

Here is an excerpt of the interview with Rinpoche. (used with the permission from **DHARMAGATES** magazine)

DHARMAGATES: We met Rinpoche briefly at the MIT Conference about Investigating the Mind in Massachusetts between the Scientists and the Buddhists more than a year ago, since His Holiness' schedule was so tight on that day, we could not approach you or other monks for an interview which was planned on our agenda. May I ask what kind of contribution from your part to this conference?

MINGJUR RINPOCHE: As part of Buddhist contribution, I was entrusted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to perform different meditations required by Dr. Richard Davidson and his team in their lab at the University of Wisconsin, Madison prior to the conference.

DHARMAGATES: So, that was Rinpoche to whom the scientists mentioned during the last day of the conference which fascinated the attendees. We were informed that few years ago, His Holiness the Dalai Lama spent two days visiting Dr. Davidson's lab, and after that He sent eight of his most accomplished practitioners of Buddhist meditation to the lab to have them hooked up for electroencephalograph (EEG) testing and brain scanning (MRI). The Buddhist practitioners in the experiment had undergone training in the Tibetan Nyingmapa and Kagyupa traditions of meditation for an estimated 10,000 to 50,000 hours, over time periods of 15 to 40 years. You are then one of the very first among the chosen lamas for this historic brain test. Would Rinpoche kindly let us know about what kind of meditation which the scientists mentioned at the conference?

MINGJUR RINPOCHE: Actually I was requested to perform 4 different kinds of meditation: (1) Non-reference compassion, (2) Visualization (of a deity), (3) Calm Abiding (Samatha) and (4) Non-reference meditation for about 15 minutes to each session respectively.

DHARMAGATES: It is so interesting to know that Rinpoche performed more than one kind of meditation for the experiment. Please explain to us the various kinds of compassion, particularly the non-reference compassion meditation which you were requested by the scientists.

MINGJUR RINPOCHE: As Kalu Rinpoche said in Luminous Mind: Compassion, Kindness, and Love together form the essential Mahayana attitude. Their foundation is a non self-cherishing frame of mind oriented towards others, aspiring to the well-being and happiness of all other beings, whether human or non-human, friends or enemies. There are 3 kinds of compassion: (1)

compassion with reference to beings is the kind of compassion which arises when we perceive the suffering of others. It is the first kind of compassion to arise, and causes us to strive deeply to do everything we can to help all those who suffer. It emerges when we perceive the pain and sufferings of others. This form of compassion is marked by our no longer being able to remain unmoved by the suffering of beings and by aspiring to do everything possible to help alleviate their suffering; (2) compassion with reference to reality is the kind of compassion which arises when we have a genuine experience of the power of ignorance; when we actually perceive how beings create their own suffering. This compassion occurs when we really see how others strive to be happy and avoid suffering but how, not understanding the causes of happiness nor the means of avoiding suffering, they produce more causes of suffering and have no idea how to cultivate the causes of happiness. They are blinded by their ignorance, their motivations and actions contradict one another. Through understanding the illusory nature of reality, genuine perception of this situation beings forth this 2nd type of compassion, which is more intense and profound than the 1st kind; and your question belongs to the third one: (3) non-reference compassion or compassion without reference is the kind of compassion retains no notion of subject, object, or intention. It is the ultimate form of a Buddha's or great Bodhisattva's compassion and depends upon the realization of emptiness. There is no longer any reference to a 'me' or 'other'. This compassion opens naturally and spontaneously.

DHARMAGATES: The result of your experiment with the scientists created quite a number of media headlines at that time and really surprised the entire world; please share with us this unique experiment.

MINGJUR RINPOCHE: To be fair, I will share with you this experiment based on general media reports: apart from the monks, student volunteers with no previous meditation experience were also tested after one week of training. Both groups were asked to meditate, specifically on unconditional compassion. Buddhist teaching describes that state, which is at the heart of the Dalai Lama's teaching, as the "unrestricted readiness and availability to help living beings." The researchers chose that focus because it does not require concentrating on particular objects, memories or images, and cultivates instead a transformed state of being. Dr. Davidson said that the results unambiguously showed that meditation activated the trained minds of the monks in significantly different ways from those of the volunteers. The electrodes picked up much greater activation of fast-moving and unusually powerful gamma waves in the monks, and found that the movement of the waves through the brain was far better organized and coordinated than in the students. The meditation novices showed only a slight increase in gamma wave activity while meditating, but some of the monks produced gamma wave activity more powerful than any previously reported in a healthy person, Dr. Davidson said. The monks who had spent the most years meditating had the highest levels of gamma waves, he added. This "dose response" - where higher levels of a drug or activity have greater effect than

lower levels - is what researchers look for to assess cause and effect. In previous studies, mental activities such as focus, memory, learning and consciousness were associated with the kind of enhanced neural coordination found in the monks. The intense gamma waves found in the monks have also been associated with knitting together disparate brain circuits, and so are connected to higher mental activity and heightened awareness, as well. Dr. Davidson's research is consistent with his earlier work that pinpointed the left prefrontal cortex as a brain region associated with happiness and positive thoughts and emotions. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) on the meditating monks, Dr. Davidson found that their brain activity - as measured by the EEG - was especially high in this area.

DHARMAGATES: Thank you Rinpoche. Next, we would like to ask about one of your projects which started a year ago: the Pal Tergar Rigdzin Khacho Dargye Ling Monastery. We knew that more than 3 years ago, land was found and purchased within walking distance of the sacred stupa in Bodhgaya, India. It is surrounded by open fields with a clear view of the top of the sacred stupa. During the 12th Kagyu Monlam in 2001, His Holiness the Karmapa consecrated the land. The Twelfth Tai Situpa bestowed the name Pal Tergar Rigdzin Khacho Dargye Ling and it was Rinpoche who worked with architects from Germany, Japan and Tibet to draw up plans for this new monastery. Please let us know the general plan of this fascinating new monastery.

MINGJUR RINPOCHE: Tergar Monastery (in short) has been designed to accommodate the large number of lamas and monks attending the Buddhist events at Bodhgaya such as the Karma Gunchoe Debates and Kagyu Monlam. There will be a spacious prayer hall with statues of the past, present and future Buddhas and many representations of enlightened Body, Speech and Mind. Accommodation for the precious lineage masters will be above the prayer hall. The uppermost floor will be for His Holiness the Karmapa and for the Protectors' shrine rooms. Two private houses on either side of the Monastery will provide accommodation for me and visiting Rinpoches. To the west of the prayer hall will be study facilities, a Tara shrine room and library. There will be 40 rooms for the Khenpos, or professors and for the Sangha who will come for study and debate. All the necessary common facilities, such as kitchens and washrooms will be built, with dormitories for up to 600 monks on the lower floor of the prayer hall. A welfare program with health clinic will help the local people and form the basis for further charity work in the area. The land is spacious enough to allow for beautiful gardens surrounding the monastery. It is hoped that the atmosphere of peace and beauty will be an inspiration for practitioners worldwide. It is estimated that the main buildings will cost around US \$700,000 and a further \$300,000 is needed to provide the infrastructure. This project will be completed by the year 2007.

DHARMAGATES: We do not plan to ask Rinpoche about Kagyu Monlam because there is a special coverage about the latest Kagyu Monlam in the same

issue this time with the contribution from our reporters in Bodhgaya and particularly Lama Karma Chodak who generously allowed us to use many beautiful official photographs of this year Kagyu Monlam. Please let us know the other important event of the Kagyu tradition: the Karma Gunchoe Debates which the Tergar Monastery is planning to accommodate the large number of people who will be attended each year after its completion in 2007.

MINGJUR RINPOCHE: In the Kagyu tradition, philosophy is interrelated with meditation. The Karma Gunchoe Debates provide an opportunity for qualified students, from many Buddhist colleges, to gather and debate the different views and to share the meditation experience from their practice. When this meeting of high Lamas, monks and nuns is at the sacred place of the enlightenment of the Buddha, it is immensely beneficial. We wish to build Tergar Monastery in Bodhgaya to ensure the continuation of these events, which are important circumstances for world peace and happiness. In addition to the above-mentioned two great events, I myself and other Teachers will hold international seminars and group retreats at Tergar Monastery. These events provide an opportunity for students and practitioners from many different countries to meet and share their views and meditation experience. The study rooms will provide the necessary facilities for the Sangha, guests and students from around the world to stay during these events, giving people from around the world the unique opportunity to study and practice at the very sacred place of Bodhgaya. We ask you and Dharmagates' readers to join us in those activities with the sincere wish that it will bring happiness to you all in this life as well as all future lives and will benefit all sentient beings.

DHARMAGATES: Last but not least, we frequently received quite a number of emails from our readers with almost the same concern: Why is Prayer so important? For the high spirit of the recent Great Prayer of Kagyu Monlam, will Rinpoche kindly give us a brief teaching about this subject?

MINGYUR RINPOCHE: Everything is interdependent. Thus when appropriate causes and conditions come together there is a result that naturally arises. To reach enlightenment we also need special causes and conditions. Generally speaking the Mahayana and Vajrayana texts speak of these essential causes: (1) Making vast prayers of aspiration, (2) Purifying oceans of realms, and (3) Ripening vast numbers of beings. Without these three we cannot attain enlightenment and our ability is limited. First and foremost is the making of vast prayer of aspiration. This is because these prayers are based on the wish to reach enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. This is the bodhicitta mind and this is why prayer is considered so important in the Buddhist tradition. In fact, it is said in the teaching that if all beings prayed together and at the same time, for peace and an end to suffering, we could really make a difference and change the world. For this reason great numbers of people from around the world gather together with the Sangha to pray for world peace and for the benefit of all sentient beings such as the Monlam Chenmo.

DHARMAGATES: Thank you Rinpoche for your precious time after your long teaching session today. We rejoice your contribution toward so many of your profound teachings worldwide, about the new horizon of modern scientific experiments with more than 2500 years old Buddhist meditation and, with great respect, your compassionate mindfulness for the welfare of thousands of people who come to Bodhgaya each year and who are in need of a protected dharma roof from the construction of the future Pal Tergar Rigdzin Khacho Dargye Ling Monastery. Tashi Delek.

Interviewed by Tam To