

Public Dharma talk by Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche  
Date: 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012 (Thursday)  
Venue: Benchen Karma Choeling

Although we always think that we've enough masters, we've enough teachings, we've enough spiritual friends from the dharma community, we've enough dharma practice with our daily routine of morning and evening sessions, and the number of things we do which we considered as dharma practices in our daily lives, this is not true.

Dharma practice has nothing to do with the session. Dharma practice has nothing to do with the morals. Dharma practice has nothing to do with your discipline alone. The point of dharma practice or the teachings is to correct your mental attitude, yes mental attitude; to cultivate or develop yourself.

So that you can judge yourself and you can observe yourself when you are alone or when certain external factors come to you. When you are alone or when you are happy, and everything around you seems okay, of course then you feel that dharma practice seems okay, that dharma is easy to apply. But when problem comes such as being physically sick or mentally disturbed, or when you are caught in some situation that you cannot take any longer, and that it is very painful, at that moment you rely on your spiritual master, and you think, "I've a good spiritual master, I've a perfect spiritual master." You trust your spiritual master, you have full devotion to your spiritual master, you are totally reliant on him but you are not applying your dharma practice.

In that case, the spiritual master alone, on his own, cannot work with you at all, no, nothing. So if you have full devotion, faith and trust in your guru, your master, then each and every word that he has given you should be applied. This is very clear.

It is like how in our daily life, in our everyday routine, we go shopping, we eat food, we drink water or tea, we don't need to remind ourselves to take our breakfast, we don't need to get reminders for our lunch. It is just spontaneous yah? When you get up in the morning, the thought of breakfast is sort of established in your mind.

Likewise, the teachings that you received from your master should not simply be jotted down in your diary book or notebook. Even if you keep a notebook, when unforeseen circumstances hit you, it will be too late to pick up your notebook. At that moment, you may not remember where you place your notebook. It could be locked up, or sometimes be burnt or even lost. So you lose your notebook and you don't know how to apply the practice. Thus, your ultimate notebook is your mind. Yah? Yes. Teachings should be kept in the mind, not on computer laptops or mobile phones. It should be kept in our mind.

That's how those great, enlightened, perfect masters came to be, not because of the laptop, or the iPad or the iPhone. Those times were very difficult for them. They experienced much hardship. Even a single page had to be copied by hand, and they needed to travel

for three, four or five days by feet. They didn't ride on horses because they respected horses very much. During those times, there were no cars, no aeroplanes, you know, no transportation of the sort we have these days. But still they walked, up and down, up and down. Even though, it was very difficult to travel around in those days. It is because of their kindness that we can still practise the Buddha-dharma as a result. Therefore, we need to be really, really thankful to those great masters who have left such wonderful teachings behind. Although they have left, such wonderful teachings were given to us, and therefore we can still carry them on.

Otherwise, our Vajrayana dharma centres become sort of like a dharma shop where you visit to buy Thangkas, statues, and you ask, "Oh, this statue is very nice, can I buy?" and the lama may reply, "Yes, you can buy." It's a little cheaper than outside, and so you pay for it. So there, you see, the image of Vajrayana Buddhism is almost like this.

I don't mean they do things like that, but that's the image of Vajrayana Buddhism now. Because the people or dharma friends who visit the centre are looking for power, for blessings and instant changes. And they thought that there is something they can get from the statues, that the minute they buy the statue and put it on their altar, they'll become or get something special tomorrow morning. So they have high expectations. The value of Vajrayana Buddhism or the practice then deteriorates.

Although there are so many dharma centres around today, the quality you see is not much. Number wise, there could be thousands or ten-thousand members, the dharma centre could be crowded with people, it could be big and luxurious (this is a simple centre, but some centres are very huge and grand), but the quality of practice is not there. By quality, I mean that through the teachings given at the dharma centre, it has helped correct its members' attitude, particularly mental attitude.

We take refuge first, in the Lama, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, right? So this is our daily practice. The minute we wake up in the morning, we are advised to chant the refuge prayers, therefore we say, "*Lama la kyab su chi-o, Sangye la kyab su chi-o, Chö la kyab su chi-o, Gendun la kyab su chi-o*" right? This means you should think of Lama, you should think of Buddha, you should think of Dharma, and then you should think of Sangha.

Not only discipline, this is not your kind of daily morality, or your daily routine kind of discipline practice. It's rather a kind of essential way to correct yourself, correct your mental attitude. Therefore, you must know who is Lama, who is the Buddha, what is Dharma and who are the Sangha. Without any knowledge of this, how can you go for refuge? You can't take refuge. To take refuge, you must know the Lama, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha perfectly and clearly.

With this, can you then develop devotion towards the Three Jewels, towards your Guru, towards your Lama. Lama does not mean the person who is wearing robes such as this. People commonly think that lama is someone who wears a robe. But lama is a very essential word in Vajrayana Buddhism. It is known as "Guru" in Sanskrit and Tibetans

use the term “Lama”. I always tell them repeatedly, *la* means above and *ma* is no one else. That means someone who guides you, someone who instructs you, and is your ultimate guide. You cannot replace him or her with anyone else. The Lama is the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the yidam, the dharma protector. All rolled in one called the Lama.

The quality of your practice has to do with your devotion. Devotion along with wisdom. Wisdom helps you to realise clearly; devotion helps you to keep the relationship or the connection with your guru until you are fully enlightened. So you see this practice is very important in our daily life. The practitioners who constantly remember who the Buddha is, what the Dharma is, who the Sangha are, and who Lama is, are very, very rare.

After taking refuge, we generate bodhicitta, right? The bodhicitta for all sentient beings, we always think of sentient beings, we always say sentient beings. You chant the prayers of “*Sangye cho dang tsok kyi chog nam la*” yah? Like Kadampa masters who felt really moved and couldn’t tolerate the pain and sufferings of these beings in cyclic existence, beings who are wandering in samsara full of pain and suffering, this is the compassion we should generate. The identity of compassion, the feeling of compassion is something that we should generate. We call this bodhicitta.

Regardless whether sentient beings are your family and friends, enemies or strangers, bodhicitta should pervade all. In Tibetan, we called this “Dra Nyen Barma”. *Dra* means enemy, *Nyen* means relatives, *Barma* means strangers. Regardless the distinctions, avoid these three. Like the sun rays or moon beams that pervade everywhere, the power of compassion, loving-kindness and bodhicitta pervades all sentient beings.

Just as I’m looking for happiness and wants everything to be well, so do others. Just as I’m trying to avoid experiencing pain and suffering, and the cause of pain and suffering, all sentient beings hold the same wish too. This is completely equal and the same between others and oneself, hence such motivation should be set up. Then wherever you go, whatever you do throughout the day, do not forget that motivation.

Based on this motivation, you then perform your dharma practices of meditation, studying the Dharma texts, or doing puja or acts of generosity etc. That is whatever activities you perform in body, speech and mind, you must not forget bodhicitta. In this way can you then improve, improve your dharma knowledge and practice.

What I’m trying to say here is do not think it is enough to simply attend some teachings, puja sessions and dharma activities. It is totally insufficient. Doing your homework is more important. When you are at home, you have to review the teachings you have received from the gurus, from the masters. Because we have to ‘taste’, to experience the teachings, we have to examine whether the teachings are true or not. To simply trust them blindly is not helpful at all. You should test and prove each and every word received from the masters, whether they are right or wrong, whether they are true or not. How do you go about proving it? Through practising, applying, studying, contemplating, meditating. The Buddha had given us three ways to approach Dharma practice: Through studying, contemplation and meditation. For one to gain experience, meditation is the most

essential. But in order to meditate, one has to first undergo thorough study and thorough contemplation. The first two help one to improve meditation. Meditation has two types: analytical and the settled. Analytical meditation is very important. Meditation does not mean you simply sit up and hold that position. Even if you force yourself, you cannot gain the experience or the benefit of the meditation. Therefore Shantideva and those great Indian masters have given us two ways to meditate. The first important meditation is called analytical meditation. In this meditation, analysis is very important, analysis with your logics, using your wisdom to find out. For instance, say selflessness, simply thinking of selflessness won't help you to realise it. You will still feel that the self is there. But upon analysing, using wisdom to thoroughly investigate, you will find out. Let's say when we say "I", where is the self, where does it exist? Does the self exist externally or internally, or somewhere else besides these two? Investigating in this way can you then improve Dharma knowledge.

So there, this is your daily practice. I always ask my old dharma friends, "What do you usually do?" when they come to me and ask why haven't their dharma practice improve. Then, they will relate to me their daily routine practices of filling up water bowls, making light offering, before sitting down to chant some prayers in the morning after waking up. And that's it. After breakfast, they don't do any practice, being very busy with their work in the office or business. In the evening when they reach home, sometime they feel so tired, they couldn't meditate and so fall asleep right away. Of course, this type of everyday dharma practice isn't going to help you. Can't help you. Not one tells me he or she is doing meditation, or is doing bodhicitta practice. Not one tells me he or she is meditating on emptiness or impermanence. They always say they are doing meditation on Amitabha, or Buddha Shakyamuni, or Guru Rinpoche via recitation of Guru Rinpoche's mantras. Very few people would tell me they are doing practices on bodhicitta, compassion and loving-kindness, impermanence and emptiness. Even for the Tibetans, it's the same. They rarely come to you, unless they are really sick, and when they do come, they ask for blessing to recover from their illness. So you give them blessing. Satisfied, they never come back to see you again.

This is similar to us you know. You only appear in the dharma centre when something went wrong. Then you offer butter or candle lamps, burn incense and kneel down to supplicate to Buddha, "Please help me Buddha, I'm sick, I have consulted this doctor and that doctor, and taken medicine but I'm still ill. Can you please help me?" And when you have recovered, you are rarely seen at the centre. And when you are there, it's just to kill time. Thus, with such an attitude and mindset, how can you improve your Dharma knowledge? So make sure that when you visit the dharma centre, it is not because something has gone wrong.

You have met great masters, you have received many precious teachings. In Singapore, there are so many great masters now. At each and every corner, Dharma teachings are being given. Sometimes, you even wonder which teaching to attend, this teaching or that teaching? At any evening, there could be four or five teachings going on so you are confused as to which teaching you should attend. Once, a long time back in Taipei, Taiwan, there were many masters doing different Dharma activities on a single evening. I

observed that fewer people attended the teachings but it was crowded for the place that was doing Zambhala puja. (laughter from the crowd)

Yes. That's very interesting. If someone is giving empowerment, it is crowded. But if someone is giving teachings on the Four Noble Truths or the Heart Sutra, only 10 to 20 people turn up. (laughter from the crowd) Towards the end, a few hours later, maybe only 2 or 3 people remain. The next day, perhaps nobody turns up, something like that. Why do most people flock to the Zambhala puja? Because most people are looking for money, because they want to get more money, they think Zambhala is the god of wealth, so they attend the puja, buy a good gold plated gigantic statue and put it on the altar. You seldom pray to Buddha Shakyamuni, seldom too can you see Buddha Shakyamuni statue on the altar. But wrathful Zambhala statues, mostly.

So examine at all times what mental characteristics you are really having. Judging ourselves is very important. According to the Kadampa teachings, the important point is to judge ourselves. Don't judge others but to judge oneself. That's the essential teaching. We need to judge or assess ourselves, and to correct ourselves. If we are doing wrong, we need to tell ourselves, we must avoid this. If we are doing something right, we must remind ourselves that we should improve further. We have to rejoice ourselves for what we're having, what we're doing and then we should tell ourselves, we should improve this. Appreciating what we are doing is not enough, we should seek to improve everyday by applying the teachings. This is the kind of attitude we need to apply in our everyday life. This is what is helpful to oneself, and the way one can benefit others.

In this way, you can fulfil the wishes of the great masters, the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas. It's a very simple job, Dharma practice is very simple, not complicated at all. It's complicated because you make it complicated. Actually the practice itself is not complicated. If you follow the instructions accordingly, the teachings are really very simple. Practice is very simple, it's almost similar to the everyday tasks we do in life such as eating, drinking, wearing clothes, shopping etc. They are alike if you do this everyday with joy. Doing it joyfully is very important. Joy is important. If you treat it as something compulsory, you don't really have joy. But because you have promised your guru, you think you must not break your practice, and it becomes something reluctant. In this way, you cannot improve your practice. Practice should be based on joy. Joy is very important.

Diligence is placed number four in the Six Paramitas. To be diligent doesn't mean to force yourself to do something, or to feel reluctant about doing something, such as reluctantly practising or to view your practice as compulsory. To be diligent means to do something joyfully, to do something with joyfulness. So you engage in meditation joyfully, you perform puja joyfully, you perform prostrations joyfully, and you recite mantras and chant prayers joyfully. With joy, you meditate on compassion, bodhicitta, emptiness, and all sorts of activities of the body, speech and mind. That is having diligence. It does not consume a lot of time, even if you perform it for just five or ten minutes, this is considered very much. Yah. And you don't feel tired, you don't feel fed up. You will experience increasing joy with the practice. You may also be able to practise longer, time-wise, like an hour then two hours, or even three hours joyfully. It's not

something you have to do compulsorily; to increase the practice time compulsorily with the thought: “I must do more prostrations, I must have more sessions everyday.” Because when you do that, there is a lack of joy. As you expect something from the practice, you then feel very heavy. Yah, you feel very heavy and yet you reluctantly go about doing all your practices. Therefore you can’t derive benefits from your practice.

As time passes by, as you age and you review your practice: “Yes, I’ve met these masters, I’ve done these practices, but what’s the benefit? Did it change my emotion? Did it change my mental attitude?” Then you discover that the answer is almost nil, you are still the same. You are still full of anger, full of jealousy, full of hatred and all those negative emotions, right? So this shows that those practices that you have applied are not really what you call practices. You did not really apply accordingly. Therefore there is a lack of wisdom, a lack of diligence, a lack of joy. I always tell my friends that when we go out we meet all kinds of people. Then we should observe how much the practices have helped us to change our character and attitude. When we are alone at home, everything seems okay around us. You cannot prove it just by yourself, so the object is very important. It’s very challenging, very difficult yet you have to do it. That’s why the great masters always instruct us to go outside and try to encounter all kinds of situations and circumstances to see how our emotions or mental attitude change through our practices.

Otherwise there really isn’t much point to visit Dharma centres or meet great Rinpoches, Lamas and Khenpos. Sometimes, a Dharma friend may say “Oh, this Rinpoche is great because when I meet him, I have a rather special feeling. But I can’t say or pinpoint for sure what kind of feeling is that. (laughter from the crowd).

Perhaps you think the feeling is a blessing. But that is not blessing. The feeling is just a feeling. I don’t know what kind of feeling you have but that is not the way to assess and accept a person as your guru. You said this person is my guru because I have a special feeling. A feeling of closeness? So you serve tea and water, clean his clothes, take him around the shopping centre, then take him back to the centre and drive him around. Is it enough? No, it’s not enough, you are spoiling him! (laughter from the crowd) Then there will be arguments between the two of you, and then you separate. And your guru is gone. When you hear his name, you are totally fed up with him. That kind of negative result can occur. So that feeling is not important. You should have feeling, but it’s a feeling of devotion coupled with wisdom. That’s very important, the feeling of devotion, the feeling of changeless loving-kindness and compassion. These are very important. These feelings will last forever. Just having the feeling of closeness to someone is not important. What is more important is that the teaching instructions you have received from this person helps to reduce your negative emotions like anger and jealousy, and increase compassion and loving-kindness when you applied them. Then that is the ultimate closeness towards this person. Then he or she is your root guru, your guru, your master, whatever you want to call him or her. Yes.

What I’m trying to tell all of you here is to carry on practising in everyday life. That is most important. Whether you are happy or unhappy, busy or not, your practice should never stop in your everyday life. No stopping. You can’t say I’m busy today, I’ve no time

to practise, to meditate on compassion and loving-kindness. It is very important for us to improve ourselves, as Vajrayana Buddhist practitioners. People judge us through our behaviour, physical, verbal and mental. If others are touched by our conduct, they will see that Vajrayana Buddhism is good, because through learning and practising it, improvement and changes can be seen in the person. And that person will be a good influence to his or her surroundings, friends, relatives and gives a far-reaching benefit to all sentient beings

It's a very heavy responsibility to maintain this valuable Vajrayana Buddhism. This is a responsibility that each and every Dharma practitioner has. Not just the masters, not just the lamas and gurus, but every single person in the Vajrayana community has this responsibility to carry on. Otherwise, you are going to be bored after sometime, of seeing the same person, the same face every year coming here to repeat the same words or instructions. I, too, want to stop repeating the same instructions again and again. But in order to do that, I have to see that you have applied the teachings within and have changed.

Otherwise, I will repeat again. (laughter from the crowd) Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, bodhicitta, compassion, loving-kindness, impermanence, emptiness, six paramitas etc, You have obtained this precious human life. You have met up with great masters. I believe all of you have knowledge of who the Buddha is, what the Buddha-dharma or Buddha's doctrine is, and what Vajrayana Buddhism is. I truly believe that none of you are mistaken in this area of knowledge. So, now your only duty is to seek achievement in your practice. Not just continuing but to achieve. Achieve in a single lifetime. When we say we want to benefit others, how can we benefit others if we have not gained experience in our practice, if we have not achieved experience in our practice? Without applying the instructions given by your guru, you cannot benefit others at all, right?

Therefore, you can see numberwise, Vajrayana Buddhism is flourishing everywhere throughout the world. There is a Vajrayana centre at every corner. But if you look at the quality of the Vajrayana centre, it is only so-so, that's very sad, really very sad. It's not because of Vajrayana Buddhism itself. It is because of human error. We always carry our negative attitudes, and we mix these with our Vajrayana practice. Therefore we deluded our practice as well. Instead of benefiting others, a lot of wrong impressions have been given to others. So in order to avoid all these mistakes and faults, one has to be very clear. One has to become a person full of wisdom, full of compassion and gain proper knowledge by being a very diligent practitioner. So to be diligent, you have to carry on with your practice everyday. You must not forget the words that you have received from the master. Why am I saying 'don't forget' because unexpected or unforeseen circumstances can arise anywhere, at any time. As we are still childish and not fully matured, we tend to mix positive and the negative while we are on the path. Without spiritual guidance, we can't purify all these. So, if you really care about yourself, you have to be very clever, alert and mindful. That is very important.

Simply relying on the master is not enough. Simply attending a number of teachings is not enough. It will never walk with you. Never. Just look at the life story of all those

great masters. The types of hardship they went through, even in the good old days. Now, in this degenerate age, all sorts of activities arise everywhere. The Dharma teachings are mixed too, the teachings they gave are not from a reliable source. I've listened many times and heard many times from the record. They are all just trying to entertain you, yes, just trying to entertain you. I don't think this is a good idea. Teachings should be direct. Whatever the Buddha had mentioned, we repeat it. In order to benefit you, we must not mix the teachings with anything else. I can't entertain you. I can't observe whether you are smiling or not. If you smile, and I try to exaggerate the teachings because I know that's what you like, this teaching would have come from me and not from the Buddha. And this is not the way. Dharma teachings are given in order to eliminate our greatest disturbance, ignorance. That is not easy. So the master and the disciple, or the teacher and the student have to work together. Dharma discussion is needed from time to time

That is the purpose of having a Dharma centre, of why we set up centres all around. Many ask, "What is a Dharma centre? What is the purpose of a Dharma centre?" A Dharma centre is not a residence for the lamas. It is not a place for members to kill time on their weekends, or a place to complain to the Buddha when you have a problem. You visit the centre and complain to Buddha, "I offer you butter lamp, I offer you apple, I offer you this and that. Now that I need your help, where did you go? I can't see you. Weekends are my rest days, but today I come here etc." Haha! It is very interesting. It is very funny and strange but this is the type and image of Dharma centre you see these days.

Actually, a Dharma centre is a place where you can meditate, a place where you can do Dharma practice. At home, there are a lot of disturbances around. Disturbances with your family, your children, your work, lots of tension. All tensed up, you feel it is not a conducive place to meditate. So you come here to the Dharma centre. You take one or two hours off to do meditation. You relax, feel calm and peaceful, and can connect deeply with the lineage masters, the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas. The Dharma centre is where you can develop compassion, loving-kindness, or the practice of impermanence. It is a place where you can do all these Dharma practices.

Therefore, as I've mentioned previously, its purpose isn't only for periods when you encounter unforeseen circumstances, and you visit the centre to do pujas or make lamp offerings. This is not the purpose of the Dharma centre.

In addition, you can hang Buddhas and Guru Rinpoche thangkas, but wrathful thangkas should be covered. In Tibet, in Bhutan and even my country Himalaya, authentic monasteries usually cover thangkas of the wrathful deities and Dharma protectors. They should not be shown to others because if these people lack the knowledge and understanding of what the wrathful deities represent, especially those in union, it could give rise to a lot of wrong impression. No matter where, in the centre or at home, one must cover these thangkas. Great master of the past, such as His Holiness Dilgo Khenyitse Rinpoche always cover it.. He will uncover the thangka and show it to the public during the performance of big pujas and empowerments. And he did this with introduction and explanation, telling them the symbolism. That the image symbolises ultimate meaning,

and not simply what you perceive of a wrathful being holding all kinds of instruments with different colours, characteristics and shapes etc. This is not the ultimate image of the wrathful deities, so the images are steep with symbolism.

Each and every aspect symbolises ultimate meaning. So one has to go through explanation to clear one's doubt and misunderstanding. Therefore, I would like to request all Dharma friends to please follow the authentic way of handling these. Otherwise, instead of benefiting you, having too many thangkas on the walls could sometimes cause a lot of mistakes and bring about deterioration of the value of Vajrayana Buddhism. Therefore understanding is very important. That's why you have to study, contemplate and meditate. With the help of these three, you can solve all these problems.

Finally, you do not need any thangka, that's the last or eventual option. You do not need to visit the shop to buy a thangka. The best is without hanging any thangkas. That's the best. It is all in your mind, that is the best. Yes, that's the best. For that reason, we have to practise. In order to achieve this, we do practice, we chant prayers, we visualise deities and chant mantras or read sadhanas. As one has to accumulate merits and purify negativities, we do prostrations, chant prayers etc. You must not forget the purpose.

Some great philosophers in the West, especially the US, have been telling people that there is no need to do puja, no need for thangka and statue, that you only need to meditate. That's wrong instruction. Wrong instruction. You need thangka and altar, you need to do all these in order to accumulate merits but you must not forget the purpose of doing all these. That's very important. Otherwise, one is just keeping to tradition by having the thangka and altar, doing prostrations, lighting up lamps and having all other decorations.

In that way, Vajrayana tradition does not make sense and does not benefit at all. But with the help of knowledge, by building knowledge in understanding the purpose of doing all these, we benefit. We have to be careful because playful masters may tell us all kinds of things that will confuse us. A master may say one thing, while another may say it differently and we ended up mired in confusion. Therefore you have to be very clever. There is only one way to solve all these problems and that is to study, contemplate and meditate. If you do that, you can overcome confusion, and nobody can cheat you. So that's all I want to say. Thank you so much.