



His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa at Karma Thegsum Choling of New Jersey (KTC-NJ)

On Friday, May 23, KTC-NJ and the Chinese community had the honor to introduce and host His Holiness the 17th Karmapa on his first visit to New Jersey to an audience estimated to be about 1,600 participants. This event took place outdoors under white tents set on a beautiful, spacious lawn, surrounded by 145 acres of plush, green open fields. Tibetan prayer flags flapping on a breezy afternoon displayed a majestic view of symbols and colors against a background of deep, blue sky.

The energy was similar to most large Dharma events, with people joyfully waiting on line, people eagerly volunteering, organizers busy checking on the flow of traffic, and vendors busy attending to gift shoppers. Among the participants were about 80 Vietnamese from various parts of the United States. The teaching of His Holiness the 17th Karmapa was - for the very first time - simultaneously translated into Vietnamese via FM radio by a member of the Viet Nalanda Foundation to benefit the Vietnamese community. As the translation went very smoothly behind the main stage, all Vietnamese participants truly appreciated the chance to understand the Karmapa's profound teaching through the language that is closest to their hearts.



Around 2:00 p.m., in the opening speech, the Karmapa thanked the audience and expressed his delight in visiting KTC-NJ for the first time. The teaching consisted of two parts: a public talk and a Medicine Buddha empowerment. The public talk focused on the importance of greater communication in order to increase empathy and friendship between people of different cultures. He stated that through deeper understanding of various cultures and languages, people can gain more freedom by being able to open up communications to foster peace and happiness. Caring for one another will result in a

more harmonious community. The Karmapa also stated that in his view, English and Chinese are two very important languages in our contemporary time and that he was happy that the teaching was being directly translated to both of these major languages.

He shared his personal experiences in his early childhood, how he viewed Western visitors as being very different from Tibetans. These views were projections without understanding the facts. However, through interacting with these visitors, he eventually discovered that the basic emotions of the Western and Eastern people are similar and that the people of all cultures possess the same wish to have happiness, share empathy, and avoid sadness.

During the Medicine Buddha empowerment, the 17th Karmapa gave an overview on the meaning of image of the blue Medicine Buddha holding in his left hand a bowl filled with healing nectar, in his right a precious myrobalan herbal plant. His Holiness the Karmapa explained the original cause of our sickness, which arises from the negative emotions or the three poisons of desire, hatred, and ignorance; how these three poisons work in conjunction with the four elements of water, fire, earth and air. Since our mind and body are interdependent, our mental negative emotions are contributing factors to our physical illness. When the four mentioned elements are in balance, we will be able to maintain wellness. Should imbalance occur to any of these interdependent factors, we will experience sickness. For instance, if at any point in our lives, the klesha of desire is predominant, this will bring in an imbalance of the water element; if hatred is predominant, it will give rise to excessive fire element; if ignorance is predominant, we will find imbalance in either or both elements of earth and air.

The Karmapa stated that the purpose of the empowerment was to give strength to the mind and to allow it the stability to rest in meditation. When there is pliancy of both body and mind, the four elements will be balanced and one will achieve a state of well being. In discussing the prerequisite for the empowerment, the Karmapa brought to people's attention the importance of "faith." He stated that faith is the critical factor which will open up the mind and allow the secret mantra to penetrate during the empowerment. Faith is the positive attitude, the openness of the heart to let the mind rest in its nature, the dharmata. Through having faith, we will effectively be able to practice the healing method by focusing and trusting our object of reliance, the Medicine Buddha.

The ceremony ended around 5:00 p.m. The sangha and a small group of people were permitted inside KTC-NJ shrine room for a special blessing by the Karmapa. Following the New Jersey visit, His Holiness is scheduled to be in Colorado and Seattle.

Written for Viet Nalanda Foundation, May 24, 2008 by S. Doan
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