

GURU DEVOTION AND THE SOUND OF EMPTINESS:  
MEETING GARCHEN RINPOCHE, HIS QUALITIES, ACTIVITIES AND Q & A ON VAJRAYANA PRACTICE  
Teaching by Drupon Rinchen Dorje Rinpoche



Transcribed and edited by Adele Tomlin

## INTRODUCTION

Here is a transcript of a teaching that Drikung Kagyu master, Drupon Rinchen Dorje Rinpoche gave in December 2020<sup>1</sup> on how he met Garchen Rinpoche and the reasons for his devotion to him, followed by answers to some questions on Vajrayana practice<sup>2</sup>.

In this teaching, Drupon Rinpoche, originally from Tana monastery in Tibet, describes not only his initial interest and spontaneous devotion for Garchen Rinpoche but also how his incredible and unique instructions and vast love and compassion inspired that even more. How despite his high status as a reincarnate teacher, Garchen Rinpoche would walk around the Bodh Gaya stupa alone like an ordinary person without fanfare or ceremony. In addition, Drupon Rinpoche explains how before Pachung Rinpoche (grub dbang dpa' chung, 1901-1988), the lineage holder of Drikung Kagyu passed away, as HH Chetsang Rinpoche was unable to receive it due to not being in Tibet, Garchen Rinpoche was asked to receive all the Drikung Kagyu empowerments and transmissions from Pachung Rinpoche, after which, he passed away:

"The reason for mentioning all of that is because in the entire lineage that is the reason why Garchen Rinpoche is considered to be so precious and important. He was the one who received and was entrusted with the entire lineage and all the empowerments and the instructions and so on. In any case, that was a time when I have not yet met him personally myself."

Despite the importance of Pachung Rinpoche to the continuation of the Drikung Kagyu lineage, I was surprisingly unable to find any biography or photos of him online. However, Drupon Rinpoche kindly provided some on request, which I have published here.

Drupon also explained how one of the heads of the Drikung Kagyu lineage, HH Chetsang Rinpoche told everyone in an assembly 'that it is so difficult to meet somebody like Garchen Rinpoche, you don't even know how fortunate you are' and he cried. Actually, that is very unusual for Chetsang Rinpoche and even his own monks were really surprised by that. They said they have actually never seen him cry like that before.

I recently received the Vajravarahi and Chakrasamvara empowerments from Drupon Dorje Rinpoche as well as the Chod Kusali Tsog Sog empowerment and transmission, see Sources below. In fact, during the online Chakrasamvara empowerment, which took place after the Vajrayogini empowerment, I was amazed and happy to see Garchen Rinpoche himself took the empowerment from Drupon Rinchen Dorje (see screenshot photo below). I have never seen a more senior incarnate teacher take an empowerment from a student like that before. It was a moving and remarkable moment and again

revealed not only the incredible humility and love of Garchen Rinpoche but also the qualities and siddhis of Drupon Rinchen Dorje too.



### **Drupon Rinchen Dorje Rinpoche (1965-)**



Drupon Rinpoche is currently one of the main teachers and three year retreat master for Garchen Buddhist Institute. He is also the spiritual director of the Dharma centre, Ratna Shri in Chicago, USA. In terms of the background, Drupon Rinpoche is from Tibet:

Having great altruistic motivation from early childhood, Drupon Rinchen Dorje Rinpoche entered Tana Monastery in Tibet in 1984, where the numerous teachings he received included the Fivefold Path of Mahamudra and Chakrasamvara according to Drilbupa. In 1993 he went to India, where in exile he joined the Drikung Kagyu Institute and received extensive instruction in Buddhist philosophy. He subsequently

accomplished the ngondro practices of Mahamudra and the grand mantra recitation of Chakrasamvara and was initiated into the Profound Path of the Six Yogas of Naropa. Drupon Rinpoche has completed six years of retreat, in Almora, India, and Lapchi, Nepal, the latter being one of Milarepa's preferred retreat sites<sup>3</sup>.



Tana Monastery, Tibet



Guru devotion (for a qualified guru) is seen as an essential part of the Vajrayana path, without which progress will not be made. In fact, many teachers have said that it is the path. Recently, HE 8<sup>th</sup> Garchen Rinpoche gave a whole set of teachings on his own Gurus (transcripts of Parts 1-4 of those teachings are [here](#)<sup>4</sup>). In these teachings, Garchen Rinpoche himself explained how one of his own main teachers, the remarkable Dzogchen master, Khenpo Munsel, emphasized the importance of guru devotion in his teachings. May we all meet authentic gurus who inspire us with authentic devotion!

Written and transcribed by Adele Tomlin, 21<sup>st</sup> December 2021.



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“I was asked to tell some stories regarding my connection to Garchen Rinpoche and my devotion to him. We cultivate devotion to the guru and it begins with a faith that is like an inspiration, and then it becomes longing and then it becomes trust. That is also kind of how it evolved for me. When I first encountered Garchen, I didn't really actually meet him, I was sitting quite far away in an assembly hall. However, even before that, when I just heard about him for the first time, I was actually still in Tibet and the Chinese cultural revolution had happened. There were not a lot of history books or texts available, and it was hard to really know which lama belongs to which lineage and so on.

**Buying his photo in Drikung Terdrom, Tibet**



Anyway, as there was not much information available in general, it was around 1990, when I went to Drikung Thil, which is a place close to Lhasa, where there were other lamas such as Kyabgon Chungtsang Rinpoche and Pachung Rinpoche. So I went through Drikung Terdrom (a village which is close by) and I went into a Dharma shop. There were different pictures of various lamas, some of whom I recognized and some whom I didn't. There was an image of HH Chungtsang Rinpoche, and also of Pachung Rinpoche and there was also a picture of Garchen Rinpoche. At that time, I didn't even know who Garchen Rinpoche was, so this image caught my eye and I thought 'this lama looks quite special', I asked the merchant who the lama was and he told me it was Garchen Rinpoche. At that time, such photos of lamas were quite rare. Out of all the pictures, that is the one that I wanted to buy, that one picture, so I bought that picture of him. I didn't actually know who that is but I just thought of buying it. I was a little bit young at that time and I didn't know so much about everything. Anyway, in the photo, Rinpoche looked a little thinner than normal. I didn't recognize him, I just thought this must be a really precious lama. So I got this picture and it actually still exists, but it is in back in Tibet.

**Garchen Rinpoche receives entire Drikung Kagyu transmissions from Drubwang Pachung Rinpoche, Drikung Kagyu lineage holder**



Drubwang Pachung Rinpoche (1901-1988)

When Pachung Rinpoche, who was the lineage holder, was very old and was not going to live for much longer. Garchen Rinpoche was traveling in Tibet to Pemako, in an area called Kongpo where he stayed. He was on his way to Pemako to meet his mother. From Nangchen, where Rinpoche came from, there are basically two roads, one that goes to Lhasa and one that doesn't go there. The road to Lhasa was blocked and also there was a flooding, so there was not really a road and it was not permissible to travel on it. At that time, Rinpoche ran into some monks who told him about Pachung Rinpoche but actually there was not really anywhere to go because Drikung Thil, goes through Lhasa but Rinpoche was able to pass through the road in order to meet Pachung Rinpoche. He went there and at that time he was really close to death but he didn't die then. In fact, he intended to die some years before, but HH Chungtsang Rinpoche had supplicated him to stay, so he stayed another three years.

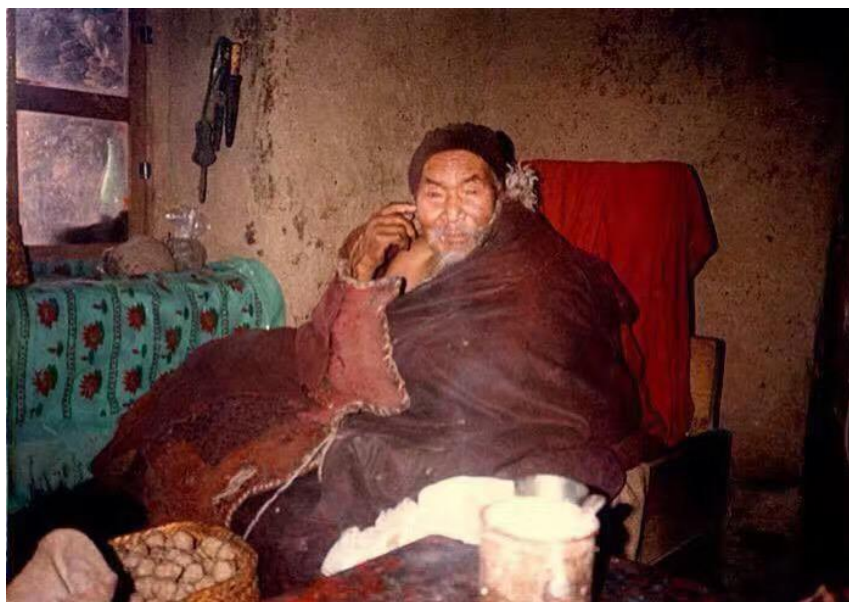
Garchen Rinpoche then came to see Pachung Rinpoche at Drikung Thil monastery and told him that now is the time to transmit all the empowerments, instructions and transmissions of the Drikung Kagyu. Pachung Rinpoche who is the lineage holder had originally intended to transmit that whole Drikung lineage to HH Chetsang Rinpoche but he wasn't able to go to Tibet. Therefore, Chetsang Rinpoche assigned Garchen Rinpoche to be the lineage holder, the one who is in charge of the lineage's teachings

and Pachung Rinpoche gave him the entire lineage in the form of mind transference. It was basically transferred from within a state of mahamudra. That is how Garchen Rinpoche met Pachung Rinpoche.



Drubwang Pachung Rinpoche with 8<sup>th</sup> Garchen Rinpoche

**Garchen Rinpoche requested by HH Chungtsang Rinpoche to act as vajra master for Drubwang Pachung Rinpoche's funeral**



Drubwang Pachung Rinpoche

Photos courtesy of Drupon Rinchen Dorje Rinpoche

After that Rinpoche left, and then soon afterwards, Pachung Rinpoche passed away. At that time, Garchen Rinpoche was in Lhasa and about to go back to Nangchen. He had already ordered the car and it was already there to pick him up and bring him back to Nangchen. However, as Pachung Rinpoche had passed away, HH Chungtsang Rinpoche had tried to contact Garchen Rinpoche to serve as the vajra master for the funeral ceremonies. So, he sent a few monks but in those days it was not easy to find somebody, there were no telephones. So they were looking for him and they asked around and in a shop and those monks said 'yes we are Gar monastery monks'. Then they brought him to Garchen Rinpoche and actually his car was already there, but because Chungtsang Rinpoche had asked him to be the vajra master to preside over those ceremonies, he cancelled the car in order to follow these instructions and did not go to Nangchen after all. So Garchen Rinpoche went to the funeral services for Pachung Rinpoche where he acted as the vajra master.

The reason for mentioning all of that is because that is the reason why Garchen Rinpoche is considered to be so precious and important in the entire lineage. He was the one who received and was entrusted with the entire lineage, all the empowerments and the instructions and so on. In any case, that was a time when I had not yet met him personally myself.

#### **Hearing Garchen Rinpoche's name again**



Drikung Terdrom, Tibet

Then in 1992, it was the Monkey year and according to the Drikung tradition we hold very special events, and all the important empowerments and teachings of the Drikung lineage were bestowed. That year it was held at Terdrom [see image], which is the place where Guru Rinpoche had practiced and is a



very a holy place of Guru Rinpoche. That is where the Monkey Year teachings were being held that year. Many people went, including my father. When they came back, I still had this picture of Garchen Rinpoche. They pointed at the photo and said 'that Lama, Garchen Rinpoche was supposed to come to those teachings and be the main vajra master and confer empowerments there' and so on. However, because Garchen Rinpoche was coming from Nangchen, Qinghai, he didn't get the permission to travel to that area in central Tibet at that time. So again, I kind of heard his name and had this feeling that 'this is a very special lama' arose in me, but still I hadn't met him. So at that time, I just knew that he is special, but it was more like a kind of an inspiration, I felt inspired by him.

### **Seeing Garchen Rinpoche circumambulate Bodh Gaya stupa**

Then later, in November or December 1993, I first arrived in India. I went to both Bodh Gaya and to Varanasi, and that was when I first sort of met Rinpoche in person. Not really in person though, I saw him circumambulating a stupa there and some of the monks there said 'oh this is Garchen Rinpoche' and that is how I knew it was him. In Tibet, we are a bit shy so we don't just walk up to a high lama and say hello or just start talking. We are just so in awe that we just stay away and watch them. That is why I didn't really talk to him at that time.

What I remember thinking at this moment is that he was very special because in the Tibetan tradition Garchen Rinpoche is viewed as a very high lama. Generally, in the Tibetan tradition, especially in older times, if they are high lamas they would not just go out like that, and go around the stupa. They would go around with a big, fancy announcement and an entourage of monks in attendance. Then everybody would know that is a big lama. Anyway they wouldn't go out much, the high lamas would just mostly stay at home and not go anywhere. Then I saw Garchen Rinpoche walking around the stupa and I almost didn't recognize him, because he just looked like a completely normal, ordinary monk. There was nothing special going on around him. I could tell that he is really someone who takes the lower seat and who is not out for any kind of recognition or praise. He just acted like a completely normal person.

### **Jangchub Ling, India and Yamantaka empowerment**



Jangchub Ling, Dehra Dun, India

Then, in 1994, Garchen Rinpoche came to Jangchub Ling (in Dehra Dun) and traveled directly from Varanasi to Jangchub Ling to bestow the Yamantaka empowerment there. They were the first empowerments and teachings I received from him. They also held a Yamantaka Drupchen at Jangchub Ling and I really wanted to attend it but because I was completely new, I was not selected to be one of those monks who could enter because it was an event in high demand, and not everybody got a seat.

#### **Praise from HH 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama**

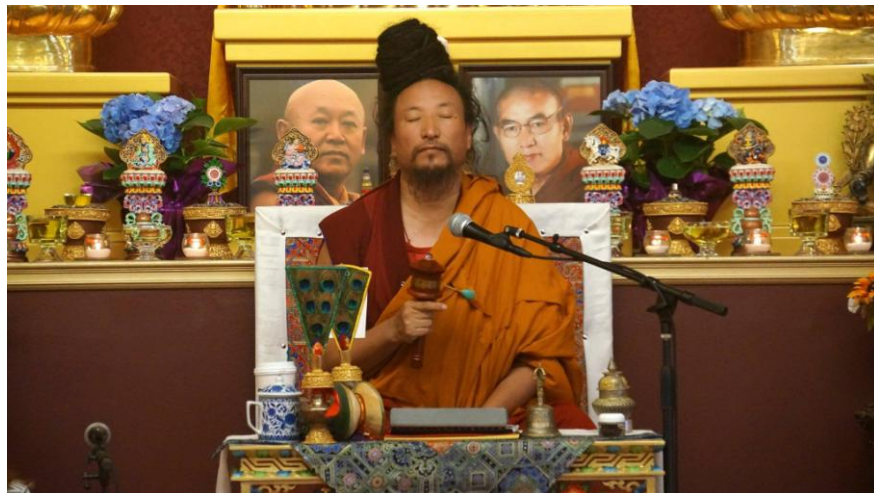


Then in 1995, I went to Rajpur in India. At the Sakya monastery, there was an event where his HH 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama gave some teachings and at that time Garchen Rinpoche had returned to Tibet. During his teachings, the Dalai Lama said that he had recently met this lama from Kham in eastern Tibet and he

asked him for the bodhisattva vow. The Dalai Lama said he had told him 'but you already know all about the bodhisattva vow' but the lama still insisted. That lama was Garchen Rinpoche.

In 1996, in Nepal, I met Garchen Rinpoche again. That was the time when Garchen Rinpoche was getting ready to go to America. He already had a plan to go and that was in summer time and it was just before I started my retreat. At that time, I met him for the first time in person and we were able to talk. Before that, it was in an assembly receiving empowerment and teachings. That in-person encounter happened in the home of Dorje Dondrup from Singapore, there are two teachers with that name, it was his uncle's home where we first met. Then I did my retreat, that was the first three-year retreat I did, which ended in 1999 and was in Almora, India.

### **Real devotion and conviction - Jangchub Ling empowerments, 1999**



After that in 1999, I went back to Jangchub Ling [Drikung Kagyu monastery in India] and at that time there was another big Drikung Kagyu event, where many Drikung lamas gave empowerments and teachings, such as HH Chetsang Rinpoche. Garchen Rinpoche was the main lama, he basically gave the empowerments and some of the other lamas gave the reading transmissions. However, Rinpoche gave all the empowerments of all the Drikung Kagyu deities and also of the Yongzab and all the protectors and so on for the whole day, and all the fifty Drikung empowerments. So he was giving empowerments and teachings all day long and that is really when a very special feeling arose within me. I really felt that these are very different kind of instructions. They really touched my mind. The whole event was a series of empowerments and teachings that extended over four months, so I got a lot of

opportunity to receive teachings. That is when a real devotion and conviction arose for Garchen Rinpoche.

After that, we held another shorter Yamantaka retreat. There were not many of us, it was about 20 or 30 people doing this Yamantaka retreat together with the protection and the repelling part and Garchen Rinpoche was leading it. On the transition day between the protection and the repelling, Rinpoche gave teachings on the Ganges Mahamudra. There was also Senge Rinpoche, whose nickname was Ali Rinpoche, who was actually a retreat companion of mine and he requested these teachings of the Ganges Mahamudra. When Rinpoche gave these teachings a very deep and a special feeling arose. I really felt Rinpoche's bodhichitta and that these were not normal teachings. These teachings and words only come from a direct experience.

### **Retreat in Labchi and prayers for Rinpoche**

After that, I started retreat in Labchi and while there, I first heard that Garchen Rinpoche had once again returned to Tibet and that he had fallen a little sick in Tibet due to the high altitude. Once you get really sick from the high altitude there, it is not so easy to get better again. Especially in Tibet, people are not always so healthy. At that time, I was really worried about Garchen Rinpoche and I made many prayers for his health, long-life that I meet Rinpoche again in his life.

### **Meeting at 61<sup>st</sup> Birthday of Chetsang Rinpoche**



Later, when I met Rinpoche again, I really felt that this is the result of the power of aspiration prayer. The next time I met Rinpoche was only in 2006, and he came to India from Tibet as he was invited for the 61<sup>st</sup> birthday celebration and long-life ceremony for HH Chetsang Rinpoche. Anyway, it was very difficult at first for Rinpoche to come and he was not sure if he would be able to. Yet, finally, at the last



moment he did make it, and he was the vajra master for the long-life ceremony. That is when I met him again and one of my monk friends, my companions, took me with him to his private chambers to receive some instructions. In terms of his private chambers, he was staying in a retreat hut in the nunnery at that time in Jangchub Ling. We went there to receive instructions, and the instructions we received were really quite extraordinary. A very overwhelming feeling really overcame me at that time. The feeling was like after having received these kinds of instructions you almost can't help but practice; you just have no choice but to practice.

This is really when the devotion to Rinpoche grew even stronger and I really found that the power of aspiration is really something very meaningful. I think it was really because of the aspiration that I was able to meet him again because at that time things were so uncertain, you never knew how the things will go in China. The policies always change and no one could really ever know if one would see each other again at that time. Yet, the power of aspiration was unfailing and because of that I really believe in that very strongly.

### **Meeting in Chicago, America in 2006**

Then when I first came to America, I first arrived in Chicago on October the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Then, only two months later, around Christmas time, Garchen Rinpoche actually visited the Chicago center and he gave teachings on the co-emergent Mahamudra there. At that time again I had the opportunity to be very close to him and to talk to him. Again, at that time I thought this is surely the unfailing power of aspiration prayer, made with great trust and with great devotion.

So, now I can meet Rinpoche many times and I've been able to meet with Rinpoche directly so often and I really think that is the the greatest merit that I have received in this lifetime. Now, I can receive Rinpoche's instructions all the time. That surely is the result of aspiration prayers and of course, also the power of the past karmic connection. Due to this, I really believe very firmly in the power of the aspiration prayer. I prayed not only to meet him again but also for his long-life.

### **Special Qualities of Garchen Rinpoche**



Garchen Rinpoche really is very unique in terms of the extent of his realization. There is no one with that kind of compassion and love and that kind of realization of the true nature of the mind. We always say the essence of the dharma is the union of emptiness and compassion, this is really what Rinpoche represents and this is what all the Buddhas are, they are a union of emptiness and compassion. Rinpoche always mentions that and that is really what he embodies.

What also I find really very special about Rinpoche is that, ever since I've known him, I've never heard him say a single negative word about anyone. Whenever anybody else would say something negative, he would always say it is better if you practice a pure view. That is really a sign that he has realized the teachings of the secret mantra of the Vajrayana. We know that it is not so easy for all of us to keep all of the secret mantra commitments and to sustain a real pure view in our hearts at all times. However, that is exactly what Rinpoche embodies. There is really no one who has that level of compassion and love like Rinpoche has. There is really no one that has this kind of practice of Mahamudra and emptiness that Rinpoche has, it is very rare. Therefore, he really embodies all of the Buddhas and I feel I have so much merit to be able to meet Rinpoche.

### **HH Chetsang Rinpoche's tears and devotion for Garchen Rinpoche**



In fact, when HH Chetsang Rinpoche was in Singapore, Garchen Rinpoche was there and Chetsang Rinpoche actually said to everyone in the assembly and started to cry 'that it is so difficult to meet somebody like Garchen Rinpoche, you don't even know how fortunate you are' and he cried. Actually, that is very unusual for Chetsang Rinpoche and even his own monks were really surprised by that. They said they have actually never seen him cry like that before. That was another very special sign of Rinpoche's vastness and his special blessing. So we are very fortunate, because many Tibetans will never have the opportunity to meet Rinpoche again.

What we call emptiness and compassion is the Buddha Vajradhara, and Rinpoche is just like that. I really believe if we cultivate real trust and devotion, then there is no question as to whether or not the blessings of the guru will enter our minds. They will certainly enter our mind without any doubt. The guru is always compassionate but if we do not trust the guru, and if there is no devotion, then it will be hard to receive and to be receptive to his blessings. If we cultivate devotion and trust, and if we keep our samaya pure, then there is no doubt as to whether or not the blessings will enter our mind.

Rinpoche only cares about others, whatever he does, it is for others. He never does really anything for himself. That actually is the practice of love and compassion, that is the practice of bodhichitta and he always remains in that state. Actually, I have never seen him not in that state of practice, he is always in the state, in a meditative state of the nature of mind. I have never seen a moment where he is not practicing. Therefore, the more I meet Rinpoche the more my devotion increases. It is not that I become desensitized and then it decreases, but actually the more I see him, the more I see his qualities, and the more I feel how fortunate I am for having met him in this life and having been able to receive all his instructions from him all the time. That is definitely a great merit from previous lives otherwise this

is a very difficult to encounter. All of us have the same merit because all of us have encountered Rinpoche so many times and were able to receive his instructions. If you can see it, then really you can see that there is no other Buddha than that.

Normally, when we follow a guru, then we are supposed to follow a qualified, authentic guru. No matter from what angle you view Garchen Rinpoche, it is really hard to meet a guru like that. Whether it comes to the vastness of his love and compassion, or the vastness of his realization of the view, or his practice, it is a very hard to meet a guru like that from all kinds of perspectives. Now, we have encountered him and since we have had the fortune to receive his instructions, it is really very important that we take them to heart and that we practice according to his instructions. If we do that, it will be for our own good in this life and in future lives. Now, we do have the merit to have met him and therefore, it is really important not to waste that opportunity but to really put his teachings into practice.

### **Garchen Rinpoche's Clairvoyant Qualities**

Rinpoche acts like he is just a normal person but really he knows everything and has a completely clairvoyant mind. He is just not really making it obvious. Yet, there are many times when I was certain about that and also many of my friends have had similar experiences. For example, just to mention one time, I needed a new monk inner skirt and that is not very easy to get in America. First of all, it is very hard to get the right fabric in America because it is very specific. Then you need someone who can actually sew it the correct way for monastics. I knew that is going to be very difficult for those reasons and I was thinking about how I would get the skirt. Then, Rinpoche comes with a skirt in his hands and he gave me his skirt without even saying anything at all. There are many stories like that.

Rinpoche acts like he is a normal person and nothing special, but really his clairvoyant power is all-penetrating. If one did not have the realization that he has, one wouldn't have that kind of clairvoyance. So it is a clear sign of having realized the ultimate nature of Mahamudra and also of bodhichitta. So again we are really extremely fortunate.

To summarize, what we really should remember is that we are extremely fortunate to have met with Garchen Rinpoche and I personally see him really as the Buddha Vajradhara. Since we have this fortune, we should all be very careful to keep our samaya pure and to practice his instructions as well as we can



without wasting that opportunity. If we do so, if we keep our samaya pure and we practice according to his instructions, then really the blessings and all the accomplishments will arise in our mind, there is no doubt about it. Our progress in the practice really depends on reliance on an authentic guru. When it comes to authentic gurus really there is no greater guru to be found than Garchen Rinpoche, we have to remind ourselves of how fortunate we are. I have the greatest devotion for him and I feel that there is no greater lama than Garchen Rinpoche and it is because of his compassion and his love and the level of his practice that I fully trust him. It is important for us to really recognize this precious opportunity.

There is one more thing, when it comes to Rinpoche's life story, someone could explain that in a really vast, profound and eloquent way, his story is so incredible but since I'm an ordinary person, I can only speak from my own personal experience.

### ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS***

Q: I have been practicing for a couple of years now but I am not clear about the correct definition of the word 'realization', what does it mean to 'realize'? What does it mean in the context of the nature of mind?

A: What we need to realize is the nature of the mind. First, we have we have an understanding what the nature of the mind is, and then we practice meditation. So the realization is when you have an unmistakable certainty of knowing this. When you know, 'this is it' and when that becomes stable and it always remains. We call that realization that has been actualized, if I recall correctly.

QUESTION: There are some practitioners who will never hear or remember secret mantras from the guru. What is the sense of continuing practice if one does not hear and remember these mantras? Would they only potentially reach the level of arhatship? There are people born with conditions, or who gain them due to circumstances outside of their control that significantly affects memory. Therefore, the lack of ability to remember any secret mantras is not their fault. It seems quite unfair that these rules almost seem to exclude people with limitations and handicaps.

ANSWER: It is not just one path that suits everyone but depending on our different wishes and tendencies and capacities there are different vehicles that we enter. There are Theravada vehicle and the Mahayana vehicle and the Vajrayana vehicle. Also, we could say that there are the vehicles of the Shravakas and the Pratyekas, the arhats, the bodhisattvas and so on. There are different kinds of ways to train one's mind to practice the dharma and not one thing works for everyone. For example, not everyone wants to practice the secret mantra, Vajrayana, so if you tried to impose it on someone, or give them the teachings anyway it would not really benefit them because they have no interest in it. It is better to teach someone something that they are actually interested in; that they have an aspiration to practice. That is why we progress in stages.

There are many people, for example who are drawn to the path of the Shravakas and then eventually slowly maybe they also enter at some point the bodhisattva vehicle of the Mahayana. The way it goes with the Shravaka vehicle, or the arhat vehicle, is like when a ship is filled with merchants going out to the ocean to find some jewels and it is a lot of work, so eventually all the workers get really tired. Then one of the merchants on the ship, he miraculously makes an island appear, where all the merchants can take a little break. Then he tells them, 'now you can take a break for a few months before we move on'. So then they are not so exhausted. It is said that the Shravaka vehicle is a bit similar to that. It is like a resting island that the Buddha provided for those who find it hard to move forward the way we do in the Mahayana, or in the Vajrayana. They take their time and and later, they enter the Mahayana path and so on.

Regarding physical limitations, first of all there is no rule in Buddhism that excludes anyone with a physical disability all. It is sometimes mentioned that a disability, depending on what it is of course, can make it difficult for someone to get the dharma. For example, if you are deaf then you can't hear the mantra and things like that. However, it is mainly to do with your capacity, your ability to understand something. Anyone who has an aspiration and who wants to practice can enter in the Buddha Dharma. There is no rule about who can enter or not enter it. Ultimately, anyone is a vessel really for the dharma, it is just that there are certain things that make it a little bit more difficult for us to practice. It does not say that in order to exclude someone but everyone has their own limitation that maybe makes it a bit difficult for them to to practice. When it comes to attaining enlightenment in a single lifetime, in this very lifetime, then it is very difficult if there are certain impairments, because in

order to attain enlightenment one must be also able to gain knowledge and really understand. That is really the key point, if one is able to understand it, then nothing is an impairment.

So it is all about the realization really. Ultimately, all sentient beings are suitable vessels for the dharma because they all possess Buddha nature. However, sometimes in the context of teaching the precious human body with those eighteen qualities, it is mentioned that impairment of the mental or physical faculties could be a hindrance to one's practice. However, has to do more with the practice that aims to attain enlightenment in this very lifetime. So, one must be of a very sharp capacity or faculty in order to attain enlightenment in this very lifetime. In general, anybody can practice the Buddha dharma, it is just there are slight differences in how we practice the dharma.

Also, since we're talking about exclusions, sometimes I have heard people say that the Buddhist tradition looks down on women. Actually, that is absolutely wrong. In fact, the Buddha a long time ago was the one who gave females the same human rights as anybody else. He was actually the first person of his time when he was alive to do that. When the Buddha Shakyamuni was teaching his step-mother she became the first nun. She wanted to be a nun yet, at that time it was unthinkable and frowned upon. There were no nuns in general and there were many religions in that place at that time, which were non-Buddhist religions. However, women were always excluded from gatherings or from practices, ordination and so forth. Even though it was unheard of then, the Buddha gave his stepmother the nun's vows. A lot of people criticized him because of that. However, he encouraged anyone who wants to practice the dharma to practice and that they could take monastic vows if they wanted to. Also, in many of the prayers we hear the Buddha always says son, or daughter, of noble family. We always say that, so actually there is really no exclusion of women or girls at all.

QUESTION: Different practices visualize different colors of the syllable HUM. When we practice Vajrasattva, we visualize the syllable HUM in white when meditating. Sometimes, we visualize it blue, and for Tsewang Dzinpa, we visualize it red. Ultimately, I know the color makes no difference but for lay practitioners like me, I do not understand why we visualize the syllable HUM in different colors, in different practices. Can we mix them in different practices? What will happen if we don't pick the right color of the syllable HUM for a particular practice? Does it mean that different deities have not received the required signals in order to get a connection?

ANSWER: We should not actually mix up the different colors and mantras and things like that. We should practice according to how it is explained in the sadhana. For example in the Chakrasamvara practice, the deity is blue, so the HUM syllable is also blue. This is how we know the color HUM. In the Tsewang Dzinpa practice the deity is red, so the HUM is also red, and Vajrasattva is white, so the HUM is white. If you mix it up, it is not entirely terrible, it might still be some benefit because the focus on the HUM syllable may help your mind be in a calm state and may support your shamatha practice. However, it is not quite an authentic practice if you mix it up.

In terms of receiving the right signal to get a connection, like when you're making a phone call it is almost like you are a little bit out of range, so you are kind of in a blind spot a little bit [laughs]. However, basically, as long as you visualize the HUM, you are not going to be in a complete blind spot, but maybe a little out of range. If you change the color and so on, then maybe it is a bit hard to get through, and maybe a little bit hard to hear when they pick up the phone. So it might not be really the ideal kind of connection, or the one that you would like to have. For example, it is said that when you visualize yourself as Vajrapani, then it is said that you shouldn't recite the Manjushri mantra. It is like when you want to call Vajrapani, but you are really dialing Manjushri's number. So if you mix things a little bit, you are not getting the person you actually want to talk to, and that is why we are not supposed to mix it up and to practice really according to how it is explained.

Also, the specific seed syllable, the way it appears, is like the life-force of the deity's heart, and the color is related to that, It is not just the sound but also the color. When we recite the mantra, we are really calling the name of the deity and it is related to the color too, because it is the heart syllable of that particular deity. Therefore, it is better to practice it just according to the sadhana. However, even if you don't do it that way, it could still be of benefit to your practice because it is always good to meditate on HUM but it is not exactly according to how you should practice. It is like being out of range a little bit. If I look at you, Ina and say 'Hey Ani la' she might say 'what?' Or you would not bother or react.

QUESTION: Garchen Rinpoche said today that all minds are one, this is very similar to the view all consciousnesses are one consciousness, this view is correct for Hinduism but Buddhism disagrees with



that. How can you explain this? Do you think this can be misleading for people without the right view of emptiness?

ANSWER: It might have something to do with how we understand this from the consciousness perspective. In Buddhism, generally, when we use this term consciousness, in Tibetan it is *namshe*. When we use the word *namshe* it is for consciousness, and mind is *sem*. When we say *namshe* or consciousness, what we mean is a sentient being's mind. In that sense, it is true our minds are separate, because we are different people, on the relative level and that is because of our different thoughts and fixations in the mind. However, what Rinpoche is speaking about is different. He is speaking about *sem*, the mind, or he speaks about *yeshe*, which means primordial wisdom. The primordial wisdom, or the *yeshe*, that is where we all are one. When it comes to consciousness, or *namshe*, due to the consciousness which is a conceptual kind of state of mind, human beings and other beings are temporarily created. As Milarepa said: 'I do not see consciousness, I only see primordial wisdom and I do not see sentient beings, I only see Buddhas.'

When our self-grasping diminishes, then we all are actually one within the vast expanse of primordial wisdom, then we all are enlightened. For example, if you take this glass vase here, it is filled with water and then you have another glass vase filled with water, maybe a bigger one, and then imagine that they both break. Then the water contained in both mixes into one, then you cannot separate it any longer. It is a bit like that, when our self grasping has disappeared, has completely dissolved, then we all are actually one within this primordial awareness, or wisdom. So consciousness, or *namshe*, is what we call the conceptual mind. I don't know how it is understood in the Hindu religious tradition because I haven't really learned much about it, this is just how I personally see it.

Jigten Sumgon said that: 'whoever practices Mahamudra, I will be with them'. So, anyone who practices mahamudra is one with Jigten Sumgon's mind. Milarepa also said that: 'there is no other Buddha than your own mind'. This is what Garchen Rinpoche always says, he always gives this example of water and ice. Self-grasping is like ice and when it melts it is water, the nature of mind.

QUESTION: Does the secret mantra equate to the so-called 'innate sound of the mind'? Is it also the same as the sound of a gong? Is it tantamount to the 'self-sounding emptiness' that Padmasambhava talked about in his teachings?

First, to clarify the meaning of the secret mantra, it is not just one specific mantra. Secret mantra here actually, basically refers to the Vajrayana practices that are called secret because they are kind of hidden, they are not openly taught. It is not just one mantra, it is the various tantric practices, the yidams, mantras and the practices of the channels, winds and drops and so on. All of that together is the secret mantra. This natural, self-resounding innate sound, or self-resounding sound of the natural state of the mind. Or we call it the self-resounding sound of dharmata. It is the sound of emptiness and it is heard by those who have realized the nature of the mind. It is not something that we just hear all of a sudden, it comes from the realization. Then the gong sound [which is made by striking a gong] that is not an innate sound, or a natural self-resounding sound as it doesn't sound by itself, it only sounds if we actually strike the gong. Even though it is not self-resounding, we should not look down on it because it is used for meditation practice and it can help us to come to a state of calm abiding.

Regarding the mantra recitation, taking a specific mantra of the secret mantra is also not really an innate sound for us because we are still actually reciting it. It is a sound when we recite it and it is not sound even when we do not recite it, it doesn't make sound on its own. However, sometimes, when someone's practice becomes really advanced, they hear the sound of the mantra. For example, dakinis appear and they chant the mantra, or they give a prophecy and so on. There are certain practitioners who have visions of the sound of mantra.

When I was doing retreat in Labchi, sometimes I would hear from my cave a woman chanting different mantras and different chants. I was not the only one who heard it, many of the retreatants heard her chanting. No one ever saw her, and at that time I just thought that maybe it is a yogini, like all of us, doing practice here or maybe a self-resounding sound. Then also many others heard her and nobody actually ever saw her. So maybe it's also due to a lack of fortunate karma that we were not able to see a dakini like that, or maybe it was a self-resounding sound.

QUESTION: In today's lecture about the three kāyas, the three bodies, as far as I know there are teachings in which five Buddha bodies are given: the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, nirmanakāya, swabhavikakāya and the mahasukhakāya. My question is whether the mahasukhakāya, or rainbow body, is what we see in complete darkness, or more precisely this multicolored manifestation of luminosity?

ANSWER: It is difficult to answer to this question clearly, I cannot really say that this is exactly what it is when you see that luminous form in the darkness. We do speak about five kāyas and however I'm not sure if the mahasukhakāya, which is the great bliss kāya, is equivalent to the rainbow body. As for the rainbow body, there are a few different ways to accomplish it. For example, one can accomplish it through the Dzogchen practice of Thogal, the 'leaping over' practice. One can accomplish it by practicing the illusory body yoga, such as attaining the rainbow body through the illusory yoga practice. Generally, when we practice shamatha meditation there are all kinds of appearances, visions and so on that we may perceive, so it is hard to say for sure that that this particular appearance is a certain kāya or not. It is hard for me to determine that. The great bliss body is in my mind, and that is when someone has realized the nature of the mind and has really gained ultimate realization of the nature of mind and always dwells in that state. That is what I see as the mahasukhakāya.

QUESTION: The next question is about the nature of mind, when I see this multicolored luminosity, in the centre I see a very shiny point, is this point a thig-le? I used to practice staring at the sun and after that, a uniquely shiny point in the center of my view showed up. While I was in a very difficult situation requiring a lot of effort, this point was pulsating with light. I have done various eye tests including laser ones and my eyes are fine. Can you explain it somehow what happened and what is the point?

Regarding the great bliss kāya, what Milarepa said is when you are in the unmoving, unchanging state of the nature of mind, that is the state of great bliss. Therefore, I believe that the great bliss kāya is just that: the perfection of the realization of the nature of the mind.

Regarding this practice about the thig-le, the light sphere, that is related to the Thogal practice or the leaping over of Dzogchen. I personally have not trained in that but it might be a thig-le.

Basically, whatever appears in your meditation actually makes no difference because you have to continue to meditate whatever you practice without grasping at whatever arises. Whatever it is makes really no difference because basically whether it is good or not, it does not really matter. If you cling to it and if you think 'oh this is good or this is not good, or what is this?' then you are grasping in your mind. No matter what practice you do, you have to let go of grasping and just continue your practice, continue to stay in a state of emptiness, without grasping anything. As I said, I haven't trained myself in Thogal practice but I have heard that it is not good to grasp at thoughts. When you meditate and you grasp at something as good or bad, it will not be good for your practice. So whatever it is, it is good to let it go and to continue the practice until you have realized the nature of the mind. So it might be a thig-le, but I'm not sure.

QUESTION: With regard to the entire practice practice text, is it a daily commitment or at least once a month? If it is a daily commitment, is it necessary to practice the entire sadhana, or is a more concise daily practice possible? Such as taking refuge and visualizing the whole syllable and reciting only the syllables?

If you are able to do the sadhana every day, of course that is the best, but it is not like you really have to do it every day because maybe it is the case that you already have a daily practice of a different deity, then you can just continue your normal daily practice. As I said before, within the expanse of primordial wisdom, all the Buddhas are one. If you practice one deity well then you accomplish all the other deities. Conversely, if you practice many deities not so well, then it is not so certain whether or not you will accomplish any of them. It is enough to practice one well and when that is accomplished all deities are accomplished. It is okay to practice the sadhana also once a month if you cannot do it every day, that is fine. It is just good to keep a continuum after the Tsewang Dzinpa practice. If you want to abbreviate it, that is fine, if you don't recite the elaborate visualization, like the protection sphere and all of that, you can just for example, see yourself as Tsewang Dzinpa and then the HUM at your heart, or at the navel, then you say the HUM, as Garchen Rinpoche taught.

This reminds me that once when Gyalpo Rinpoche came to Chicago, he gave that Tsewang Dzinpa empowerment and he did actually give us a commitment to do a one week long retreat where we just recite HUM HUM HUM, which is the Tsewang Dzinpa mantra. Actually, I didn't do that yet and it



reminds me, I should probably do that. Anyway, Rinpoche always tells us that the HUM syllable, is the essence of all the deities, the heart essence. Therefore, it is fine to just visualize the HUM but maybe first you see yourself as the yidam and then you just focus on the HUM. Also, at that time, I only received the empowerment with Garchen Rinpoche, not the teachings. Now we are able to not only receive empowerment but also the elaborate teaching, so we are really very fortunate. For that reason, we should really do our best to actually practice it too.

QUESTION: If I got it correct, in today's teaching Rinpoche taught that it is the mind that is the basis for all samsaric and nervous appearances, and it is the nature of the mind that is the single ground mentioned in the Kunzang Monlam. The nature of the mind is *kadak*, the primordial purity. What recognizes the nature of the mind is *rang rig*, or self-awareness. Then how does *rangjung yeshe*, the self-arising innate insight, fit in? Is it also the basis of samsara and nirvana? Is it also the single ground in the Kunzang Monlam, and what is the relationship between them?

ANSWER: So *rang rig*, I would probably not say self-awareness actually, I would maybe say one's own awareness and *rangjung yeshe*, which is self-arisen primordial wisdom, are basically the same. In terms of *kadag*, which is the original purity that speaks about the essence, its quality. So the essence of this awareness is originally pure, meaning that it is unstained by any flaw. Longchen Rabjam had said it cannot be said to be existing because even the Buddhas have not seen it. Nor can it said to be non-existing because it is the basis of all arising of samsara and nirvana. These two, like not being existing and not being non-existing are non-contradictory, they are actually a union and that is what we call the freedom from extremes. Also, we call it the freedom from all conceptual elaboration. The freedom from all conceptual elaboration is this original purity, the originally pure nature of the self-arisen primordial wisdom, or one's own awareness or *rigpa*. Now sometimes, in terms of that terminology, it is actually explained a little bit different in Mahamudra and Dzogchen teachings.

We talked about *namshe*- consciousness, and *sem*- the mind, so in Mahamudra when we speak about the nature of mind, we actually mean the true nature of the mind, not the afflicted mind. When we say *sem* which is the mind, according to Mahamudra it means the nature of the mind. In Dzogchen, however the true nature of the mind is called *rigpa*, which would be the same as *sem* in Mahamudra. Its counterpart, is Dzogchen's *rigpa*, or intrinsic awareness. Then in Dzogchen teachings, *namshe* the

consciousness, is actually what they call the mind, *sem*. In Dzogchen, *sem* or mind actually is the consciousness which is generally the afflicted, conceptual mind. So there is a slight difference here. Regarding the one ground the single basis that is this original, self-born awareness, that is the basis of all of samsara and nirvana and its nature is originally pure. Just to be clear, there is no difference between Mahamudra and Dzogchen. There is a difference in how the words are used, but there is no difference when it comes to the actual nature of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

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<sup>1</sup> The teaching is on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MPATqvBv2M>. Transcript is mainly based on oral translation by Ina Bieler during the teaching.

<sup>2</sup> This teaching was part of a series of teachings given by the Garchen Buddhist Institute teachers in December 2020 and January 2021.

<sup>3</sup> <https://garchen.net/drupon-rinchen-dorjee-rinpoche/>

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://dakinitranslations.com/2021/11/07/guru-stories-parts-1-4-booklet-and-new-website-section-on-8th-garchen-rinpoche/>