

“The Tilopa Institute will be a place where a lot of translators of the Karma Kagyu School will be developed”

It was on December 1, that Karmapa Thaye Dorje attained the position of Vidyadhara or Highest Tantra Master, after having completed his curriculum the studies of the Sutras and Tantras and having received all the main Kagyu initiations and empowerments. This milestone in the life of the Karmapa was celebrated at the Karmapa Institute in New Delhi



In connection with this recent occasion Gyalwa Karmapa gave an interview during which he talked about his future plans and activities for the Karma Kagyu Lineage in India, in general and especially regarding his new project the Tilopa Institute.

The education in the Shedra (Buddhist University) involves an intensive nine year long study program after which the degree of a Junior Khenpo may be attained. The curriculum at Dewakar in Kalimpong consists of, for example, six years of studies in the Sutras and an additional 3 years studies in the Tantras as well as Buddhist philosophy, Theory of Knowledge and the Art of Debate.

What is the purpose of such long term studies? What are the qualifications a student has acquired after completing the Shedra?

The reason that they have to study that much is, first of all, that currently the Dharma is not only popular in India or Tibet, but, all around the world. So there are a lot of people who are interested in the Dharma, and there are a lot of centers. I think that in the future there will be a lot of monasteries around the world. So, for that reason and also to introduce the Dharma, and to teach the Dharma, we need a lot of Khenpos.

The school of the Tilopa Institute puts - beside teaching general Buddhist subjects - yet another focus namely, to educate special translators for Buddhism. Acquiring knowledge of the Sanskrit, Tibetan and English languages is therefore an important component of the education.

Gyalwa Karmapa, Could you tell us something about your plans regarding this school?

Actually, the institute in Tilokpur will be more or less very similar to the one in Kalimpong. A place where young monks from the age of 12 up study for a longer period there and then graduate and become a Khenpo.

But then of course what is special about the Tilopa Institute in particular is that it is sort of directed to developing some very special translators. Nowadays we don't have, up until now, we don't have very many texts translated into different languages. For example, the rituals and also the dharma teaching could be translated in the future. We don't have it especially translated through Karma Kagyu Schools. That's the main reason, I think that the Tilopa Institute will be a place where a lot of translators will be developed.

Is the monastery of the Tilopa institute designed to educate only young monks or will it be a permanent residence for the 40 first young monks if they decide to take the ordination.

What will be the evolution of these monks in the monastery?

It will be somehow like a school but at the same time a monastery. So once they graduate, once they become young Khenpos, then of course they themselves can become teachers in the institute and then maybe some of the teachers will also be transferred to different institutes to teach.

Students of Buddhist schools in India wear monk robes.

Do the students take ordination in order to study?

The reason why they are ordained is that they want to dedicate their whole life for activities of the Dharma. But of course in Tibet it became such a tradition, that even from a very young age like 5 or 6, or even when they started walking, children would be sent to monasteries. But I think the proper way would be to wait until they are in the age of maybe 14 or 15, when they can really think, when they can somehow decide whether they want to be ordained or not. That would be a better way.

Is it also possible for a lay person to study in a Dharma school?

Yes, it is very possible. Dharma is not specifically for monks or nuns alone, it's for everybody, for each and every individual. Everyone can practice in whichever way they want. The reason that in Tibet, where in the old days a lot was based on being ordained, I think, was because through that way of doing it, they could have more time. They were sort of free from a normal life and its demands. In a 'normal life' there could come obstacles such as not having time, or having to do more work compared with being in a monastery or whatever. So for that reason, to have more time to sort of dedicate their life to performing Dharma activities and also for themselves to practice Dharma living as monks was easier. But of course, even for lay people, one can also do that. It will just be a little bit more difficult in some ways because of having more work.

So there will be Shedras also for lay people in the future?

I think for lay people, maybe not exactly like that. It should be something else, a sort of KIBI (Karmapa International Buddhist Institute).

Buddhist schools in India are destined to men, aren't there women who would be interested to follow such studies?

There are a lots of sorts of religions around the world, right? But Buddhism is not actually exactly a religion. From my understanding Buddhism is mainly a method. Just a method or a way to sort of develop better habitual pattern. That's how I would say it.

So for that, Buddha was sort of the first teacher to teach something that was equally for men and for women as well. In that time, his teachings were mainly for everybody, to let everyone know that there were no hierarchies or like that. Just for everybody. To distinguish, in those days there used to be a caste system and within that the women were lower and all that. In order to make all equal he taught the Dharma. But of course, even after that, in India and also in Tibet where Buddhism spread, the same way of living or the same traditions kept on going. I think that now there is much more general idea of everyone being equal and that everyone has the same potential, that everyone can do anything. I think that's a very good way of experiencing things. A better way of living I think. Then, from that base, the Dharma will be an even better tool to show that. For me, my goal, also in the future, is to develop more institutes and retreat places or retreat centers for both monks and nuns as well. So, there is no difference.

What role do Monasteries in India play for preserving the Dharma in general and in particular for the Karma Kagyu Lineage?

Each different school of Tibetan Buddhism such as, Sakya, Nyingma, Kagyu, all of them have their own way of rituals and practices from their own sources. Right now in India we don't exactly have a sort of a headquarters, but, as soon as we have one, then we will again continue with whatever ritual that we were doing such as Gyalwa Gyamtso, Phagmo, Khorlo Demchok, that kind of puja that, in the past, we were doing every year. This kind of program will continue. Of course on top of that we can begin the Drubdra (retreat center). The Drubdra of course is very, very important for us. This is because a lot of teachings of the Kagyupa are mainly based on meditation and realization through meditation, so for that there will be a lot of retreat centers in India.

When you talk about retreat centers the Drubdra, do you talk about the three years retreat or are their also short retreat?

Mainly we will emphasize the three year retreat. As monks have all the time they need, once they enter into retreat they can stay for a long, long time.

And the retreat in your opinion would be put after the Shedra.

Yes that would be the best.

Could you tell us about the education of the young monks in the monastery. About the different meditation practices they learn and the importance of learning rituals ?

The monasteries in Tibet, normally, were mainly for monks, who at the young age of 5 to 6, simply learned how to read and write. They mainly read and memorized lots of texts. But in this case, not texts like Madhyamaka and so on, not that kind of philosophical text, but more the rituals. There learned that and they also learned most of the rituals. Then when they came of age their lives would be dedicated to doing monthly pujas. Every year they followed a program and they would keep on going with that program over and over again. Of course, that in itself is not a practice, but that would be in the main monastery. On top of that, just nearby, there would be both a *Shedra* and a *Drubdra*. In those days they used to make a choice between *Shedra* and *Drubdra* or to go to both.

I think in the future it would be much wiser to have all young practitioners first of all ordained in a monastery and then after that to enter to the *Shedra* so that they will have a very good knowledge of everything. In the *Shedra* one learns everything, from ABC up to the highest level of Lama teachings. On top of that one now has to learn different languages, sciences, or history or things like that. And then, once they have done that, they could enter into the *Drubdra*, the retreat center. I think that would be the best way.

Will the future graduates of the Shedra, the junior Khenpos, visit the Western centers around the world in order to teach?

Of course; they will travel to different centers all around the world. Also, in the future, once we have a very strong base in India, and then slowly, if it is possible and if it is suitable with the different local cultures of countries, we will have also monasteries, shedras and everything, just like in India.

In south-eastern and eastern Asia, America and Europe, there is a growing number of lay centers, monasteries, libraries, and study and meditation courses where the teachings are learned and practiced in different ways. All of the above mentioned institutions are meant to preserve and spread Buddhism in general and the Kagyu heritage in particular.

Which importance do you attribute to communication with and mutual support of practitioners in the East and the West.

I have traveled in Europe mostly and in South East Asia and then most recently in America. Somehow through all the travelling I have learnt what kind of teachings should be taught, what kind of meditation, what kind of studies are needed to be done. On top of that a lot of our Khenpos are also travelling to different centers. For that reason we will have better communication as time goes on. Soon, when everything is ready in India, we can set up a good network. There can be good communication without any kind of obstacles with each and every center.

What is the significance of "traditional monasteries" in the East for „modern“ lay centers in the West?

Of course in time, we will have to sort of somehow deal with this. That means that even the way and the method that we teach Dharma will be a little bit different due to the time and due to different cultures for sure, otherwise for the beginners it isn't easy at all. But once they have a good understanding of it, then I think it is good also to keep the tradition as well.

Because through the tradition, there is so much blessing: The way the traditions are kept by the senior practitioners or old Lamas or Rinpoches, the way they have done rituals, the way they teach, and how they preserve teachings, like in the texts. Of course, nowadays we can have books but still to have texts or to have some kind of monasteries, to have that kind of tradition is still very very important. But of course for the beginners it is important that they have a very easy way of reaching the Dharma.

Will it be also possible for Westerner practitioners to visit the Tilopa Institute and receive meditation instructions and to practice there?

Of course yes, to every center or monastery, everyone is welcome. Once everything is ready.

Will you also be at the Institute from time to time ?

Yes, if I have time it's sure that I will have a visit.

What are the most important points for practitioners to focus on, and what is most important to maintain the authentic Dharma nowadays?

First of all one has to know the very basics of Dharma, that's for sure. That means such things as the four thoughts of Ngondro; that's the best. Then, to understand the reason that they take refuge is because there is nothing other than Dharma, without the Dharma there is simply no way of getting out of samsara. On top of that, based on those four thoughts, one can gradually increase ones level of understanding of the Dharma. But, the most important of all is to always have the base of Dharma be very very pure. To have a very clear understanding of it that is not based on a worldly way of religion. Buddhism also is not a religion, it is simply a method. It is simply a method to make us behave better, think better, work better.
