

Dear Sangha,

On behalf of Mindrolling, we wish you all a very Happy New Year.

May this year of the Earth Ox be filled with renewed inspiration to practice the Dharma and bring to fruition this precious human life for the benefit of all sentient beings.

It is now almost a year since the passing into parinirvana of our precious Guru, Kyabje Mindrolling Trichen. With Kyabje Rinpoche's blessings and his presence permeating everywhere, we have spent this year trying to follow his vision and commands as best as we can. As many of you know, since the time of the great master and Dharma Monarch Clögyal Terdag Lingpa's parinirvana, Mindrolling has always emphasized its practitioners to dedicate more effort to practice and various Dharma activities following the passing into parinirvana of their teachers.

In keeping with this command of our gurus, the entire Mindrolling Sangha is attempting to keep to this tradition. We have had a very rich year of many practices, drubchen and drubclöts, retreats, pilgrimages, offerings, *tshé-thar* (giving life) practices, building and renovations of various sacred stupas, temples and sacred objects and bestowing of many abhishekas and transmissions.

As I write this letter to you all, the Rinchen Terdzöd abhishekas are still going on at Mindrolling. It has been almost four months of a downpour of transmissions and for the almost four thousand practitioners here, it has been an experience of being in a buddhafiield endowed with the five perfections.

We hope that the blessings of these dharma activities will bring peace and harmony to this world, especially in today's trying times. The challenges in the spiritual world, weakening of human tolerance and kindness, violence, natural disasters, continued destruction of the environment and global economics are just the few of the obstacles we all face today. As we enter into this New Year, we pray that the coming year is free of many of these difficulties. Most importantly, I hope that we, as practitioners, learn more from these situations and begin to clearly see the preciousness of this opportunity that we all have of practicing the Dharma and bringing fruition to this rare and precious life.

I urge you all to work in strengthening your devotion to the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. Along with the intellectual hunger, I hope you all also realize that many times, very easily, our connection to Dharma in an intellectual way maybe just another form of excuse to avoid bringing true changes within oneself without which liberation from this samsara and the abandoning of its seed, our habitual tendencies, is impossible.

Giving rise to devotion is of utmost importance to anyone on the Vajrayana path. Devotion is the most skilful means of letting go of grasping and clinging to ourselves and the phenomena. It is imperative that at some point we get to a point of exhaustion of our ego and all the doubts, hesitations and intellectualizations that we bring to our practice path. Sometimes we hesitate to

talk about devotion because it seems "old-fashioned" or like "brainwashing." In this day and age, it is considered smarter to ask questions and express doubts. I am not saying that questioning is not important. In fact Buddhism began in our age with one man and his quest for truth and his search for a way out of suffering. The Buddha always encouraged questions and analysis and the teacher-student relationship has much to do with the Guru answering the questions of the student and dispelling doubts and hesitations of the student through reasoning and analysis. But all questions and hesitations must lead to the point of all this exercise, which is liberation from self-grasping. This can only come about by letting go of everything—doubts, hesitations, fear, questions, reasons, right and wrong. I think we often start off with the right attitude to questions and analysis but somewhere along the path we begin to hide behind our reasonings and rhetoric and use that to prevent true self transcendence. Practice then becomes a cold, mechanical thing that *sometimes* makes us feel good but most often we just try to get by with the memory of how things first felt when we encountered the dharma—when everything inspired us, made us joyous and we marveled at it all. But instead habitual tendencies steep in and seize us and we let dharma make outward transformations—we carry malas and practice materials wherever we go, we throw in Buddhist words and terms whenever we can, we bow and bring hands together in anjali at the right times. But true inner transformation becomes difficult. We are still irritable and intolerant, especially now armed with righteous Buddhist quotes and witticisms. We increasingly blame everyone else for our delayed enlightenment and feel that if we were just given the right practice and the right people behaved in the right way around us to create a perfect environment, the long overdue liberation would just occur. But this is samsara and the First Noble Truth is as irrefutable as the name suggests. The nature of samsara is suffering and perfection lies within and nowhere else.

Therefore, the antidote to all this is devotion. Devotion to the Guru and the dharma is what gives us the humility to know that we need to really work hard in transforming ourselves. But this knowledge is free from self-pity and self doubt. Devotion is not about, "Oh how great is my guru and how bad am I!" Neither is it an exercise in aggrandizing one's own teacher or lineage. Instead it is the firm ground upon which to build our practice path. Devotion brings joy in practice and inspires exertion. It makes us realize that the world does not spin around us and we are *not* the center of everything as we make it out to be.

I speak from my own personal experience as I thought a lot about what devotion truly meant to me when Kyabje Rinpoche passed away. It suddenly struck me that actually almost everything we make out to be so important is actually without any substance. That the Guru is inseparable from me not just because his compassion is vast, ineffable and free from the constraints of time and space, but also because the Guru is no other but my own pristine dharmakaya nature. This understanding is not an arrogant assumption that, "Oh, the Guru and I are the same." Rather it is more of a glimpse of how I could be if I was very, very, very, *very good*. It is a resonance of what I know innately but somehow forgot because I made everything else more important than what is truly essential and indispensable.

Devotion is the armor that protects us from all obstacles and difficulties along the path. It keeps us grounded and just as a tree with strong roots is unharmed by strong winds, similarly, a person with true devotion is protected from harm on the path to liberation.

As is said by Patrul Rinpoche, "The difference between a *good* and *bad* practitioner is dependent upon devotion. Even if someone is very learned but devoid of faith, he will only be an inferior practitioner for what is the use of knowing many things without knowing the essential? But if someone has pure devotion, he will be sure to achieve the state free from suffering."

If you are someone still looking for a Guru to whom you can generate irreversible devotion, then generate it for the Three Jewels. Do not rush into finding a teacher just so you can experiment with devotion and find out if it works for you. Go into it slowly but build it from strength to strength until such a time comes that simply bringing the Guru's face to mind can uncoil any klesha, allowing oneself to rest in true equanimity.

So let us all bring to mind our precious Guru, the source of all refuge and the essence of Three Roots—Kyabje Mindrolling Trichen. Let us make aspirations that we always follow upon the path he exemplified in every way and that we be known in future as his worthy students. Let us generate great devotion and gratitude to the Three Jewels, Padmasmbhava and all the root and lineage gurus. Let us begin this New Year with renewed and strengthened devotion and the inspiration to be everything our Guru trusted us to be when he bestowed and entrusted to us an unending stream of immaculate and incomparable precious teachings. May we have the humility to realize the ground upon which we stand and the courageous confidence to joyously and fearlessly walk on the path of liberation in this New Year.

As you may already know, this year there will be no Losar, Tibetan New Year, celebrations in Tibet and India and most other places. This is because of the passing away of Kyabje Rinpoche, the loss of many lives of Tibetans in the uprising last year and due to the ill health of Kyabje Penor Rinpoche, Kyabje Trulshig Rinpoche and many other senior teachers. Instead people will be spending the New Year in practice and contemplation. May the prayers and wishes of everyone bring strong health and long life to all our teachers and shower the blessings of peace and happiness in this world.

Jetsunla and I send you all our best wishes and please know that our love and prayers are always with you. We also convey to you all the greetings and love from Sangyum Kushog and the entire sangha of Mindrolling and Samten Tse.

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