



Aspire to Be Born On the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain

Personal Link, Talk 198
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Editors' Preface

We do not generally proclaim a preference among Rinpoche's many remarkable teachings, yet undeniably there are teachings to which we return over and over again for inspiration or to remind us of our intentions as practitioners. This talk, delivered as a Personal Link in May, 2004, remains such a teaching for many who heard Rinpoche's original presentation and have returned to the recording in subsequent years. In it he not only clarifies the Tibetan Buddhist view on rebirth but also elaborates many root concepts regarding karma, the flow of time and dependent origination, impermanence, devotion, and the effects of culture on our everyday decisions. Importantly, woven throughout this talk Rinpoche illustrates the Buddhist distinction between mind and brain, and lays out a vision for attending the necessity to consider what follows after physical death. However, primarily this is a celebration of Guru Rinpoche and the importance of strengthening our connection with him, noting the consequent benefits which thereby appear in our lives. This entire teaching is central to understanding Rinpoche's message and his mission.

We were moved to transcribe and edit this exceptional teaching when Suzy Greanias highlighted it during her LINK. Recognizing its historical importance to senior MSB students, as well as to those in the sangha who have more recently joined and haven't had the opportunity to hear it, we offer this fully edited transcription. We also acknowledge there were many instances, while editing this oral presentation, when it was necessary to rearrange the wording or sequence for the purpose of clarity in the written document. Without the benefit of Rinpoche's tone or gestures, a written transcript must still faithfully reflect his intended meaning. In this we were guided by Rinpoche's frequent teachings on these topics. We remain solely responsible for any defects or mistakes that have been unwittingly introduced, and we apologize sincerely to Rinpoche, the Lineage, and to readers for any such inadvertent errors.

Mark Kram and Máire Ní Ghrada, editors,
Joseph Waxman, final review

GURU RINPOCHE SUPPLICATION

E MA HO

On the magnificent Copper-Colored Mountain—
A place of great beauty and peace—
Is a celestial palace of light.
In this palace, seated upon a lion throne,
Rests Mahaguru Pema Thötreng Tsal,
Emanating from the kindness of all the buddhas of the three times.
He is surrounded by one-hundred million vidyadharas,
And possesses the youth and splendor of a boy in his prime.
You who are free of birth, old age, death and decay,
Consider me!

Having accrued little merit, the beings of this degenerate time,
Have been born at the very decline of Noble Shakyamuni's teachings.
Unlike the great disciples of the past who were able to see his face,
We do not have the good fortune of liberating deluded mind
Through the diligent study of the Three Baskets.
But through the light rays of your compassion, which pervades all space,
Having heard your name, I call upon you, Mahaguru,
And with great longing and pure intent I supplicate.

For myself and others, from this life until enlightenment,
With the support of your compassion,
May I turn away from hindrances and diversions on the path.
May all disturbing emotions, war, disease and poverty be pacified.
May all outer, inner and secret obstacles be subdued.
May I meet my own inner wisdom guru
Through the essential practice of your guru yoga,
And with loving-kindness show the path of benefit and happiness to all.
May I become an excellent noble friend to all beings.

When the appearances of this life dissolve,
May I, with ease and great happiness,
Let go of all attachments to this life,
As a son or daughter returning home.
And at that time may you, Guru and Dakini, receive me,
And guide me to the glorious Copper-Colored Mountain.
With great desire and single-pointed trust, I supplicate you.

This supplication was written with one-pointed devotion by Kongtrül Jigmé while on the Mangala Shri Bhuti sangha pilgrimage in India (in 1993).

Introduction

We had a discussion last night about preparing ourselves to live the life we want, but at the same time preparing ourselves to face the inevitable transition from this life to the next. I was struck by how few students think about this, so I'd like to address it further this morning. Everyone here is seriously pursuing the path and I don't imagine it is anyone's intention to ignore their own impermanence and inevitable death. Yet I also recognize that many are not thinking clearly about their intentions for the *next* life.

I've been wondering whether the lack of an aspiration to be born on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain—or in some other favorable place—is due to a certain neurosis or blindness on the part of Western students. In Tibet we grow up in the Dharma and while of course not all Tibetans do so, we are taught to constantly think about this. It's a matter of practicality. Unless you are a monk, you can't simply think about today's rations without thinking about what you may need tomorrow. It's the same with considering your next life and where you aspire to be born.

There is a general belief within the Tibetan culture that this body of ours is only borrowed temporarily. People typically believe that the mind leaves the body at the end of one life and has to find another body into which it can be reborn. There is no overriding predominance of science and technology in Tibetan culture that compels people to believe everything is a function of this body alone, or that the mind vanishes at death. In contrast to this view, many Western scientists believe that what we call the "mind" is merely a function of the brain or that the brain actually *is* the mind. Maybe it is freedom from the pervasive influence of science and technology that allows Tibetan culture to approach this question differently.

Relationship of Brain and Mind

If one accepts this idea that everything happening in the mind is a mere function of the physical brain, and there is no "mind" separate from the brain, then someone may easily presume that death is simply the natural ending for any possible continuum of that life. When we detect that a person's brain and heart have stopped functioning, the body is cremated or buried. If there is no belief that a mind exists as a separate entity from the body, it then appears obvious that death is the end of the story. I think, however, that recent indicators have clearly established there is a mind, or an aspect of mind, that is separate from the brain itself.

For example, brain-mapping experiments have been conducted that identify the locations where specific brain activity occurs during meditation. Through using certain devices, researchers have been able to pinpoint where specific functions occur in the brain when a longtime meditator focuses on different meditation practices such as compassion, equanimity, loving-kindness, or shunyata (i.e., nonconceptual emptiness).

During the brain-mapping sessions that I read about, a number of Buddhist teachers and meditators were hooked up with EEG electrodes so researchers could track various brain functions. Advanced meditators who took part in the research demonstrated evidence that new neurons and new connections were created. These determinations were not seen in other subjects over a similar period. The researchers have theorized that this is due to neural alterations that occur during these different modes of meditation. This research shows we can dramatically influence the brain through means that are external to the brain itself. So there must be some factor aside from the brain that accounts for the creation of these changes or potential changes. This seems to me quite a notable breakthrough in neuroscience.

It is an example of our modern advance in neuroscience to recognize that new neurons may be produced during our adult years. In previous decades, it had been thought that the number of neurons in the brain was established at birth and that no additional neurons could develop during one's lifetime. For instance, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who corresponds often with prominent Western scientists, was assured in his conversations with neuroscientists that no new neurons could be produced during the course of a lifetime, and that whatever neurons were present at birth remained the only ones available throughout one's life. However, scientific research has now shown that new neurons are created. This process is called neurogenesis.

Anyway, returning to the limits of the physical brain itself, Buddhists believe there is some entity or influencing factor that does exist separately from the brain. So if there is a function of mind separate from the functions of the physical brain, I think we can agree there would be no reason for a being to cease entirely when the physical brain stops functioning. This other factor we're describing—separate from the organic matter of the brain—is not a substantive, material entity. It is not something, for instance, that could be measured or analyzed as you could, say, a chemical substance. But again, it is distinct from the physical brain, an influencing

factor separate from the brain itself. Of course it uses this body, and particularly the brain, as an organ *through* which it functions. But when that organ itself ceases to function, then this entity has no specific reason to stop nor to continue. Here, I'm using the word "function" as something that produces an effect—at least when the appropriate causes and conditions are present.

As we know through rational analysis, one of the appropriate causes that must be present for the continuation of anything is its previous continuum—in other words, its prior manifestation in form, in time, or in thought. Without such a previous continuum, there is simply no basis upon which there could be a continuation.

Prior Continuum as the Prerequisite for the Present One

All five elements¹ must be present for the material world to come into existence at all. But if the potential from a previous time is not also present, then what else could give rise to any phenomena that manifest in material form? New planets are being discovered by scientists all the time. This Earth arose over four billion years ago. All five elements, including space, must have some kind of previous continuum. Then, when the proper conditions come together, a new world comes into existence. I think this is also what many scientists believe.

His Holiness has said that for something to exist at all, it must have an infinite primordial continuum—a beginningless continuum. This is true for anything with material form. If we consider a plant, for instance, the continuum of that plant species has arisen primordially from beginningless time. Without such a beginning how could a plant come to exist in the first place? Of course, once it exists, the plant goes through recurring cycles: the seed grows into a plant, and it then produces whatever is required for the next generation to continue. The seeds fall to the earth and, with the right conditions of moisture and nutrition, the plant grows and produces more seeds, so the whole cycle of growth and reproduction can follow.

When we speak about impermanence, we also clearly recognize there is flux and the changing of appearances, such as seeds turning into plants, and those plants creating seeds, which create more plants, cycling again and again, yet always differently and uniquely each time. If there were no previous continuum, we must then surmise that something has to arise from a void, from nothing. And, if even one thing can take birth from a void, why couldn't everything start that way? In

¹ Earth, water, fire, wind, and space.

other words, anything at all could potentially begin from nothing. If that were so, then we would see no order in the universe. The whole notion of cause and effect would be overturned.

His Holiness has also said it's not surprising that consciousness continues. Even a plant species continues the reproduction cycle infinitely. While the individual plants may have to change somewhat from generation to generation due to varying conditions, the actual *basis* for the plants—that is, for the trees and fruit we see today—has existed from the time of the dinosaurs. And the *potential* for what was there in that ancient time had to be there even prior to the very beginning of the Earth. What was there at the beginning of the Earth had to be there when the Earth had not yet even manifested out of space. A genetic code of some sort was present within that primordial space; that is, something other than the void, out of which nothing could ever be produced.

His Holiness has noted that not only is consciousness beginningless, but everything else is beginningless as well. Even the Earth is beginningless. It is endless too. If it's beginningless or “unborn,” then it continues endlessly. The scientists who come to speak with His Holiness the Dalai Lama often discuss these matters at length. There's really no argument about the idea that something cannot start from a void or without some primary seed. Even the five elements must have some primary seed to form the Earth.

Nothing really stops existing. The human race manifested on this earth and has continued to the present time, to what we have now become. When I look at myself, or when you look at yourself, what we identify as *myself*, in this body, is beginningless. Your physical form arrived due to your father's and mother's seed and egg. Similarly, your children are part of you, their forms arising from your physical body. In this way, humanity continues. And in that sense, there is no ceasing of humankind, or the potential for humans to continue existing.

All that ceases is the gross material form, the individual's outward body. The human race continues. The deceased physical body that turns to ash is a tiny fraction of the humanity that continues on. Despite the leaf that falls from a tree and disintegrates into fertilizer, the tree continues undisturbed.

Looking at our own lives, we are confronted with having to acknowledge that everything has its own primary cause. Speaking relatively, the primary cause of each existing thing is the previous moment of its existence. When that previous

moment of its existence is there, all that's needed for continuation are the appropriate conditions. These conditions allow the previous moment, as it seems to arise and cease, to give birth to its own continuum. From that point of view plants, for instance, are beginningless and continuous. So is consciousness. Clearly something is present other than the brain itself. Recognizing that the brain itself is influenced by another factor is the starting point for proving that a continuum must exist and must continue so long as there are the right circumstances and right conditions. However, when we say the "right circumstances" and "right conditions", this doesn't mean they always remain the same.

We know that plants manifest differently from one environment to another and can continue even though conditions change. Some are less adaptable, of course, yet many plants and species of animals adapt successfully to their environment. Let's say you bring a tropical plant into a dry environment like Colorado. It will need to change and adapt if the climate and conditions are different from its traditional setting. You may have to think about whether it would be wise to bring a particular plant here as it may get damaged and not survive the transition.

In a similar way, it's not that this mind continues from one life into the next by relying solely on *this* particular environment and these particular conditions that exist around us right now. This mind continues even if these conditions, or this environment, change or even cease altogether. Of course, there will be effects on the mind when the environment changes or when conditions change. But it's still the *same continuum* of this mind.

The continuum of our mind has the potential to adapt to different conditions and different environments. The mind may function differently, or acquire a different outlook. It may exhibit different potentials brought about by different environments and conditions—such as adapting to different realms. But the actual essence of that mind does not change.

Effects of Karma

Here, we're not talking about karma creating consciousness. Karma reshapes our consciousness, so that it will evolve through different experiences, but karma does not fundamentally *produce* our consciousness. What we do need to be concerned about is how karma will reshape our consciousness in the future. The primary factor in reshaping our consciousness is not what occurs through physical or speech activity. Since consciousness is continuous, a cause or condition

occurring now may not manifest right away, but will have an effect on the continuum of that consciousness at a later time.

Again, let's take the example of a plant. You obtain the plant from a nursery and apply fertilizer to help it grow. But you don't expect to see anything different right away. The plant won't immediately change into a different shape or form, or quickly sprout more flowers or fruit. But you know the effect of the fertilizer will be to create a fuller plant or more fruit in the future. The fruit-bearing nature of the plant is one aspect of the continuum of that plant, yet we know the resulting fruit won't happen immediately, but sometime in the future.

In a similar way, negative or positive mental thoughts may not immediately cause hallucinations of suffering in the hell realms, for instance, nor the pleasures of the god realms. But these negative or positive mental thoughts will contribute to reshaping the consciousness, enabling an experience of something else in the future.

We can't really question *why* the law of karma works like it does. All we can do is observe *how* it manifests. If you ask why it is what it is, then you are asking why a creator made it happen this way. Since we don't believe there is a creator in the first place, we can only study how karma manifests. We don't question why the plant bears more fruit when we apply fertilizer. We study it over time and discover how this works. But why does it work in that way? That comes down to the laws of nature in our world.

Mipham Rinpoche said that when we see how something manifests, there's really nothing further to question in terms of why it is like that.² It might still be a problem for restless logicians who think there's always something more to figure out. They may think there actually is a creator behind it all, or that there are some unknown causes and conditions. But the enlightened ones see clearly how things manifest. They have no reason to question why it manifests, other than seeing what effect is linked to which causes and conditions. They understand the world manifests according to the interdependent processes of the laws of nature.

Thinking Only of Now vs. Preparing for the Future

If you take this point of view—that you're only concerned with the present moment and not the future—then why would you care about education, which is an

² Cf. Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche, *The Sword of Wisdom That Ascertains Reality*, (verse 15 of the root text). In Khenchen Palden Sherab, *Mipham's Sword of Wisdom*, Wisdom Publications, 2018 (p. 3).

example of something most people value and consider important? Why not simply let children be and avoid reshaping their minds through conventional education, since it's meant to benefit them at some point in the future?

When you teach the ABC's to a two-year-old toddler, you are aware of the value to that child of knowing the alphabet, and how that knowledge will be fruitful in the future for him or her. They will be able to read whole sentences and books someday, and reap benefits that don't even carry any advantage toward attaining enlightenment. But we know this is a favorable, desirable aid to developing and enhancing the capacities of the child's mind.

Drawing on this same logic, we don't concern ourselves with merely the present situation, and then just ignore the possibility of reshaping our present mind into something more favorable, more prosperous, more beneficial—ultimately into a state of happiness and freedom from suffering. This kind of effort is a continual part of our psychological makeup and how our logical and reasoning mind works.

Disbelieving in the next life is such a mystery to me. It is not founded on religion or scientific discovery but is a type of laziness, an unrefined view. People find that the whole notion of one's next life is easily ignored so they don't feel the need to take any responsibility for it. Yet, at the same time, they do care about things that are conventionally recognized as important, such as maintaining a healthy diet to benefit the body, or getting a good education to benefit the mind.

It's important to acknowledge that becoming an educated person—with many years devoted to schooling—doesn't have any effect whatsoever on the primary nature of the mind itself. The primary nature of the mind in a toddler is still the same as the primary nature of the mind of that very same person at a future point, after years of education. All that has changed are the conditions, so that the primary nature takes on a different appearance, perhaps a more evolved or articulate shape.

In terms of the mind's awareness, there is no difference between a baby's mind and that of someone with a PhD. Perhaps the awareness of the baby seems outwardly much simpler because they have taken in far less experience. The baby's awareness has not yet been reshaped into a more sophisticated or more knowledgeable expressiveness as in the case of, say, a scholar or a physician. But that fruit will come about through the conditions of the education system and its effects on the baby's mind. The possibility to adapt must already be present for

that baby's mind. If the baby's mind had no possibility to adapt, then it could not be reshaped into a PhD's mind nor into Einstein's mind, no matter what level of education it receives.

Reshaping the Mind in This Life and the Next

Since this potential must be in the mind already, the process of educating or reshaping the mind is dependent on the right conditions to bring out those possibilities that are present. We can see in our own life that we have the possibility of shaping our mind through education in order to form new ways of perceiving and thinking as well as developing our reasoning and logic. That is how we can improve the likelihood of creating an entirely different life than we had as a child. Similarly it's not difficult to recognize that a certain type of education in this life can affect our next life. Some schooling we simply forget. In fact, most of what we learn, we forget. Ironically, education is usually based on memory. When one's memory is lost, then much of what we've learned is also lost, similarly to what may happen with a computer's hard drive. But if there is a type of learning that is not dependent upon memory, and by analogy is "immune" to any computer virus, that particular type of learning will survive.

There is a difference between our education based upon memory, and what we learn based upon the growth of our own experience. In the first kind, we may memorize texts. Most of what we memorize we'll forget once we've passed our tests. However, there are some things we learn which are not based upon that kind of memory. Rather, it is learning based on something much more fundamental than memory. We learn to know what is true. And that we never forget. It becomes part of us.

Conventional education is specifically related to this human realm, which is the basis for our current life. When we meet our death in this realm, the education that seems so much a part of us now may be lost if we change realms. If we are reborn as a dog, we won't have access to our prior human experiences because we're no longer in the human realm.

From this perspective, the superficial or conditional type of education we receive in this current lifetime won't be retained as we change realms. However, the effects of our positive and negative actions will continue to influence us, remaining strongly embedded in our mental continuum as we progress through lifetimes.

Even if we change realms, the effects of our actions persist strongly within our mental continuum. In fact, our prior acquired patterns will continue to affect the mind unless some opposing conduct takes over to strongly counteract those habitual effects and reshape the mind. I've heard that people who like to steal, for instance, will be reborn as mice if they take birth in the animal realm, and they will continue stealing as mice in their next lifetime. That behavior pattern continues. People who like to do harmful or detrimental things in their life will continue to do those same things if they are reborn in the lower realms, due to their ongoing patterns.

We see that the future is very much in our own hands. By restraining from negative actions and habituating instead to positive actions, we can shape our mind to reap a benefit in this life as well as in the next. That inclination will continue into the next life—not simply to reap the parallel benefit in the mind, but also to achieve a better realm for our rebirth.

There is a consensual agreement that the mind can, in fact, hallucinate and create a realm which is then actually experienced. If someone doesn't believe the mind can create a world—at least to some extent—then neither will they accept that those suffering from psychosis actually experience their own fearful realm.

If we accept that this whole human realm is created collectively by all of our minds and that we inhabit this realm together, how is that so different from the idea that the person with a psychosis is creating their own realm of experience? You could say, "This realm in which we live is mostly physical, but that psychotic realm has no physical reality, it's purely mental." Then we must go into the question of whether there is actually any real physicality in this realm or not. That's a very long discussion, and one in which it can be proven very logically that there is no physical realm in this world that exists outside of one's mind. For this we could study Nagarjuna and the Madhyamaka teachings. Chandrakirti, for example, pointed out that a fish and a human perceive two different, conflicting worlds in a single glass of water. That recognition also relates to the question of whether or not there is a "real" physical world. But regardless of whether there is a physical element or not, we know the mind can create a world in which that mind can live, experience joy, and suffer.

To summarize this idea, habituating oneself to positively reshaping your mind may not have an immediate benefit that you can detect. However, the mind as it continues from this life creates the world or realm it experiences. It produces

elements such as pain and pleasure, all the senses and experiences of sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, and thought that are found within samsara. Samsara is really your own creation. This is relevant to whether you allow yourself to become habituated to negative tendencies and behaviors or whether you refrain from those negative habits and instead, cultivate positive conditions.

Aspire To Be A Responsible Person

You can also go beyond that aspiration. I recommend that you develop a strong intention to be reborn as a responsible person in a favorable environment. Create the aspiration to have a beneficial life, a good mindset, and positive experiences that reflect being a responsible person. This must also arise from understanding the responsibility that you hold in your hands right now. If you know this responsibility lies in your hands and that you could affect your life in the future, then possessing that intention will be something superior—something incredibly valuable and beneficial. It will be something the enlightened ones will praise and in which they will rejoice, even though you're still within samsara.

Holding this intention is very necessary, even if you have no greater aspiration than to avoid being reborn in a lower realm. Let's say you decide that you want to come back into this human world. The karma to come back would have to be very significant and, even if you had it, you wouldn't want to come back with a worse mindset than you had when you began. If you intend to come back into this world, then you must strive to come back with a greater, more advanced, more enlightened mind.

It is very, very important to maintain a good intention for the next life—even if that will again be in samsara—and not limit yourself to think only about your present life. That's why the Buddha gave special teachings on the *lhami'i tekpa*,³ which means the yana that brings you back into the human realm or the god realm.

Of course, as practitioners we must understand how karma works. But beyond these teachings for seeking rebirth in the human or god realms, it is possible to transcend one's karma altogether, which means we would transcend the very realm of samsaric existence that we create through the projection of our mind.

³ Wylie: *lha mi'i theg pa*; the vehicle of gods and humans.

Aspiring To Advance on the Path

Since most of you are practitioners, I want to encourage you to hold the intention to achieve a better rebirth. If you cannot actually envision yourself having a better rebirth in some pure realm, then at least intend to have a better rebirth in samsara. Don't just remain passive and refuse to think about it. If you are passive, then your karma will be the only determining factor for your rebirth. But if you can actively maintain and renew your strong intention, it will ultimately prove to be a great support and a great advantage.

There could be someone who's a good practitioner and adopts all the right conduct of the Dharma, but who lacks a strong intention to be reborn with favorable conditions to continue their path, even if that is again in samsara as a human being. I honestly don't know where that person will go after their death. But when that person maintains their strong intention to be reborn into the human realm, firmly holding an aspiration to gain favorable conditions, they will be well-supported in achieving their aim.

Some people remain passive and resist thinking about their future lives because they relate to their present body as all they have. Thinking it's all over when this body is burnt to ash is fundamentally a non-Buddhist view. Such a person has not yet become a Buddhist. This viewpoint is not even based on current science. Scientists are now saying that there could be a continuum, or at least that there are no reasons for there not to be a continuum.

A practitioner with a decent lifestyle, who has studied the tripitaka and practiced the three trainings (discipline, meditation, and wisdom), whether in the Hinayana, Mahayana, or particularly the Vajrayana—most likely would have no intention of coming back into this world. But some people do feel they'd like to come back into this world again as a human being. Let's look at what the world is like now. Unless you have some very specific purpose in coming back to this world, it won't be very enjoyable to be reborn again and again in this world when, even in our own lifetime, it is becoming worse and worse. But if you have a specific reason to come back here to continue your path or to serve beings and serve the Dharma, then maybe you're not coming back here to enjoy the world. Thinking it would be good to come back to this world simply because you're familiar with it is rather like denying that this world is changing for the worse even in our lifetime.

My suggestion here is that you firmly intend to remain on the Vajrayana Mahayana path and aspire to attain enlightenment through this very path. That

may take a couple of lifetimes to complete. It doesn't necessarily take long to transform our mind according to the teachings, but because of our laziness, and the small effort we put into studying and sitting on our cushion, it may take a couple of lifetimes, or even more.

What will you do when your life ends? What is your interim plan to continue your path, before attaining enlightenment? Where are you planning to continue your path? We have a connection to the deities, the buddhas, and the enlightened beings. All these names refer to the same idea. The enlightened ones have created these realms, but not for them to find happiness or pleasure there. The deities could simply abide and enjoy every conceivable pleasure in the dharmakaya state itself, but they have created these realms for the benefit of beings to be reborn there.

This whole manifestation of realms, and the manifestations of the enlightened ones dwelling in these realms, is for the benefit of beings. The enlightened ones could choose not to manifest at all. If not for the benefit of beings, the enlightened ones could remain in the samadhi of the dharmakaya in freedom and bliss without ever having to manifest a single appearance outside of the dharmakaya. All the sambhogakaya realms and nirmanakaya realms are manifested for the benefit of beings. The sambhogakaya realms are for the benefit of the bodhisattvas on the path. The nirmanakaya realms are for ordinary beings like us who have not yet reached the first bhumi⁴. Once we have this connection to a path, we continue our connection to that path through working to perfect our own paramitas, which brings the path to completion. That is the sole purpose for the realms that are manifested by the enlightened ones.

Guru Rinpoche's Realm of Sangdo Palri

All of the cycles of practice in our lineage, including the guru, yidam, and dakini cycles, are composed by Guru Rinpoche to enable individuals to attain enlightenment. So, as a Nyingma practitioner, there's little doubt that you will want to be reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. There you will meet Guru Rinpoche personally and be able to continue your present connection along with all the practices he has revealed for the benefit of beings.

⁴ bhumi (Sanskrit) stage, level, or ground; in the Mahayana there are ten progressive stages on the path to complete realization (i.e., ten bhumis).

These practices correspond with the path of the Vajrayana and correlate with the absolute truth—that one can actually become realized and attain enlightenment. If you belong to another tradition you may think of some other place to be reborn. But to imagine any better place than the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, or a better teacher than Guru Rinpoche, would be an odd assumption for a Nyingmapa.

All of Guru Rinpoche's earliest disciples—from the very first disciples, King Trisong Detsen and Yeshe Tsogyal—have aspired to be reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. These enlightened beings have their own three-kaya realms manifested in the infinity of space, but each of them also has a representative who is present on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. There, you would meet the representatives of King Trisong Detsen and Yeshe Tsogyal, as well as those of other enlightened masters.

For instance, it was due to Guru Rinpoche that Longchenpa attained enlightenment through the path of Dzogchen. Lhacham Pema Sal, the King's daughter, was just an ordinary girl but, due to Guru Rinpoche's blessing, she became Longchenpa and Longchenpa became enlightened. This is how their lives were connected by Guru Rinpoche. So a representative of Longchenpa will be found on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain.

The assembly there includes not only the enlightened Nyingma teachers—the 108 tertöns and the other enlightened masters—but also whoever has been blessed by Guru Rinpoche and has attained enlightenment within the Kagyu tradition. Long before Marpa was born, he was predicted by Guru Rinpoche himself. Guru Rinpoche also predicted that the dakini Dagmema would take birth in this world as Marpa's wife.

All the eighty mahasiddhas and the Karmapas as well as Tilo, Naro, and Marpa will be present on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. One can meet them there and receive their teachings if one has a connection with them. It would be the same for the Sakyas, and the other lineages too, because most of the Tibetan masters who attained enlightenment were blessed by Guru Rinpoche. Atisha for instance, is a reincarnation of Vairotsana, who was brought up by Guru Rinpoche. So if we are to continue our path of enlightenment as a Nyingma, or through any other school, the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain would be the greatest place to be reborn.

You will only be reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain if you have a connection with Guru Rinpoche, and if you have lived your life doing the practices he revealed for the benefit of those with that connection. I also believe you will only be reborn there if you have some degree of realization. It is said that you could be reborn in Dewachen, the enlightened buddhaheld of Amitabha, simply by making strong aspirations. But Dudjom Rinpoche said it's not like that for rebirth on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. To be reborn there you must have some degree of realization. In other words, you must have some *tokpa*,⁵ which means having some true measure of understanding.

The Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain is an interim resting place before attaining enlightenment. Depending on the karma of the individual, some may then need to return to this world to serve the Dharma, to serve beings, and to serve the enlightened activities of Guru Rinpoche. You can see that the exalted teachers Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé have come back again and again. They are already enlightened, so it's only their emanations who return to this world and carry out their activity. The original Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, an incarnation of Trisong Detsen, was probably enlightened from the beginning. If not, when he was reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, he would have attained enlightenment upon receiving simply a single empowerment. He would then be able to send back his emanation.

If it was the whole person's being who returned here to the human realm, then how would such ordinary beings be split into two, or three, or five beings? How could that be possible? But as emanations, that could occur. If there is a single moon up above, and a number of pots filled with water, there could be many emanations of the moon reflected in those pots. I don't believe that an enlightened teacher, like Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo or Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, comes back in their whole being. It's only an emanation who comes back. Because they are emanations, there could be five or three or any number of emanations here. It's a sign of enlightenment.

To continue our path in this life and the next, we need an environment favorable to practice, a spiritual friend, and a practice of great wisdom and skillful means. Then, in the case of the Vajrayana, we need a vajra master, as well as assemblies of great realized vajra masters. A vajra master can ripen you with one session of

⁵ Wylie: rtogs pa; stable realization; direct, intuitive understanding.

empowerment, and the great vajra masters can instruct and guide you, practicing alongside you to liberate your mind.

If you reflect in this way, what could be greater than to be reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain? Guru Rinpoche, who is inseparable from your own root teacher, is there as the main vajra master who gives the empowerment. Then you have this assembly of great vajra masters to guide you, instruct you, and practice along with you, as in a drupchen sadhana, starting from King Trisong Detsen himself, Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal, the twenty-five disciples, the 108 tertöns, as well as the eighty mahasiddhas and the lineage of all the Vajrayana teachers.

In my mind there is nowhere other than the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain for me to aspire to be reborn. Even if there's a chance for me to attain enlightenment within one lifetime before departing from this life, I would still like to have the chance to be in the presence of these great masters and to practice with them. This is an opportunity to have their realization feed into my mind through their blessings and guidance, to witness the entire array of their magical display of all phenomena. Maybe I could even think about putting off enlightenment until later, though everyone's goal is to attain enlightenment sooner.

For these reasons we must continually aspire to be reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, even to the extent of dreaming about it and becoming able to go there in our dreams. So develop this aspiration to the point that when anything happens, your habit is to spontaneously think of your reliance on Guru Rinpoche immediately. Feel that Guru Rinpoche is actually present in your life in every moment, supporting you and guiding you.

Then you can genuinely rest at ease, without feeling threatened about whether you can complete the whole path in your lifetime or not. To accomplish the whole path in this life, you need to examine the number of hours you are sitting on your cushion. If you are not sitting for more than one, two, or even five hours, then how will you become enlightened in this lifetime? Even when you are sitting for ten hours, if you're not transforming your mind during that time, how can you expect to become enlightened?

Aspiring to be reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain supplements the practices we already do. There we will have the whole environment to support us as well as the vajra master and the assemblies of the other masters to guide us. We can practice with them to complete our Vajrayana path. So if we are Nyingma

practitioners, that is why we should aspire to be reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain.

In our sangha we are Nyingma practitioners, but even if someone is not a follower of a Nyingma lineage, the other lineages are followers of Guru Rinpoche as well. For instance, all the Karmapas who are from the Karma Kagyu lineage are known to be emanations of Guru Rinpoche according to Chokgyur Lingpa's vision. The Tai Situ Rinpoches, also of the Karma Kagyu lineage, are known to be emanations of Guru Rinpoche. Marpa, a Kagyu practitioner, was himself predicted by Guru Rinpoche, and his wife Dagmema was an incarnation of Yeshe Tsogyal. All the Sakya throne-holders are known to be emanations of Guru Rinpoche. So even according to these other traditions there are significant reasons for aspiring to be born on Guru Rinpoche's Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. I'm not saying that other pure realms or buddhafiels are unimportant or that one shouldn't aspire to be born in one of them. But I just feel there are far more significant reasons to base your intentions on the aspiration to be born on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, especially for Nyingma practitioners.

Priority of the Vajra Guru Mantra and Supplications

Recite the E MA HO supplication single-pointedly, in a heartfelt way, so that you truly connect with what you are reciting. Don't just read this supplication without actually thinking about your next life. Some people have said they don't mind being a feather in the wind, just blowing wherever their karma takes them. Others say they cannot even imagine themselves existing after this life. Some say they want to be reborn into their own abstract idea of Akanishta. And some say they just don't know, because they don't ever really think about their next life. These examples reveal several levels of confusion that point to a fundamental lack of clarity in preparing for our next life. Some may say they want to attain enlightenment, yet they don't sit on the cushion for even one hour a day. In this case their behavior doesn't match their intention. As a practitioner you must develop clarity regarding the path and your aspirations, including the interim goal of where you will go to continue your path on the way to your eventual enlightenment.

People should have great clarity about how to engage with the aspirations they're reciting. The most important recitation is the Vajra Guru mantra, OM AH HUNG BENZAR GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG. For those who create a real connection to it, the Vajra Guru mantra is exactly like a wish-fulfilling jewel. The Guhyagarbha

Tantra⁶ explains the power and purposes of mantra recitation. It says that a deity mantra is a nirmanakaya enlightened manifestation. Meeting a mantra is, to a great extent, no different from meeting a deity. The Vajra Guru mantra in particular holds a lot of power and we can use it as a supplication to be reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain.

By holding a very strong intention, one attains rebirth on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, especially if that intention is accompanied by the recitation of 100 million mantras of Guru Rinpoche during one's lifetime. People who take this seriously and devotedly can accomplish it in five years. When you consider the years people spend on other types of useless education, five years is not that much time. Even if you cannot do that number of recitations, you will still accumulate a large amount by reciting the Vajra Guru mantra as often as possible every day with consistency, along with the aim to strengthen your connection and devotion. If during that process you cultivate a deep sense of commitment to meet with Guru Rinpoche, you will be reborn on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain in your next life.

I know a lot of students in MSB who have done twenty-five or thirty million mantras over the last six or seven years. If they continue at that pace and live to be, let's say, eighty years old, they will have accumulated well over 100 million recitations.

Appreciating the *Tendrel* ⁷

We must really strive to understand the importance of *tendrel* in all the situations we encounter. When you understand the tendrel of a situation, you naturally feel a certain level of confidence in knowing what you're doing and how to proceed. Whereas, if you're someone who cannot understand the tendrel of a situation you won't know how to cook, or how to make a bowl of soup, because you cannot see what is required. "What ingredients do I need? How do I cook it properly?" You have to eat, but you're hindered by not knowing what to do to make a simple bowl of soup, so you feel overwhelmed. However, when you intuitively understand the tendrel of the situation, you will naturally and confidently put some onions in a pot, put in some meat, put in some vegetables, then add some water, some spices or flavoring, and heat it to make a delicious soup. In that case, there's nothing

⁶ The Secret Essence Tantra; the main tantra of Mahayoga.

⁷ Wylie: rten 'brel; dependent origination; interdependency; *pratityasamutpada* (Skt.); sometimes translated as "auspicious coincidence."

overwhelming at all and, in fact, it's actually soothing because it calms your hunger. In a quite similar way, once you are able to recognize the tendrel that's present in the situation of your life, and face the suffering of samsara, you can feel naturally soothed and calmed by that clear understanding.

We have been very fortunate to come into contact with the Dharma and to be connected with this particular Nyingma lineage of the Longchen Nyingtik. We can enjoy our lives fully because we're connected with Guru Rinpoche and the practices he left for our benefit. When our life is ending, we can die with a secure mind, knowing we will continue our path on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. We won't assume that we'll merely dissolve into ash along with our body. And we won't claim that we wish to be reborn into some abstract realm, the name of which we can't even pronounce correctly. Nor will we remain so attached and bound up in this life that it doesn't even occur to us there will be a next life. Once we have developed a clear understanding of the tendrel of our whole situation—that into which we've been born—we will then naturally find we've received a tremendous benefit toward resolving those fundamental confusions.

Honoring the Need for Support and Humility

This is why I am strongly encouraging people to sincerely make this connection. Especially if you already have devotion to a teacher, it would be wonderful to receive as many of Guru Rinpoche's empowerments as possible, as well as the deity sadhanas that were formulated by Guru Rinpoche himself. He created those for the benefit of future sentient beings who have a connection to him, to find a path to enlightenment. If you receive one or two empowerments every year and you live to be a hundred, you will then have received over a hundred empowerments. That alone will significantly strengthen your connection to Guru Rinpoche.

Of course we must strive with these practices, but at the same time we must be humble. Some people who strive very diligently are not humble. They may think, "Only *I* can do this, and I will do this on my own. I myself am the one who will accomplish this." People who think and behave in this emphatic way, determined to "make a hole in the rock," as Tibetans say, have a big problem with their self-importance. People who think in that way are much too arrogant.

Take the example of a child learning a skill who says, "I can do it myself! I want to do it myself!" The child still needs support and won't fully learn how to succeed without the help of his parents and teachers. No one is greater than Jetsun

Milarepa in striving their utmost to make the best of their life. But even he still needed the support of Marpa, who was actually an emanation of Guru Rinpoche himself.

Some people with a lot of self-importance are eager to do everything on their own and reject the possibility of relying on anyone else's support. It undermines their large ego to rely on someone's support. It makes them feel too dependent. Sometimes I think we need to look very hard at whether it's our own self-importance that gets in the way and prevents us from doing what is best. Again, it's helpful to strive at understanding this tendency in the context of the whole tendrel of our situation.

This is not a Shravakayana⁸ or Pratyekabuddhayana⁹ path. Even in the Shravakayana or Pratyekabuddhayana, you still need a lobjön, a khenpo, and a sangha because you need that support. In your previous lifetimes, you must also have had a lobjön, khenpo, and sangha. And in the very lifetime during which you are to attain enlightenment, whenever that arises, you will need a charnel ground, an actual piece of bone to remind you of what you have studied in your past lives and what you have already tried in order to finally reach the point of fruition. So everything has a tendrel of its own. Even the Shravakayana and the Pratyekabuddhayana have their own tendrel. In the Mahayana, and particularly in the Vajrayana, the tendrel contributes a very important perspective that we must seek to understand. The tendrel that is wonderfully present in our own life is due to what Guru Rinpoche brought into this world and introduced as dharma practices. This tendrel includes the opportunity of practicing what he left for all of us and discovering his mantra, which is like a wish-fulfilling jewel.

Whatever time you spend in practice—one, two, three, five or even ten hours a day—spend that time strengthening your connection to Guru Rinpoche. I try to practice for at least eight to ten hours a day to strengthen my connection to Guru Rinpoche, and to do the best I can to follow the path of enlightenment through the Vajrayana lineage. If I do not accomplish that completely in this lifetime or in the intermediate state, I aspire not to be reborn as a fly or even as an ordinary human being. I wouldn't want to be someone who is historically significant either, like a President of the United States, which might require an involvement in war. There's

⁸ Vehicle of the Shravakas, lit. "those who have heard the Buddha"; includes arhats.

⁹ Vehicle of the Pratyekabuddhas, lit. "solitary realizers;" arhats who accomplish their level of realization primarily through their contemplation in the Hinayana.

no point in that. I want to be born on the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. That way, with the vajra masters as instructors and guides, I will have the chance to practice with my own root teacher who is inseparable from Guru Rinpoche, as well as all the rest of the assembly who are there. What we are practicing right now in this life is the same as what is practiced there. The sadhana practices are the same ones we practice here. I could also have their realization transferred into my mind, and so attain enlightenment there.

Effort Is Needed, Leading to Confidence

This comes only with the right effort—effort on your cushion. It comes with the effort of the mala in your hand, with the effort of visualization, with the effort of resting your mind in the absolute truth. What I mean here is that while there is no effort involved in the *essence* of this practice of resting your mind in the nature, since that part is effortless, effort is still required in carrying out your intention to sit there on the cushion and not idly waste time. There's also the effort made to refrain from roaming around all the time in your thoughts, as well as the physical effort not to yield to the urge to get up prematurely. So, there is some effort in remaining at ease in the nature of mind even though the resting itself is *tsölmé*¹⁰ in Tibetan, meaning "absolutely effortless." But this effortlessness also needs to be sustained, which is a different kind of effort. It's an effort you have to make in the beginning and then maintain throughout your session. Besides that, maintaining consistency in practicing every day requires effort. And of course the rest of your practices require effort as well.

This is the only kind of effort that will bring you confidence. Today, without that level of effort being put into their practice, I don't believe anyone will achieve enlightenment. Maybe that happened in the past, I don't know. It is said that Indrabodhi received the empowerment and spontaneously became fully realized and enlightened. (Rinpoche snaps his fingers.) There are many stories of great teachers in the past who were enlightened in that way. But nowadays, among the people that I have met and those I know well, there is no one greater than His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and no greater living teacher than His Holiness the Dalai Lama or Trulshik Rinpoche or Penor Rinpoche. [Trulshik Rinpoche passed away in 2011 and Penor Rinpoche passed away in 2009.] They each put effort into their practice every day. They don't believe that somehow everything will just magically work out for them. So whatever effort you put in, that is how much confidence you will reap in the favorable *tendrel* of your situation. I feel that people who don't put in the effort are wasting their life, even if their other activities

¹⁰ Wylie: *rtsol med*.

produce some benefit to others. I'm referring here to the deeper levels in the tendrel of this whole situation—how one can attain enlightenment through this Vajrayana path. I don't see how enlightenment can occur without that effort.

Learn To Be Firm with Yourself, Without Guilt

I really encourage people to put consistent effort into their practice every day. Rejoice when you are able to do that and reprimand yourself when you are not. You need to reprimand yourself sometimes. People may think to themselves, "Everything is okay for me whether I do the practice every day or not. It's all the same." This "doesn't matter" attitude really won't get you very far. When we are not doing well, we need to kick ourselves in the butt. There's no better person to kick your butt than yourself. If you depend on somebody else to do that for you, it won't be consistent. But if you learn how to kick your own butt consistently and then move forward, you will actually do quite well.

I'm encouraging you to understand how very rare this tendrel is, and how profoundly favorable your situation is already. There is no need for guilt. But if you are not doing well, you're allowing the preciousness and opportunity of this life to simply go to waste. Some people adopt the attitude that they are fine whatever they do: "It doesn't matter. I'm content. I'm beyond all this." This kind of attitude is like a laziness or a deep sickness in the pit of your stomach preventing you from digesting the teachings and gaining understanding and realization. If you are not going to engage, then why bother becoming a Buddhist? And if you are a Buddhist, then at least make the effort to do the best you can. Don't just adopt a passive or convenient attitude and assume that whatever happens is fine. When you look at the people who talk this way about the Dharma, you see they will practically jump out of their skin to accomplish mundane responsibilities and obligations in their life. But with the Dharma, there can be this sort of mahasiddha-like attitude or convenience attitude. "Whatever happens is okay. I'm fine. It doesn't matter. I'm beyond it". This attitude is really a sort of self-deception. No one else will be deceived. This is your own tendrel you will be ruining. It is a way of deceiving yourself and no one else.

If that is your attitude in the Dharma, it should be the same when it comes to raising your children, or in relation to your health, or business. "None of this matters. It's okay. Whatever." But you don't say that when it comes to your health, or when it comes to your business, or when it comes to raising your children. You'll jump right out of your skin when you're called to attend to any of these. It appears as if it's only with the Dharma that this kind of indulgent or smug attitude

is ruining your tendrel. Here you have such a wonderful opportunity to drink the nectar that will sustain you forever in eternal life. But instead, you pour this cold black liquid into your cup, then say, “It doesn't matter whether I drink this one or that one; whether I live eternally or not.” This attitude ruins one's own tendrel. It's just so very unwise.

You must remain sharp about this. We can all find ourselves with this attitude from time to time. When you do, really talk to yourself. “Wake up, man! Wake up, woman! What's going on here? What are you doing with your life? Look at your stress! Look at your belly! Look at your gray hair! Look at your waning stamina. You're becoming like a piece of dried-out wood. Before you become completely hopeless, change something!” Then, make sure you rise to meet this situation. Find a way to do something differently. You have chosen this path, so you have to discover how to make it work for you. Otherwise, what have you been doing all these years if your effort won't bear any fruit, or if you're not allowing it to bear fruit because you've sunk so deeply into this laziness?

Talk to yourself sternly with clear intelligence, but not with any guilt, or by being harsh or demeaning. It's like one side of your brain communicating with the other side of the brain. We know the two sides have different functions. Bring those two together, as well as the head and the heart. Bring them together with the rest of the organs. In this way, as you synchronize all of your parts through your intention, your belly will get smaller, your gray hair may hopefully rejuvenate to black, and your dried-up skin will take on a new glow. Nothing is impossible.

Value Your Opportunity, Value Your Tendrel

We can change the entire course of our life. I recommend changing the course of your life each and every day. This occurs by appreciating the precious tendrel that's already present here—relying on Guru Rinpoche and making sure not to waste the practices that are introduced to you. Some people have the attitude, “Oh, these practices just happened to show up in my life for some reason.” But for others there is a recognition that, after countless lifetimes and stores of accumulated merit, this fruit has finally appeared in their life along with the opportunity to attain enlightenment within a few lifetimes. There is nothing more precious in this whole wide world, nothing of comparable measure or value to anything else in the entire world. Even if the whole world were to turn into gold and jewels and it was all offered to you, it wouldn't be anywhere close to being as precious as having an introduction to the teachings in these practices. What would you do with a whole world of gold and jewels anyway? You can't eat it, you can't

even make much use of it. What will you do with it? Most likely, you'll die with tremendous attachment to the gold and to the jewels that you can't even take with you from this life into the next.

Nothing can be more precious than being introduced to a path such as the Vajrayana and having it remain present in your life. Let's think for a moment about the feeling of poverty—of feeling impoverished in your life. Feeling impoverished is a true sign of lacking a fundamental clarity in your mind. That's all it is. Thinking that something else will work more in my favor than this Vajrayana path and the positive tendrel that takes place from it unfolding in my life, simply reveals a fundamental lack of clarity in the mind. Remembering this will be helpful at those times when we temporarily lose our way.

I know a lot of people who feel, "I don't have this, I don't have that." As a result, they feel intensely fixated on obtaining something new, something different, getting something they don't have. But think about it. Recall something you didn't have and wanted so badly that you became fixated on obtaining it. Now that you finally have it, how has it served you? If it hasn't served you in the way you thought, then what about the next thing? And how about whatever you may now intend, whatever has transfixed you right now? How will that turn out any differently? It won't be any different. This is just your habit getting the better of you. Recall all those things you have already obtained through that same greediness, that same transfixed mind, that same feeling of deep yearning and the sense of poverty in not having them. Now you finally have them—a new car, a new suit, or a piece of furniture; a house, or more dollars in your savings account. They're now in your possession, so you think, "Good, now this is mine." And then they become irrelevant! You're already on to the next thing! This is just a self-created, self-indulgent habit that's not going to leave unless you actively apply your mind to reducing the momentum and power of that habit. You're not going to be any better off, and you know it. What will it be worth in the end anyway? One always has to work with these fundamental tendencies in one's mind.

People become fixated on what they don't have. They feel deprived and then suffer from their poverty mentality. Any of us can become caught in this way. We become like pretas, hungry ghosts. At the same time we are ignoring the incredibly beneficial situation of obtaining a human life and the tendrel of having been introduced to the Vajrayana path. We are ignoring our connection to an enlightened being like Guru Rinpoche and being able to practice the sadhanas he has left behind for us.

One has to know how to communicate all of this to oneself. People talk about communicating to others and think very highly of themselves when they know how to communicate effectively with others. But what difference does it make to communicate well with others when you ultimately fail to communicate with yourself? Then it's not worth anything. It's only when one knows how to communicate with oneself that we can enjoy the fruit of effectively communicating with others, as well as appreciating the true benefit of having this precious tendrel in our life.

Year of the Monkey (2004)

Since 2004 is the Monkey Year, I want to encourage people to do as many recitations of the Vajra Guru mantra as we can. I hope the sangha can collectively accomplish 100 million recitations through our individual efforts. Each person can definitely recite a million or perhaps as many as four million or more. Then, at the end of the year we can calculate how many of the Vajra Guru mantras the sangha has accumulated. Maybe each of us in the sangha can set an individual goal for ourselves to accumulate as many recitations as possible this year. At the end of the year, we can dedicate that merit to all sentient beings, and we can also dedicate it for everyone in the sangha to strengthen their connection to Guru Rinpoche.

Because this year is so significant, my brother Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche is traveling throughout India, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim to perform thirteen drupchens. That many drupchens means quite a lot of practice. To travel to each location with thirty or forty monks, bringing all the necessary drupchen equipment and implements is an incredibly tough endeavor. But they are doing that since this year is such a significant one. I rejoice tremendously in that aspiration and effort. Right now they are in Bhutan doing the Guru Drupchen, the same drupchen they will hold in different places for the benefit of the world, for the long life of the teachers, and for the benefit of all individuals who are connected to Guru Rinpoche in this life.

With that in mind, we can also try to make an extra effort as a sangha to accumulate more recitations of the Vajra Guru mantra this year. We can figure out the total number of recitations performed, and at our annual drupcho we could then dedicate that merit very deliberately.

The significance of this year is also one of the reasons I began my retreat. What I really hope for is a greater clarity and more confidence in each person's connection to Guru Rinpoche. Starting now, this very talk could produce a beneficial effect not only in this life, but also in the next, so that people are no longer stuck in a fundamentally unclear state of mind. Even though you may have been a Dharma student somewhere else, or a serious student of mine for a long time with years of practice and retreats, there still may be something lacking. That could be my fault for not communicating this sooner. I thought I had communicated it. That's why I wrote the Guru Rinpoche Supplication that we recite every day. So I thought this was already clear in people's minds, but maybe I haven't communicated as clearly as I'm trying to do today. Hopefully this communication bears some fruit. But this is not about me. This is about all of us and particularly those who have developed this connection with Guru Rinpoche that we have been discussing.

If you do have that connection, if you've done well with that, we'll all meet in Sangdo Palri in the next life. If not, you might be there, but I might not be. Or I might be there and you might be born in some other place. It's this connection that makes the difference in whether we all, as we say in some of our prayers, "attain enlightenment as one assembly." If we want to attain enlightenment as one sangha, as one assembly, this is what counts more than anything else.

As a teacher I feel a responsibility to help people in this life and in the next life. We talk frequently about how to do better in this life, so today I wanted to place more emphasis on what we think we want, and on what we aspire to do in relation to the next life. Hopefully this will bear some fruit and make a difference in our lives.

With that I'll conclude. Good day to you all.