevajra sadhana, days before starting on his teaching tour abroad.



The Sakya Settlement at Puruwala

The Sakya settlement at Puruwala, in the Sirmaur district of Himachal Pradesh, was founded in 1968 by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin with an aim to furnishing Tibetans who had been forced into exile with a place to live and sustain themselves.

Established as an agricultural community, it is now home to some 1500 Tibetans, mostly Sakyapas. The settlers add to their meagre earnings derived from agriculture, by the manufacture and sale of woollen handicrafts. The economic hub of the community is the craft centre, but every year, most able adults leave the settlement during the winter months to ply their trade in different parts of India. It is customary for them to return home on time to celebrate Losar, the Tibetan New Year.

The settlers are unanimously Buddhist, and

religion forms an integral part of their lives. The annual Tsewang (Long-Life empowerment) given at the neighbouring Sakya Thupten Namgyal Ling monastery by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin draws large crowds, as do the visits to the small local gumpa by His Eminence Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, where he occasionally imparts teachings and initiations.

Managed by a democratically elected assembly of representatives, the settlement is well organised, and has strong community ties. It has successfully managed to preserve the values that were brought from Tibet by its early settlers, of respect for elders, moral conduct, hard work, and resilience.



Devoted settlers awaiting His Holiness' arrival



Schoolchildren from the settlement



Lamdre at Puruwala, 1980

The Beginnings of Puruwala

(From an interview with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin)

Whenever we establish a monastery, we have to bear in mind that its monks have families, and that these also need to be looked after. This is the main purpose of starting a settlement.

And so when, in the sixties, the need arose for a monastery, we began to look for a piece of land large enough to also accommodate a settlement. At the beginning, there were a lot of difficulties in finding a suitable place. We looked everywhere, in every part of India, but couldn't find anything.

Finally, we found Puruwala. We all felt that it was a very warm place but, on the other hand, it had very fertile land, which was ideal for an agricultural settlement. After a lot of struggle, we were given funds by European Refugee Aid organisations to purchase the land and so in 1968, we bought it. But we faced

new difficulties, because we couldn't get permission from the State Government to build. We had to wait a long, long time, and it was a very difficult and anxious time for us but finally, the government gave its permission. We were very happy, and we started the settlement. By the time of its final opening, it was 1970, two years after we had bought the land.

Next, we had to find a suitable place for the monastery within the settlement. Again, we were faced with many difficulties in finding an accessible site for it, but finally, we chose the present location. The earth breaking and blessing rituals took place in 1973. It was also around this time that we built the Phodrang at Puruwala. It was only later that we built the Phodrang here at Rajpur.

The first step was to build the monks' quarters. At

that time, there were no funds at all. Money was very scarce; those were difficult times financially. In early 1977, our family had one lakh rupees (100,000), and we gave all of it to the management and told them to build as far as that amount would allow them to. It was fortuitous that we were soon to leave on a teaching tour abroad, where we could gather more funds for the temple and the monks' quarters. And so, we travelled to Asia, Europe and America, teaching and raising funds.

We were a long time abroad – we returned only in 1979. We did raise some money, and with that we managed to build the temple. The monks participated in the building effort and worked very hard, receiving no money in compensation. We had just enough money to finish it. The opening ceremony was in December.

And then the Lamdre started in January. It was Lamdre Lobshey. So they were quite close, almost at

the same time, although in different years! Chogyé Trichen Rinpoche gave the reteachings. Many people came to the Lamdre, many lamas. And when it ended, we decided to use the monastery as a College of Higher Buddhist Studies.

Our first abbot was Khenpo Rinchen, who was a famous khenpo at the time. He was also my tutor. When he passed away, Khenpo Gyatso took his place, and after him came three more khenpos. At present, Khenpo Kalsang Nyingma occupies the post, but he is currently on a sabbatical, and so the College is currently looked after by Ngawang Nyingma, the deputy khenpo.

Many, many outstanding students from Tibet, India and Nepal have graduated from the College, and are now fulfilling important roles in upholding our Sakya tradition.

As for the settlement, we also faced many difficulties in creating it. When we finally managed



Khonrig Ratna Vajra Rinpoche teaching at Sakya Thupten Namgyal Ling

to buy the land, and to secure permission to build, we held an official opening ceremony. But not long after, Thubten Tulku, General Secretary of the settlement, Sodon Niedak, head of the handicraft centre, and their driver, died in a car crash. Thubten Tulku was very capable, and ran the whole settlement; Sodon Niedak, who had been my personal attendant when I was very young, was also a very good man. The driver, an energetic young man, had just returned from Europe. So this was a great loss to the settlement. And then, there were a series of new appointees to the position of General Secretary, but for one reason or another, none of them were able to retain the post for any extended period of time.

And so the settlement had many difficulties since its creation but now, finally, it is running successfully, under the direction of a capable director, which makes us very happy.



His Holiness blessing schoolchildren from the settlement



Monks going into the temple for a teaching

Remembering Great Masters

Gorampa Sonam Senge

(1429-1489)



The 21st day of the 1st month of the Tibetan calendar (25th March) marks the anniversary of the Parinirvana of Kunkhyen Gorampa Sonam Senge.

Gorampa Sonam Senge was one of the greatest scholars in the history of the Sakya tradition. A

renowned philosopher and practitioner, he composed a number of texts throughout his life, totaling thirteen volumes. Some of Gorampa's philosophical texts were so overtly critical of the philosophy of Tsongkhapa and the Gelug sect that they were banned in central Tibet under the rule of the fifth Dalai Lama. His works continued to be studied in eastern Tibet, however, where the central government held less control. In the early twentieth century, Jamgyal Rinpoche obtained permission from the thirteenth Dalai Lama to collect and reprint Gorampa's extant texts. The texts were collected from monasteries throughout eastern Tibet, and were reprinted in Derge between 1905 and 1925. Today, Gorampa's texts are widely studied – not only within the Sakya sect, but by Nyingma and Kagyu scholars as well.

Gorampa was born in 1429 in Bom-lung-da in the Gowo region of Khams, in eastern Tibet. His father's name was Ru-tsa Zhang-kyab and his mother was Gyalwa-man. Even as a child, he was considered a great person, showing a strong affinity for the dharma, and easily mastering reading.

At the age of eight or ten, Gorampa received novice monastic vows from his teacher, Kunga Bum, and was given the name Sonam Senge. He studied a number of Madhyamaka texts and received tantric empowerments. Once, he had a powerful vision of Manjugosha, holding his sword in the air. His teachers

were impressed with his studies, and he came to be known as “Rabjampa,” a title that signifies his excellent command of scriptures.

At age nineteen, Gorampa decided to travel to central Tibet to further pursue his studies. He arrived at Nalendra monastery, where he studied briefly with the master Rongton. He developed a firm faith in his teacher and stayed at Nalendra through the summer. Unfortunately, Rongton passed away shortly thereafter.

The following year, Gorampa traveled to Lhasa, where he studied with Sangye Phel at Dreyul Monastery. He studied and quickly mastered a number of Madhyamaka, Pramana, and Abhidharma texts, and received many tantric transmissions. He was considered a learned master by all of his teachers.

At age twenty-five, Gorampa traveled to Ewam Choden monastery to study tantra with the monastery's founder, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, and at age twenty-six, he received full monastic ordination. He stayed at Ewam Choden for several years, receiving the complete Lamdre initiation twice, as well as many other tantric transmissions and instructions from a number of other teachers including Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo's successor, Muchen Konchok Gyaltsen.

At age thirty-two, Gorampa left Ewam Choden to return to Khams. On the way, he stopped at Dreyul Monastery, where he had previously studied with Sangye Phel. Upon seeing his mastery over many texts, his former teacher requested him to stay, in order to teach the younger monks. At first Gorampa declined, but he was eventually persuaded to stay and

teach. After some time, Sangye Phel temporarily left Dreyul, and Gorampa replaced him as the abbot of the institute. During this time he composed several commentaries, and taught Prajnaparamita, Pramana, Vinaya, and Abhidharma. His students excelled, and his fame spread throughout central Tibet.

After Sangye Phel returned to Dreyul, Gorampa traveled back to Ewam Choden. He continued his studies and composed a number of commentaries on tantra. Shortly after this, Gorampa founded Tanag Serling Monastery, a small institute in upper Tsang. In 1473 or 1474, Gorampa founded the monastery of Thubten Namgyal Ling. Here, he established a curriculum based on sutra and tantra, and taught a number of different subjects along with extensive commentaries.

Some time after founding Thubten Namgyal Ling, Gorampa returned to Ewam Choden to become the sixth abbot of the monastery. He remained there for four years, teaching the Lamdre system, as well as many other sutric and tantric texts. After leaving Ewam Choden, he returned to Thubten Namgyal Ling to continue to develop the monastic curriculum there.

In 1488, Gorampa traveled to Sakya to give teachings and receive offerings. On his return trip to Thubten Namgyal, he became ill, and in 1489, Gorampa passed away. His body was transported to Thubten Namgyal, where he was cremated, and his remains were enshrined. He was considered an incarnation of the great Sakya master, Drakpa Gyaltsen.

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Ms Kassor is a Ph.D. student in Emory University's Graduate Division of Religion in Atlanta, USA. She is currently in Kathmandu on a Fulbright fellowship, conducting dissertation research on Gorampa's philosophy.

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Distinguishing the View

by Gorampa Sonam Senge



The following is a selection from Gorampa's Distinguishing the View (Ita ba'i shan 'byed), his most well-known philosophical work. In this text, he outlines three different presentations of Madhyamaka, establishing the Sakya view as that which is ultimately free from the four extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither. This passage is Gorampa's general presentation of the Madhyamaka view:

The meaning of Madhyamaka is freedom from all extremes such as existence and nonexistence, and “is” and “is not.”

One must therefore abandon all grasping at extremes and all grasping at signs.

If one does not initially refute the truth of an object that is apprehended as truly existent, one will be unable to refute the later grasping at extremes.

Because of that, it is necessary to definitively set down the truthlessness of all things, both internal and external, by means of logical reasonings such as neither-one-nor-many.

Since this is the gross object of negation, as well as the main cause of samsara, the texts give extensive reasonings for negating the truth of conceived objects.

Having negated truth, however, one grasps at the very emptiness of truth, just as, for example, one riding a horse may not fall off on the right side, but falls off on the left side.

In the same way, if one has not gone beyond falling into the extreme of nihilism, that view must also be refuted.

Therefore, since grasping at things as both empty and nonempty, and neither empty nor nonempty must also be refuted, no object of grasping whatsoever is found in the four extremes.

This non-grasping is called “the realization of the Madhyamaka view.”

But, if one grasps to any one extreme and says, “this is the Madhyamaka view,” then, since one has not gone beyond grasping at extremes, conceiving things as empty, non-empty, and so on, this is not the Madhyamaka view.

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Looking Into The Nature of The Mind

(part 2)

by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

The practice of looking into the nature of the mind is called “insight meditation”. The first requirement for practising insight meditation is that we should have stable concentration. Without concentration, we cannot practise insight meditation. We first need to practise concentration so that our mind is stable, without thoughts. Then, on the basis of this, we can build our practice of insight meditation.

There are three parts to insight meditation. The first part is to recognize the clarity of the mind. First we need to analyse this clarity a little bit. According to the Buddha’s teachings, there is no self. The aggregates of physical form and mental factors, mind and feelings and so forth, all together, all this we cling to as self. We cling to it as *I*. But where is this *I*? If there is an *I*, it has to be our name, our body, or our mind. But our name is empty, it’s something that was given to us, it could have been given to anybody else, anything else. So our name is empty, it is not the *I*. We say ‘my house’; the house is not *my*, the house is not *I*. We say ‘my car’, ‘my house’; there is a link, but the house is not *myself*. Similarly, when we say ‘my body, my hands, my feet’, the *I* is somewhere else, it’s not the body. If we try to find the *I* inside, outside, anywhere, we won’t find it. It is my body, but where



is the *my* itself? We can look in our head, our hands, our heart, but the *my* itself, where is the *my* itself? You cannot find anywhere the *I* or the *my*, so where is the real owner, the real *myself*?

The *I* is not the body. Is it then the mind? But

if we look at the mind, we see that it is changing at every moment. The past mind has already gone, the future mind has yet to arise, and the present mind has itself also already gone. The present mind is changing at every moment. And yet we say '*my mind*', in the same way that we say '*my house*'. The mind itself is not mine.

Myself is something else. We say 'it is *my mind* and it is *my body*, it is *my house*, it is *my car*', but the *my* itself, where is the *my* itself? We cannot find it anywhere. The *my* itself is neither body, nor name, nor mind, it is neither outside the mind, nor is it created by anybody else. We cannot find the *my* itself, the *myself*.

And then there are the phenomena that we perceive. They appear because of our very strong propensities. There is no solid reality in the outside objects that we see, in the sounds that we hear, in the foods that we taste. All these, our life, the visions or appearances that we experience, all this is not real. It is just due to our very strong propensities that these things appear, just like in a dream. In our dreams, we see many things. When we see nice things, we feel very happy, just like in real life. We can also see very fearful things in our dreams, and wake up frightened. Similarly, this life is like a dream. Outer objects don't really exist. There are no objects, no things, no phenomena behind the forms, sounds and tastes that we experience. There is no subject.

As for the mind, if it exists, where is it? Is it inside the body, outside the body, in between the body? Which part of the body contains the mind? If there is mind, it has to have a shape. What shape does the mind have? Round or square? Even if it did exist, it would have to have a shape and a colour, our mind would have to be white, yellow, or green or blue, or any other colour. But we cannot find any colour or any shape to the mind. It is just clarity.

All these, our life, the visions or appearances that we experience, all this is not real. It is just due to our very strong propensities that these things appear, just like in a dream.

Clarity in the sense that we're not dead, or we're not unconscious. We are awake, we are alive, and there is a continuity of the mind. The clarity of the mind, the stream of the mind, continues, as we have continued from being a baby to becoming an adult, and will continue until we end this life. Also it has continued from our previous life, continues throughout this life, and will continue into our next life.

We could say that the continuity of clarity is one aspect of the mind. Each and every thing has special characteristics that distinguish it from other things. For example, the special characteristics of a flower are in that it has petals, a particular colour, a particular shape. This is what makes it a flower. It is different from other things, it is different from a microphone, or a table. Tables do not have petals, as the flower does; microphones don't have the same colour or shape as flowers do.

Similarly, the special characteristic of the mind is clarity, the continuity of clarity. We cannot say that the mind exists, nor can we say that it doesn't exist, because there is a mind. It is the mind that does everything. It is the mind that does right things, it is the mind that does wrong things. It is the stream,

the continuity of the clarity that is the special characteristic of the mind. So the first part is to recognize the clarity of the mind.

The second aspect of the mind is emptiness. We need to ask ourselves: where is this clarity? From where does it arise? Where is it going? In fact, it is emptiness, it is never arising, it is never residing, and it has no cause.

If it does reside, it has to reside inside the body, or outside the body, in between the body; it needs to have a particular shape or colour, but it does not. So the nature of the mind is void, it is emptiness. The void aspect is emptiness. Emptiness is another aspect of the mind. The nature of the mind is emptiness, and its special characteristic is clarity. Emptiness is inseparable from clarity. Clarity itself is emptiness. Emptiness itself is clarity. If you try to search for the mind, you cannot find it anywhere, in any shape, in any colour, in any part of your body, so it is emptiness. And yet there is a mind. You cannot say that there is no mind. If there is no mind, then who is it that thinks, that experiences the happiness, and the suffering?

And so you might say that mind is the combination of the two, clarity and emptiness. Clarity and emptiness are inseparable. Though clarity and emptiness seem contradictory, they are inseparable just like fire and its heat. You cannot separate fire from its heat. The fire itself is heat, the heat is the fire, they are inseparable. In the same way, clarity and emptiness are inseparable, and together they are the true nature of the mind.

The mind has three aspects. The clarity is one aspect, and emptiness is another aspect. The combination of these two aspects, their inseparability, is the true nature of the mind. And so, on the solid foundation of a very clear concentration, we try to meditate on clarity, emptiness and the combination of the two. We'll eventually find that there is no meditator, no method of meditation, no meditation itself. It is all beyond our present mental concepts; all the things that we see, all the things that we do, are at the relative level. Our mind itself is at the relative level. The relative level of the mind cannot comprehend the absolute. The absolute is away from

all extremes, for example the concept of existing and non-existing. Ordinary people do not even bother to find out what life is, why we are here, why we have to go through this life. They just take it as it is. But more intelligent people, different schools of thought, Buddhist schools, non Buddhist schools, conceive many, many different philosophies. Many different cultures and many different religions try to find out what this life is, what its

real meaning is, why we are here, how it all appeared. And they all come to different conclusions. They all have something to say: "life is like this, it is created in this way, or in that way, or the creator made it, or everything is mind, mental projections", and so on. In Buddhism, however, there is a philosophy that differs from the rest. Considered the highest school within Buddhist philosophy, Madhyamika was formulated by the great master Nagarjuna. The Lord Buddha himself, prophesied that after his mahaparinirvana, there would

The nature of the mind is emptiness, and its special characteristic is clarity. Emptiness is inseparable from clarity. Clarity itself is emptiness. Emptiness itself is clarity.

be a monk called Nagar, who would be able to explain the true philosophy, the true wisdom of the Buddha's teachings.

Nagarjuna's philosophy of Madhyamika is different from other schools, including Buddhist schools, in the sense that Nagarjuna does not offer a definition of the nature of reality. He divides reality into two aspects: the relative truth, and the absolute truth.

He describes how things are in both aspects. He looks at relative truth, where there are ordinary people, who lead an ordinary life, who experience the results of causes, who enjoy and who suffer. And then, when his very sharp reasoning examines what is this life, what are all these appearances, he differs from all the other schools in that he draws no conclusions.

For him, true reality, absolute truth, is beyond all description. It is beyond all extremes. We cannot say that anything exists or doesn't exist, or both exists and doesn't exist, or neither exists nor non-exists. All these considerations belong to ordinary reality, the relative level. On the absolute level, none of this applies. He doesn't deny the relative level, and does give

an analysis of its components. He accepts that there is interdependent origination, interdependent in the sense that everything arises due to causes and conditions. Nothing, not a single thing exists independently, without relying on causes and conditions. Each and everything must have its own causes and conditions in order to exist.

On the relative level, there is interdependent origination. If one single cause is missing, then the

object will not appear. Everything is dependent on causes and conditions. On the absolute level, there is void, emptiness. This is not meant in a nihilistic sense, but rather in the sense that it is away from all descriptions. On this level, we cannot say that things are like this, or like that; they are impossible to describe; they are beyond our current way of thinking, beyond this dualistic net that we are caught in. After meditating for a while, we begin to have an intellectual understanding of the true nature of reality and, through sustained concentration, we gradually attain more wisdom, until we eventually realise ultimate truth. And then we are completely free from all our karmic propensities and so forth. So how can this be achieved? How do we meditate to attain wisdom? This cannot happen straight away. It's

easy to say "ultimate truth is away from all extremes, it's beyond thought, and so on". But how do we actually experience this? In order to really do so, we as ordinary beings must go step by step.

The first step is that we must establish all outer appearances as mind. As we mentioned before, everything is mind. It is the mind that creates all the good things, the bad things,

happiness, suffering, everything. We must establish all outer appearances as mind. We see many quotations in the sutras and in the teachings of great masters that our current life, everything we experience, is our own mind. And how do we come to understand that our life is mind? There are many examples of how to realise this. One important example is that of the dream. In our dreams, we have many experiences and, while we're dreaming, it feels as real as this life. We can

The relative level of the mind cannot comprehend the absolute. The absolute is away from all extremes, for example the concept of existing and non-existing.

see colours, shapes, everything, and it can have an effect on our mind. If it is a happy dream, we enjoy it, and our mind is happy. Actually, there's no difference between our dreams and the life that we are living. It is we who experience the dreams, and it is we who experience this life. There is no difference between the dream and the present life. The only difference is that our normal life is influenced by very strong propensities while our dreams are not so strongly affected by them. But it's actually all the same. So the first step is to establish everything as mind.

So everything is mind, all that we see, hear, all that we taste, all that we feel, everything is mind. When our mind is happy, even if we're in the poorest of conditions, we feel happy. But if our mind is not happy, even if our circumstances are favourable, we don't feel happy. It is the mind that determines the way we feel. Similarly, a place can be a very happy place for one person, and a very unhappy one for another person. If it really exists outwardly, then it has to feel the same for everyone. If it's a happy place, then it must be so for everyone, and if it's an unhappy place, then it must also feel unhappy for everyone. But it's not that way. It feels different for everyone. Each person experiences it differently.

The second step in discovering ultimate truth is to establish all mental appearances as a magical show. Magicians use certain ingredients, or certain mantras to create a magical show, and they conjure up many

things. When we see these things, they feel as real as this life. In the same way, when the right causes and conditions all meet, mental appearances come up. If the slightest cause or condition is missing, then the mental appearance doesn't come up.

After meditating for a while, we begin to have an intellectual understanding of the true nature of reality and, through sustained concentration, we gradually attain more wisdom, until we eventually realise ultimate truth.

The third step is to establish that everything is devoid of self-nature, everything is interdependent. Due to these causes, due to these conditions, those things appear; but in reality, everything is beyond existing or non-existing.

And then we need to establish that everything is inexpressible. Things appear, we experience things, but it is impossible to describe why they appear, why we experience them. Just

like young babies when they laugh; they must have a reason to laugh, otherwise they wouldn't. And yet the reason for their laughter is indescribable.

So, to conclude, the true nature of mind has three aspects: clarity, emptiness, and the inseparability of the two. We have seen a few examples of each here, but there are many, many more. By remembering these examples and mixing them with our everyday life, we'll become more and more familiar with them, and wisdom will gradually arise in our mind. And it is through this wisdom and the merit accrued by our efforts that we achieve ultimate enlightenment.

Maitreya's Semtsema

A Teaching by The Most Venerable Khenchen Appey Rinpoche
(part 2)

Maitreya's 'Semtsema' is one of the teachings by the great Bodhisattva Maitreya that were brought down to earth from Tushita Heaven and given to Arya Asanga.

If we want to practise the Dharma, it is not necessary for us to try to learn everything. The main thing is to practise compassion. If we practise compassion, we have the foundation, the teachings, the qualities, the stages leading to Enlightenment, all in the palm of our hand. Once we practise compassion, there's not much else we need to do.

Compassion is the essence of the Dharma, but almost as important is the meditation on impermanence and death. If we fully understand the teaching on impermanence and death, we do away with all the difficulties and obstacles that arise as excuses not to practise the Dharma.

Once we begin to practise the Dharma in earnest, we come to appreciate the qualities of the Buddha, and this empowers us to gain thorough liberation from everything negative that afflicts us. 'Moksha', or thorough liberation,



is expressed in the second verse of the Semtsema: “*O Sage, you who are free from all obscurations*”. These words address the One who has gained freedom from all the obstacles, both gross and subtle, that bind beings into karma and defilements. He is the Fully Enlightened One, the Sage, the *Muni*, the Saint who has the absolute ability to remain free from all obscurations. He embodies the qualities of One who has attained thorough liberation.

The reason why we emphasise the Fully Enlightened One who is free from all obscurations, is because even though freedom, or *moksha*, is achieved by certain worldly beings, the nature of their liberation is limited. For instance, some worldly beings may be endowed with certain qualities, and may attain particular aspects of liberation, but their qualities do not free them completely from the obscuration of defilements or the obscuration of knowledge. The *sravakas* and *pratyekas*, for instance, may have become free from the obscuration of *karma* and defilements, but nevertheless, they have yet to become free from the obscuration of knowledge. On the other hand, the Fully Enlightened One is fully free from all defilements and obscurations. The verse above refers to freedom from all obscurations, which means that He is free from all obscurations, without a single exception. The Fully Enlightened One has attained thorough liberation.

There are different aspects to thorough liberation. The first two are related to the fact that the Fully Enlightened One is able to create manifestations of Himself, both visible and invisible. The first of these two is the ability of the Fully Enlightened One to create manifestations of Himself that others can actually behold – this is called ‘visible manifestation’. Here, the Enlightened One creates a manifestation of Himself that He renders visible to others. It is the miraculous manifestation of the Enlightened One

assuming physical form. Some of these manifestations may be very attractive, and some may be less so. There is a limitless array of physical forms that the Fully Enlightened One may adopt in order to assist beings and guide them out of their ignorance. This is called thorough liberation of physical manifestation.

The second aspect to thorough liberation is the manifestation of invisible forms. Here, the Enlightened One manifests Himself, but His manifestation is invisible to beings, it has no visible form. In both these cases, the manifestations are an expression of thorough liberation.

Another aspect of thorough liberation is manifestation through beauty, whereby all manifestations of the Fully Enlightened One are attractive. Ordinary objects pale in comparison with the beauty of His manifestations, and thereby cease to be attractive to beings who are exposed to them. The purpose of this thorough liberation is to destroy the attachment of beings to ordinary objects.

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Yet another form of thorough liberation is called the meditative concentration of formlessness. This meditation on formlessness is the realisation that all things are formless.

The Fully Enlightened One has also attained the thorough liberation of cessation. This refers to the

liberation from ordinary perceptions and feelings, through which phenomena manifest. By virtue of this liberation, all ordinary perceptions and feelings, all concepts, completely cease.

So, the first supreme quality of the Fully Enlightened One is immeasurability, the immeasurability of His compassion; and His second quality is freedom from all obscurations.

The third quality of the Fully Enlightened One is the dominion over all phenomena. This is a quality that surpasses all other worldly qualities. It expresses itself through the Fully Enlightened One manifesting as any phenomenon whatsoever, whether in the animate or in the inanimate world. For instance, it can express itself through beautiful features of nature and, when it does, it far surpasses in beauty any of nature's ordinary features. This quality of dominion over all phenomena can express itself through the Fully Enlightened One assuming the form of any phenomenon in the animate realm and, when it does, its quality far surpasses that of any ordinary phenomenon within this realm. This serves to induce and inspire beings onto the path.

Another way that the Fully Enlightened One guides beings through severing their attachment to ordinary phenomena, is by rendering them invisible. By making invisible the object of a being's attachment, there is no longer an object to be attached to, and so desire for it is eliminated. So turning visible forms into invisible forms is another way in which the Fully Enlightened One liberates beings.

In the same way, the Fully Enlightened One can transmute colours, shapes and textures that beings are attached to, and transform them into something far superior to anything in the ordinary realm, so that the latter ceases to be attractive and a source of attachment.

While worldly beings such as *sravakas* or *pratyekas* may be able to control or transform certain

objects in order to curtail beings' attachment to them, they cannot transmute all objects, all phenomena. For example, their abilities are limited when it comes to making visible objects invisible; on the other hand, there is no visible object whatsoever that the Fully Enlightened One cannot render invisible. There is no form that the Fully Enlightened One cannot transmute into formlessness. This is another aspect to the quality of having complete dominion over all phenomena. Only the Fully Enlightened One is endowed with this quality.

And so, the next verse, "*Homage to whose mind is liberated*", refers to the fact that the Fully Enlightened One has exhaustive meditative *samadhi*, or concentration.

All phenomena, the four elements of water, air, fire and earth, all colours, all textures, all the ingredients that produce appearances, that make the world what it is, all these are infinitely transmutable by the Enlightened One's exhaustive meditation. This means that through His *samadhi*, He can make a mountain appear out of an atom, or He can make it so that the whole world is overwhelmed with water, or with fire, or half with water and half with fire. These limitless manifestations of the transmutation of not only appearances and the four elements, but also that of space, and that of consciousness, are the domain of one who has exhaustive meditative *samadhi*.

"*You who embrace all knowable things with your knowledge*" refers to the exhaustive quality of the Fully Enlightened One according to which His knowledge encompasses all knowable phenomena. The knowledge of ordinary beings is infinitesimal in comparison to what there is to know, whereas the Fully Enlightened One is omniscient, which means that He knows absolutely everything there is to know. He is omnipresent, and all phenomena fall within His sphere of knowledge.

When the Buddha goes on His alms round, He is not there to seek alms at all. That's not His purpose. His purpose is to subdue and tame the defilements of sentient beings who might be exposed to Him. His purpose and intention is to eradicate the defilements of sentient beings.

This means that the qualities of the Buddha are such that the mere exposure of a being's senses or mind to Him, will cause this being's defilements to be naturally eradicated.

"Homage to whose mind is liberated" addresses the one whose mind is liberated from all obscurations, both gross and subtle. *Sravakas* and *pratyekas* may have become free of the gross obscurations of defilements, but they are yet to eradicate the obscuration of subtle knowledge. The Buddha, however, is one who is completely liberated from both these obscurations.

These supreme qualities are not achievable by us at the moment, however hard we may try. They belong uniquely to the domain of the One with exhaustive *samadhi*. But, through devotion and sustained practice of meditative concentration, we can eventually achieve these qualities.

Furthermore, as is expressed in the verse *"You who tame all the manifest defilements without exception"*, not only is the Enlightened One in meditative concentration devoid of defilements, but He is also able to uproot and suppress the manifest

and hidden defilements in the mind-stream of the fortunate sentient beings who become exposed to the meditative concentration of a Fully Enlightened One.

When the Buddha goes on His alms round, He is not there to seek alms at all. That's not His purpose. His purpose is to subdue and tame the defilements of sentient beings who might be exposed to Him. His purpose and intention is to eradicate the defilements of sentient beings.

This means that the qualities of the Buddha are such that the mere exposure of a being's senses or mind to Him, will cause this being's defilements to be naturally eradicated. So, a further quality of the Buddha is that, just by being who He is, the defilements of beings are uprooted by His mere presence. His presence has the natural activity of suppressing all manifest defilements in sentient beings, without exception.

This natural ability is not limited to eradicating certain defilements in certain sentient beings. There are no defilements of sentient beings whatsoever that are not eradicated by the mere presence of the Buddha. All manifest defilements of all sentient beings, without exception, are tamed by the qualities of the Buddha. Not one single sentient being is excluded from the domain of the compassion of the qualities of the Buddha through which He tames the manifest defilements, or gross defilements, of sentient beings. Furthermore, not only does the mere presence of the Buddha destroy manifest defilements, but it also destroys latent, more deeply rooted defilements. And it is for this reason that the Buddha manifests Himself to sentient beings. He sees sentient beings' defilements, and when He does, His natural tendency is compassion. All defiled sentient beings become objects of His compassion. His power is such that He is able to dispense compassion toward any suffering being, and all the defilements of those sentient beings,

however subtle they may be, are uprooted by His compassion.

When we, as ordinary beings, become exposed to someone who is angry, jealous, aggressive or abusive, we automatically dislike this person, and can even come to see him or her as an enemy. On the other hand, when the Fully Enlightened Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas become exposed to sentient beings with such characteristics or defilements, They will not see these sentient beings as enemies. All They will see are their defilements that need to be uprooted and destroyed. They will see a sentient being who needs to be cared for, to be protected from the unconscious enemy that he or she has fallen prey to.

Sentient beings wish to be free from suffering, but they don't know how this can be done. It's not that they're not interested in obtaining happiness, this actually is the very thing dearest to their hearts, but they are completely unable to do so. They wish for happiness, but they don't know what its causes are. They wish to be free from suffering, but they're ignorant of how to get there.

And so, through an act of compassion, we need to know what it is that makes sentient beings suffer. Sentient beings suffer through their own actions. Their actions are actually caused by their own unconscious defilements. Unawares to them, their defilements make them commit acts that create suffering; and so we need to discover the relationship between the suffering of beings and their actions, of their actions with their defilements, and we need to realise that defilements are caused by selfishness, by self-grasping.

When we fully realise that our own grasping is the root cause of afflictions, that afflictions cause negative actions, and that negative actions cause suffering, then we see the causal chain of the suffering of beings. We can only help sentient beings by knowing the causes of their suffering. Otherwise, however good our

intentions are, we cannot help beings.

As novice practitioners of the Dharma, the first thing we need to learn is our relationship with our defilements: what are our defilements, what is our view of them, what we consider them to be. We need to recognise our defilements as faults, as something very negative, that can only bring harm. We need to develop a kind of aversion to them, and see them as an enemy, as something that we cannot fall prey to, and that should not control us. We should try to avoid them at all costs and, if possible, try to suppress them, and never ever surrender to them. We should learn how to overcome and defeat them. As novice practitioners, this should be our primary intention and our main objective on the path. Not only should we refrain from falling prey to defilements, but we should also act as guardians, preventing them from afflicting others.

Through an act of compassion, we need to know what it is that makes sentient beings suffer.

We can aspire to obtain the same kind of qualities that *sravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* have, by making a deliberate effort to help others attain the happiness that they so desire. We can do this by fervently reciting aspiration prayers that beings may be able to experience the result that they aspire to. On the other hand, the Fully Enlightened One does not need to aspire to results or to pray for them; He has omniscient knowledge of what will be the fruit of His activities; He fully knows the interrelatedness of circumstances that come as a result of particular causes.

Another quality of the Buddha is that of spontaneous accomplishment. Other beings, like

sravakas and ordinary sentient beings, have to invest a lot of time and effort in realising their intended goals. But Buddhas don't need to plan or strive to achieve something. This is spontaneously accomplished because they have omniscience.

The next set of qualities described by the verses relate to what is called the four sets of the intelligence of discriminating awareness. Of these, the first one is the discriminative awareness of phenomena, of dharmas, of reality as it is. This refers to the knowledge of the definition of each object; if we take fire as an example of an object, we first have its actual definition – the fact that we can see fire as an object is the basis for our objectification; and then, we have its unique characteristic, in this case heat, which distinguishes the object, fire, from any other object. The Fully Enlightened One has this intelligence of discriminating awareness, of knowing the meaning and definition of each and every phenomenon, its basis, and the definitive characteristic that distinguishes it from every other object. This is what we call the intelligence of discriminative awareness that knows phenomena, their base and their definition.

Not only does the Buddha know the nature of phenomena, but He also knows how to expound it. And so the discriminative awareness of phenomena has two aspects; the first is that of knowing the true nature of *dharmas*, and the second is that of being able to explain it.

The third discriminative awareness refers to the Fully Enlightened One's knowledge of the definite etymology of words, their definite meaning. He knows all the languages of all sentient beings. He knows the names, or labels, of all phenomena. These are of two kinds: some are called 'merely labelled', which means to say that there is no particular reason why they are named as they are. Others have what we call 'inferentially accomplished meanings', where

their etymology is defined by their meaning. The name of the Buddha, for example, has inferentially accomplished meaning, in the sense that the etymology of His name is defined by the inferentially accomplished qualities with which He is endowed. And so the ability of the Buddha to know the meaning of all words and languages, their labels, and their inferential meaning, is called the etymological intelligence of discriminative awareness.

The fourth is what we call the distinctive awareness of supreme intelligence. It refers to the fearlessness of knowledge that the Buddha is endowed with. This inner power or fearlessness comes from a strong sense of confidence in knowing the meaning of a word. The Buddha has a full understanding of each and every word, and has the limitless ability to express their meaning in the most effective way possible. And He has boundless knowledge and skillful means that allow Him to explain the teachings.

So the third and the fourth attributes of distinctive awareness that the Buddha is endowed with, relate to the extraordinary intelligence and courage that provide Him with the unobstructed ability to penetratingly articulate the teachings, and to dispense them in the best way possible for them to be understood by any listener whatsoever.

So here, the author pays homage to the Buddha who is endowed with these four discriminative awarenesses. These are also within the scope of *sravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* dwelling on the ninth bhumi, or ninth stage of enlightenment. But at the highest, unsurpassable stage, the ultimate discriminative awarenesses are uniquely within the domain of the Fully Enlightened One.

Dharma Activities

His Eminence Gyana Vajra Rinpoche Vajra Master at Gu-Tor Ceremony



H.E. Gyana Vajra Rinpoche as Gu-Tor Vajra Master

It is said that if someone witnesses the Black Hat Dance being performed, their mental obscurations will be purified and their obstacles removed. When a great master renders the dance, this becomes even more true, and whoever had the good fortune to be present when His Eminence Gyana Vajra Rinpoche performed it this year, was given a fertile opportunity for deep spiritual experience.

This was the first time that His Eminence was performing the dance, and the mastery and intense fervency that characterised its rendition powerfully revealed the deeply sacred character of this yearly ritual, dedicated to the repelling of obstacles and the subduing of maras, both inner and outer.

Replete with symbolism, the Black Hat Dance is at the centre of Gu-Tor, the Vajrakilaya Torma-Throwing ceremony that is held every year on the 29th day of the 12th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar. At the core of its activity is the destruction of negativities accrued over

the past year, and the elimination of all obstacles that may present themselves, thus clearing the way for the oncoming Losar, the Tibetan New Year.

This ceremony was the culmination of a seven-day Vajrakilaya festival held at the Sakya Centre in Rajpur. It had started on the morning of the 25th of February, with His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and His Eminence Gyana Vajra Rinpoche conducting an opening puja, and had continued throughout the week, with daily rituals being held from early morning until late afternoon.

Vajrakilaya is a deity very special to the Khön family. When, in 1072, the then head of the Khön family came to the realisation that the old teachings to which the family had theretofore adhered had become corrupted, he decided that these should be abandoned. And so, it was resolved that their texts be buried and that the new Sarma teachings from India be adopted in their stead. As a result, the Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism was founded, under the leadership of Khön Konchok Gyalpo, the first Sakya Trizin.



His Holiness in Black Hat Dance costume



His Holiness and H.E. Gyana Vajra Rinpoche conducting the opening puja

But the protector deities of a few among these scriptures resisted so strongly to this verdict that the decision was taken to preserve them. Such was the case with the Vajrakilaya texts. This places them among the oldest and most important teachings extant within the Sakya lineage.

The Vajrakilaya practice usually takes one of three forms: the puja with mandala, designed to remove obstacles; the fire puja, which is used for purification; and the Torma-Throwing puja, or Gu-Tor, which serves to repel negativities and to purify.

The significance of tormas in Tibetan Buddhist rituals is substantial. Mainly made of barley flour and butter, they are given a form that is invested with particular qualities and that can be influenced by specific rituals.

In this case, two kinds of tormas were fashioned for the Gu-Tor ritual and were placed in the temple during the week of rituals. Five large ones were intended to entice and capture all negativities and obstacles that might present themselves, such as spirits or negative emotions, hindering the way to spiritual attainment or to material contentment. These would be destroyed on the last day of the ritual, at the actual Torma-Throwing ritual. On the other hand, a number of smaller tormas were made as offerings to Vajrakilaya and other deities.

The Festival came to a peak on the morning of 3rd March, with an open-air ceremony presided over by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and Their Eminences Ratna Vajra and Gyana Vajra Rinpoches. The proceedings began at nine o'clock as His Holiness and Their Eminences came down the Sakya Centre stairs, and took their places in a ceremonial marquee that had been erected in the parvis for the occasion.

The ritual opened with four black hat dancers emerging from the temple doors and making their

way to the temple courtyard, where they performed a preliminary dance, accompanied by the sound of ritual instruments, with the *dungchens* (long horns) and cymbals prevailing.

An expression of wrathful activity (*thale*), the dance consisted mainly of the performers spinning in one direction, and then in the other, in hopping movements, while swaying brightly-coloured scarves in one hand, and long wisps of black thread in the other. The religious symbolism of purification inherent in the ritual, the potency of the music, the striking hues and designs of the costumes and the way these swayed around the performers as they swirled, all this served to introduce an element of intensity that would permeate the main part of the ritual that was to follow.

As the four black hat dancers concluded their performance and disappeared into the temple, it was now the turn of His Eminence Gyana Vajra Rinpoche



Black Hat dancers in full sway

to play his part as Vajra Master. The exuberant display of motion and colour that had thus far painted the ritual was now replaced by the quiet fervour that His Eminence invested in his movements as he conducted the *serkyem* ritual. An offering to the local deities in order to pacify them and entice them to allow the ritual to progress without



His Holiness and H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche look on as H.E. Gyana Vajra Rinpoche performs the ritual



H.E. Gyana Vajra Rinpoche performing the *serkyem* ritual

hindrance, this ritual consists of a dance wherein a chalice filled with black tea is held aloft and its contents strewn in the air as a libation to the deities. This is repeated three times, as the chalice is refilled and its contents are newly offered.

With the local deities propitiated, His Eminence regained his place in the marquee alongside His Holiness and H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche. Here, His Eminence conducted a short purification ritual designed to repel further obstructing forces. As he stood on his seat, scourging the space before him in a series of wrathful gestures, the majestic allure of his costume was thrown into relief. As he extended his arms upwards, the sleeves of his *changu* (dance cloth) unfolding into wings, and the face of the deity staring wrathfully from his *torsha* (apron), His Eminence's presence became poignantly evocative of Vajrakilaya.

With all outer obstructions subdued and pacified, His Eminence made his way to the centre of the courtyard where a seat had been prepared from which, as Vajra



His Eminence in a wrathful stance

Master, he would conduct the main part of the ritual.

In front of His Eminence's seat stood a table covered with a black tablecloth, painted with the flayed corpse of a mara. Upon it lay a triangular metal platter, containing the *linga*, a mixture of substances symbolising the flesh, bones and blood of the maras. This represents all the negativities that, due to our ignorance, continually inflict themselves upon our consciousness, and need to be removed if we are to free ourselves from unfavourable conditions.

Adjacent to his Eminence's seat was another table, whereupon lay the sacred objects that he would use to conduct the ritual. Among these were seven special phurbas, called *dapus*, which were to be used to "kill" the *linga*; a vajra and bell, with which His Eminence was to perform mudras over the *linga* in order to make captive its maras; and a number of small skulls, the contents of which were to be sprinkled over the *linga* in order to dispel obstacles and ensure the Vajra Master's control over them.

Through his meditation, the Master transforms himself into the deity and, through an elaborate ritual

consisting of dance, mudras and the use of prescribed objects, he destroys and purifies all inner and outer forces, negativities and obscurations that keep beings in bondage.

As His Eminence positioned himself on his vajra seat, he entered a state of deep concentration from where he began to perform slow and intense mudras over the *linga*, first with his phurba, and then with his vajra and bell. Such was the depth of His Eminence's contemplation, that it felt as if his phurba, vajra and bell were indeed endowed with the wisdom, compassion and might of all the deities.

While the vajra and bell serve to subdue the maras, the phurba is used to "kill" them. Once the Vajra Master has "killed" the maras, he dips a finger in the *linga* and anoints his forehead with it, in order to secure their power, now transformed into enlightened qualities, while he recites prayers to liberate the maras' consciousness into the Dharmadhatu.

Then, using a small curved sword (*raja*), the Vajra Master carves the *linga* into small bits, following which he crushes the maras' "bones" with a small



His Eminence performing a mudra over the linga

hammer (*towa*). With this, the *linga* has been purified and transformed into *amrita* (nectar). It is now a suitable offering for the deities.

Vajrakilaya's retinue of two deer, two tigers and two horses next made their appearance in order to assist the Vajra Master in his work. They danced around the courtyard, sword in one hand and whip of black threads in the other, clearing the space of any remaining negative forces that might linger.

As they came to a stop, they formed a line on either side of His Eminence, while he held aloft the triangular salver now filled with *amrita*, and offered the precious substance to the deities.

As His Holiness and Their Eminences got up and withdrew, the gathering was adjourned until the afternoon. This would be mostly taken up by the casting ceremony, where effigies of the maras would

be thrown into a large bonfire, in whose flames all of the past year's negativities would be consumed and purified.

In the early afternoon, His Holiness and Their Eminences regained their seats in the marquee, and the proceedings resumed.

These began with the emergence from the temple of five *gharpa sarpas*, impish characters who provided light entertainment in the midst of an otherwise solemn occasion, as they leaped and swivelled zestfully around the courtyard, while beating hand-held drums and waving colourful scarves.

Dressed in white, with a brocade chasuble over their shoulders and a tiger apron around their waist,



His Eminence conducting the purification ritual

they wore human masks topped by a long pointed white hat, each with a flag of a different colour as its pinnacle, which bobbed to and fro as the dancers pranced across the court.

Next began the preparation for the journey to the casting ground, with five effigies of the maras being brought down the temple stairs, one tall principal one and four smaller secondary ones, and placed on tripods while awaiting their oncoming demise.

In a preamble to the procession, His Holiness and H.E. Eminence Ratna Vajra Rinpoche rose from their seats and made their way to the centre of the courtyard, where they were joined by monks

in ceremonial hats, while the Vajra Master and “Vajrakilaya’s attendants” danced full-circle around them before joining their ranks. The cortege then began to move toward the temple gates, preparing to escort the Vajra Master to the casting grounds, where he was to conduct the final part of the ritual.

Once there, members of the procession began streaming into the field as the music-playing monks joined His Holiness and H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche by the purification pyre. The Vajra Master and his ‘attendants’ then arrived, dancing full-circle around the group, as they had done earlier in the temple courtyard, before resuming their places among the others.

The surrounding mountains lent an inspiring backdrop to the ceremony, as the casting ritual started with His Eminence newly performing the *serkyem* ritual in order to appease what forces or spirits might inhabit this vacant space, and invite them to allow the ritual to proceed without obstruction.

With the local deities pacified, His Eminence continued the ritual with a vajra dance, this time wielding a bow and arrow. These are meant to clear the way for the effigies that will be thrown into the pyre, and to ensure their successful purification in the flames. The bow and arrow are also generally associated with the compassionate killing of Langdarma, the evil king who ruled Tibet in the 9th century (see box). This was followed by His Eminence flinging an ‘eight-eyed lasso’ (*urdo chimeg guthi*), considered to have protective qualities, toward the pyre.

His Eminence concluded the ritual with the recitation of special prayers, before casting the mara effigies into the pyre, one by one, ending with the main one. The pans that had contained them were



A gharpa sarpa performing his dance



His Eminence making a new *serkyem* offering

swiftly withdrawn, and placed at the opening of the pyre.

As His Eminence withdrew, the pyre was set alight, and within seconds flames roared; a loud burst of firecrackers shattered the air, and in a flurry of excitement, the crowd scampered out of the field. It is believed that in the flames are all of the past year's negativities and obstructions, and so it is considered inauspicious to look back on them.

And the procession started back to the temple. Outside the temple gates, a hole had been dug, where remains of the *linga* had been buried, and covered with the pans that had sat next to the pyre. As a closure



His Eminence points an arrow at the pyre



The flames consuming the maras

to the ritual, His Holiness, Their Eminences and an attendant monk joined hands and circled around the pans, in a ritual gesture meant to stabilise the purification work that has been carried out during the puja.

Finally, as the crowd dispersed, His Holiness and Their Eminences returned to the temple and drew the Gu-Tor festival to a close. With all of the past year's negativities purified, and all obstacles removed, the way was now clear for the new year to enter, fresh and filled with promise.

NB: In order to avoid having too large a number of words in italics, the editors have opted to limit its use to those that are less likely to be familiar to our readers.



His Holiness and Their Eminences concluding the ritual

A MEMORABLE GU-TOR

We arrived early at the temple courtyard. It was drizzling, and yet preparations were going on as if nothing. His Holiness had instructed the monks to go on with the preparations, and had said that the weather would improve on time for the ceremony.

By the time Gu-Tor started, the weather had effectively improved, and the sun was shining. His Holiness and Their Eminences sat down in the marquee, and the *chams* began with four Black Hat Dancers, who were beautiful to watch – so vibrant and colourful.

Then His Eminence Gyana Vajra Rinpoche got up to begin his dance. It was the first time that he was performing the Black Hat Dance, and all through the ritual, it was astonishing to see the grace, precision and aplomb with which he executed it – a true Khön. It was unlike any other Black Hat Dance I'd ever witnessed, it was beyond words. There's usually a certain amount of self-consciousness when a dancer performs alone in this way, but His Eminence seemed so immersed in his performance that he carried everyone with him. There was a brief but copious cloudburst while he was dancing in the morning, but he carried on, oblivious to it. Everybody was overwhelmed with emotion at watching him, not only because it was his first time, but also because he was giving a glimpse of himself as a great master.

Gu-Tor is always a special occasion – it's beautiful and it's exciting. It carries with it centuries of Tibetan spiritual and cultural tradition, and it's always a privilege to see it, but the skillfulness of His Eminence's first performance of the Black Hat Dance made this year's Gu-Tor truly memorable.

Ngawang Gatso

The Black Hat Dance

The Black Hat Dance is commonly believed to be a reenactment of the compassionate killing in 842 AD of the “demon-king” Langdarma by the Buddhist hermit Lhalung Palkyi Dorje.

A follower of the Bön religion and a staunch enemy of the Buddhist faith, Langdarma was the last king of the Tibetan empire. He is believed to have reigned around the middle of the 9th century AD, during which time he came close to annihilating Buddhism in Tibet, destroying monasteries and persecuting monastics and practitioners.

Palkyi Dorje, a hermit and devout Buddhist, despairing that the Dharma might disappear from his land, resolved to prevent this calamity by assassinating the “Demon King” Langdarma. He knew that he was taking upon himself a heavy karmic debt by ending a life but, as a bodhisattva, he was prepared to do so for the good of all. And as a bodhisattva, he was also bearing in mind the enormous amount of negative karma that Langdarma was accumulating through his negative actions, for which the latter would require aeons to atone. And so his decision to assassinate Langdarma had a dual purpose of compassion: to save the Dharma from extinction in Tibet, and to save Langdarma’s own soul.

So it was that Palkyi Dorje, wearing a reversible cloak, black on the outside and white on the inside, and riding a white horse that he had dyed black with coal, set off for Lhasa, with a bow and arrow hidden in the long, loose sleeves of his robe. Lore has it that the hermit participated in a dance festival held before the king and, feigning this to be part of his dance, pointed his arrow in the king’s direction, and shot him in the heart, killing him instantly. He swiftly fled, turned his cloak inside out and rode through a river. Both his clothes and his horse were now white, and so he managed to escape undetected.

Originally a secret practice, restricted to adepts intent on spiritual realisation, the Black Hat Dance was eventually opened to the public and became a ‘*cham*’, dances that are held in monasteries, generally performed by monks, and which mostly form part of religious festivals.

Whether this story is true to fact or not, the Black Hat Dance symbolises the killing of evil forces by a holy one who is black (wrathful) outside, but white (pure) inside. The dance has at its core the same element of compassion that drove Lhalung Palkyi Dorje to kill Langdarma; once the Vajra Master has destroyed the maras, he swiftly liberates their spirit into the Dharmadhatu.

H.H. the Sakya Trizin Visits Tso Pema



Nyingma Monastery

On March 12th, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and His wife, Her Eminence Gyalum Chenmo, left Dehradun with their entourage for the holy lake of Tso Pema, in the Himachal Pradesh district of Mandi.

According to legend, Tso Pema, or 'Lotus Lake', was miraculously created by Guru Rinpoche, also known as Guru Padmasambhava, the Mahasiddha whom Tibetan Buddhists look upon as the Second Buddha (see box). Tso Pema is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Tibetan Buddhists; it boasts several monasteries, and the hills surrounding its shores are dotted with caves and houses where dedicated practitioners live in retreat, some during

decades. Also known as Rewalsar, the lake is sacred not only to Buddhists, but also to Hindus and Sikhs.

His Holiness was visiting Tso Pema in answer to an invitation extended by the Guru Padmasambhava Mandi Committee. His Holiness arrived on the morning of the 13th, His path to the hosting monastery lined with the hundreds of devotees who had come to greet Him.



His Holiness arriving at the Nyingma Monastery



Welcome ceremony for His Holiness in the temple

After a welcome ceremony in the monastery temple, and a pause for lunch, His Holiness and Gyalyum Chenmo paid a visit to the 'Guru Rinpoche Cave', named this way because Padmasambhava is said to have spent time in meditation there.

His Holiness, accompanied by a small group of followers, then undertook the steep climb leading to another monastery, that of Lama Ngawang Jinpa.

Still very much in progress, the monastery has seen its construction hampered by a series of obstacles, but is finally nearing completion.

The next day, after conducting an early morning puja at the Nyingma monastery, His Holiness held a blessing ceremony at the Guru Rinpoche statue, erected on the lakeside by Lama Wangdor and Khenpo Sonam Tashi.

Made possible by contributions from thousands of devotees across the world, this impressive statue was built almost entirely by hand by local workers, with



In Lama Ngawang Jinpa's monastery



H.E. Gyalyum Chenmo offering a khata in Guru Rinpoche's cave

the collaboration of accomplished artists from Bhutan and Nepal.

That afternoon, under the auspices of the Tso Pema Nyingma Monastery, His Holiness bestowed the Vajrapani-Hayagriva-Garuda Initiation, as well as the Long-Life Initiation of Mahasiddhi Thangtong Gyalpo to a crowd of some 6000 followers. Due to the large number of people attending, the ceremony was held in the open air, next to the lake. After it ended, His Holiness spent the remaining hours of the afternoon tending to each one of the thousands of devotees who stood in line to receive His



His Holiness blessing the Guru Rinpoche statue



Guru Rinpoche ritual



Initiations on the lakeside



His Holiness performing a blessing at the Zangdok Palri Monastery



His Holiness signing a tangkha at the Drikong Kagyu monastery



Lake Tso Pema

blessing.

On the last morning of His visit, His Holiness attended a ritual featuring the Vajra Dance of Guru Rinpoche and His Eight Manifestations. This ritual belongs to the tradition of the Revealed Treasures (*termas*) of Guru Rinpoche, and represents the different aspects that He assumed during His life on earth.

The final part of the visit was dedicated to the consecration by His Holiness of two monasteries under construction, beginning with that of a Nyingmapa monastery being built by Ringu Tulku, and followed by that of a Drikung Kagyu monastery, a project undertaken by Ontul Rinpoche.

His Holiness concluded His Tso Pema visit with a circumambulation of the lake, offering a khata to its waters, before starting His journey back to Dehradun the following morning.

The Legend of Mandarava

as told by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

King Shastradhara of Zahor ruled over a very large kingdom. He and his Queen had only one child, Princess Mandarava. She was an exemplary daughter, and her parents adored her. She was kind, beautiful, well-behaved, educated and very religious. So many were her qualities that many kings kept asking for her hand. But the King and Queen could not decide on whom to offer their daughter to, because if they chose one king, then the other kings would become angry. And so they asked the Princess which one she would prefer, but she answered that she refused to marry. She said that samsaric life was miserable, full of suffering, and that she wished to renounce the world, become a nun, and devote her full time to spiritual practice. And so she retired to a cave.

Some time later, Guru Rinpoche miraculously appeared in Mandarava's cave, and gave her many teachings. Some shepherds suspected that someone was visiting her, and so they listened and heard a man's voice. They became more suspicious, and informed the Queen. But she said: "No, that's impossible. My daughter is very well behaved and she wishes to devote her full time to religious practice, so she would never do that." And the Queen herself went to listen outside the cave, and she too heard a man's voice. She was very upset, and informed the King. The King became very angry, as he had tried so hard to arrange a good marriage for the Princess, and now she was with this strange man. The King sent many guards to catch Guru Rinpoche, and so he was made prisoner and tied in chains. Mandarava was also made captive, and was cast on a bed of thorns in a very steep pit, and condemned to stay there for twenty five years.

The King then ordered for a large quantity of wood and oil to be brought. A huge pyre was made with the wood, and Guru Rinpoche was placed on it. Then the oil was poured on the wood, and it was set alight.

There was a huge blaze, and it went on burning for a whole week, with the whole place filled with thick black smoke. When the fire finally died out at the end of the week, the King went to visit the site. He discovered that all the oil had turned into a lake, and all the wood had been transformed into a lotus. And on the lotus sat Guru Rinpoche together with his consort Mandarava, both of them looking beautiful, young and radiant.

The King was very repentant, and made many offerings to Guru Rinpoche, who took Mandarava as one of his main consorts. It was soon after this that Guru Rinpoche went to Tibet to spread the Dharma.

H.H. the Sakya Trizin bestows the Vajrayogi Initiation and Teaching

On the 27th of March, His Holiness began a two-week bestowal of Vajrayogini initiation and teachings at the beautiful Rinchen Choling Sakya Nunnery in Dekyiling, a short distance from His Holiness' Sakya Dolma Phodrang.

Attending the teachings were H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and H.E. Abhaya Rinpoche, as well as Tulku Tsewang Rinpoche, who has remarkably completed over twenty-five years of Vajrayogini retreat. Nearly nine hundred Sakya monks



participated, including Rinpoches and khenpos from most Sakya institutes and monasteries in India and Nepal. Adding to their numbers, were some two hundred lay Tibetan people who had come from near and far to receive these exceptional teachings.

This most special of occasions swelled by over five-fold the numbers of the 200 resident nuns, who were perfect hostesses to the event. Their organisation was flawless, and their generosity awe-inspiring, as they not only shared their facilities with their guests, but also took on the gargantuan task of offering lunch, tea and dinner to all the participants.

Vajrayogini is considered to be the highest of all tantric deities, and innumerable masters have reached realisation through her practice, particularly in the Sakya school. There are three different traditions of Vajrayogini tantra; the one that His Holiness bestowed on this occasion belongs to the Naro-Khachöd tradition, and was transmitted by Vajrayogini herself directly to the great master Naropa. He, in turn,



H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche receives the initiation from His Holiness

passed it on to his two main disciples, the Nepalese Phamthing brothers. Several years later, the great translator Mal Lotsawa, brought it to Tibet as part of the Chakrasamvara Tantra, and gave its transmission to Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, the first Sakya founding father. Along with that of Hevajra, Vajrayogini has become the foremost practice of the Sakya tradition, and forms an integral part of its collection of the Thirteen Golden Dharmas. Vajrayogini is relatively simple to practice, and even its full-length sadhana is quite short. But its body mandala and its completion stage are astoundingly profound, in particular its “Beyond Thought” meditation, which has both a common and an uncommon version.

The first two days of the gathering were dedicated to the initiation and teachings of Chakrasamvara, Vajrayogini’s consort. Over the following four days, His Holiness conferred the Vajrayogini initiation on well over a thousand disciples, who had been divided into groups of twenty-five, which meant that His Holiness saw Himself performing the rite an astonishing number of times over those four days.

Then began a regular programme with His



H.H. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, H.E. Abaya Rinpoche, H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche, H.E. Luding Khen Rinpoche and Chiwang Tulku receiving the teachings from His Holiness

Holiness teaching the entire assembly in the morning. These morning teachings were conducted in Tibetan, but the few foreigners who were fortunate enough to be there were elated to discover that not only was there to be a translation into English and Chinese, kindly provided by Acharya Lama Jamyang Lekshey and Pula Rinpoche respectively, but also that His Holiness had granted to do the afternoon reteachings in English, while His Eminence Ratna Vajra Rinpoche would do the revision in Tibetan for the monks and nuns who made up the major part of the assembly.

The morning teachings were conducted in the main temple; in the afternoons Tibetan speakers once again met in the main hall for the revision with H.E. Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, whilst His Holiness gave



His Holiness giving the revision in the Tara shrine



Many guests for the nuns

the reteaching in English in the glass Green Tara shrine on the roof of the main shrine hall. The small congregation considered themselves hugely privileged to receive these extraordinary teachings from this greatest of masters in such select surroundings.

The teachings are divided into stages, consisting of the Chakrasamvara initiation, the Vajrayogini initiation, the Eleven-Yoga instructions, the Body Mandala, and the transmission of the Uncommon Meditation Beyond Thought. Participants were given a choice as to the level of the teachings they wished to receive. It is most auspicious that 680 participants chose to receive the body mandala, which is given to only three people at a time. It carries a commitment to do a basic three-month Vajrayogini retreat within three years, with the recitation of 40,000 mantras. It is even more auspicious that 600 members opted to receive

the “Uncommon Beyond Thought” transmission, which is given privately to only one person at a time, and entails a commitment to the recitation of 3,700,000 mantras during one’s lifetime.

The Vajrayogini mantra is said to invoke all the Buddhas and Dakinis, and so, notwithstanding the strain that the bestowal of these transmissions placed on His Holiness’ time and energy, the combined recitations of those who received its transmission from His Holiness will benefit the Dharma, and all sentient beings, enormously. Furthermore, it is most propitious for the preservation of the Dharma that so many monastics should have had the blessing not only of receiving these unique teachings from His Holiness the Sakya Trizin, but also to be led through their revision by His Eminence Ratna Vajra Rinpoche.



The hundreds of monastics receiving the precious teachings

Celebration of H.E. Akasha Rinpoche's First Birthday



His Eminence Luding Khenchen Rinpoche offering Dungsey Akasha a mandala

On the 14th of April, the Sakya Centre was host to a most joyful occasion: the celebration of His Eminence Akasha Vajra Rinpoche's first birthday.

Born on the 27th of March of last year to His Eminence Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and to Her Eminence Dagmo Kushok Kalden Dunkyi, His Eminence is His Holiness the Sakya Trizin's first grandson, and the youngest member of the Khön family. With its origins in a celestial realm called Abhasvara, or Realm of the Gods of Clear Light, the Khön family has produced generation after generation of great bodhisattvas, emanations of Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani. If one is to judge by the young Dungsey's inquisitive nature, gentle disposition and penetrating gaze, he could very well take his place among these exceptional beings.

His birth took place on the twelfth day of the second Tibetan lunar month, anniversary of the parinirvana of Jetsun Dragpa Gyaltsen, third of the Five Great Founding Fathers of the Sakya Lineage. This day actually fell on the 15th of April of this year, but according to Tibetan astrology, the 14th was determined to be more auspicious for the celebration.

As a preamble to the main ceremony, a three-day Jimala puja had been held on the 11th in the

Phodrang shrine-room; as its main protector deity, Jimala is very special to the Phodrang and held in great reverence by members of the household. And early on the morning of the 13th, a Chong Sang (birthday incense) puja was held in the Family's private quarters of the Phodrang.

On the morning of the 14th, the Sakya Centre saw its temple filled to capacity with monks and nuns from surrounding Sakya monasteries, and its courtyard replete with residents from the neighbouring Tibetan settlements, all of whom had come to share in the happy event.

The ceremony centered on a Three-Yidam Long-Life puja, an invocation to the Long-Life Buddha, White Tara and Ushnija Vijaya to grant His Eminence a long and fruitful life. It was His Eminence's first



Family members gathered to celebrate with His Eminence

official function at the Sakya Centre, and he acquitted himself masterfully of his role as a Sakya lineage holder. Sat on his father's throne, and donning the ceremonial hat that had been worn by His Holiness on His own throne as a child, Dungsey Akasha seemed



His Eminence wearing His Holiness' ceremonial hat

very much in his own element, unruffled by all the attention that was being lavished upon him.

Considering his tender age, His Eminence demonstrated remarkable forbearance throughout the lengthy proceedings, and a natural ease in his handling of the vajra and bell which, as he grows into a master, will gradually become essential instruments of his activity.

It was auspicious that His Eminence was accompanied not only by his paternal grandparents, His Holiness the Sakya Trizin and Her Eminence Gyalyum Chenmo, but also by his maternal grandparents, Lhundup Topden and Yangdol Tsatulsang, as well as his maternal great grandparents, Rinchen and Tseyang Sadutshang. Also present was Rinpoche's elder sister, Her Eminence Jetsun Kunga Trinley Palter Sakya. The family was joined by H.E.



His Eminence wielding his vajra and bell

Luding Khenchen Rinpoche and H.E. Luding Khen Rinpoche, who had come from Ngor Monastery to present His Eminence with their auspicious greetings.

The celebration concluded with offerings being proffered on His Eminence, the first of which was on behalf of Ngor Monastery, with an elaborate mandala-offering ritual conducted by His Eminence Luding Khen Rinpoche, followed by a shorter offering extended by His Eminence Luding Khenchen Rinpoche. It was then the turn of Rinpoche's sister Jetsunma to present the young Dungsey with a mandala, this time on behalf of Sakya Dolma Phodrang.

Following this, the numerous tulkus, khenpos and high lamas in attendance offered His Eminence a series of long-life mandalas and symbols of enlightened body, speech and mind. And then a long line formed in the centre aisle, as devotees awaited their turn to present their respects and gifts to the young Rinpoche. It was very touching to see that so many children had come to pay homage to the master alongside whom they would grow up, and eventually

look to as their principal Guru.

The ceremony ended around noon, as His Eminence left the temple with his Family, and regained the calm of the Phodrang, where he would enjoy a well-deserved rest.

On the 17th of April, a three-day Lhamo Puchima puja was held in the Phodrang shrine. White in colour, with one face, and two arms carrying a small child, this deity was venerated in Tibet as the protector of children, and a monthly ritual was traditionally held in her honour. Her practice had disappeared with the Tibetan diaspora, and this was the first time in over fifty years that it was being celebrated. It was dedicated not only to Dungsey Akasha's well-being, but also to that of his sister Jetsunma, and of all children everywhere.

We wish His Eminence Akasha Vajra Rinpoche a long and auspicious life. May he be blessed to benefit countless beings.



Sakya Centre representatives with their offerings for His Eminence

CHÖTRUL DÜCHEN



From March 5th to the 19th, took place the celebration of Chötrul Düchen, one of the four festivals commemorating the great deeds of the Buddha.

Also known as Chonga Choepa, or Butterlamp Festival, Chötrul Düchen celebrates the Buddha's display of miracles for fifteen days in order to bolster the devotion and multiply the merits of His current and future disciples. In the Tibetan calendar, it occurs on the full moon (fifteenth day) of the first month, called Bungyur Dawa, and so closely follows Losar.

It observes the day when the Lord Buddha, being challenged by the leaders of India's six major philosophical schools, resolved that the best way to defeat His opponents and to prove the power of the Middle Way, was to perform a different miracle every day in front of a large gathering at Sravasti, thus demonstrating the degree of His realisation to all.

It is said that, during this time, positive and negative actions are multiplied 10 million times, and so Tibetan Buddhists exert themselves in reciting mantras, performing pujas and good works, and making offerings.

Annual Grand Pujas at the Sakya Centre (JUL-AUG-SEPT)

- **Wrathful Guru Rinpoche Puja:** 10th of the 5th lunar month for one day
- **Annual Grand Vajrakilaya Puja:** 11th of the 7th lunar month for eleven days

Great Festival

- **Chokkor Düchen:** 4th day of the 6th month (3rd August)
The day the Lord Buddha turned the first Wheel of Dharma in Sarnath.

Important Dates

- **July 3rd:** Parinirvana of Sachen Kunga Lodrö
- **July 6th:** Parinirvana of Khyentse Dorje Chang Jamyang Chokyi Lodrö
- **July 5th:** Western Birthday of Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche
- **July 6th:** Western Birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama
- **July 10th:** Tibetan Birthday of Khöndung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche
- **Aug 18th:** Parinirvana of Ngawang Thutop Wangchuk
- **Aug 28th:** Parinirvana of Dorje Chang Ngawang Lodrö Rinchen
- **Sept 7th:** Western Birthday of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin
- **Sept 11th:** Parinirvana of Ngakchang Kunga Rinchen
- **Sept 12th:** Parinirvana of Tsarchen Losal Gyatso
- **Sept 16th:** Parinirvana of Ngakchang Kunga Tashi
- **Sept 28th:** Tibetan Birthday of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

✿ Lamp offerings in the monastery and food offerings to the lamas are welcome during all important pujas and ceremonies. Kindly contact the Sakya Centre in Rajpur if you wish to make an offering (see contact addresses on sponsorship page).

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The Absolute is not an object of the mind

It is beyond mind

It cannot be understood by the mind

It is incomprehensible

Shantideva



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