

The Consecration of the Rigdzin Shikpo Stupa at Ty'n y Gors.

11th - 13th September 2024.

An introductory talk given by Lama Shenpen Hookham

Rigdzin Shikpo Rinpoche (1935-2023) was regarded as a realised Dzogchen master by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. This was even before he did a three year retreat in the back bedroom of his Oxford semi 1989-92. He had been a close student of the Vidyadara Trungpa Rinpoche since he arrived in the UK in the early 1960s. In 1973 Trungpa Rinpoche and HH Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche asked him to establish a Dzogchen practice group called the Longchen Foundation. When Rigdzin Shikpo was at Seminary in Canada (1981) he explained the meditation experiences he was having to the Vidyadara Trungpa Rinpoche who said that they showed that he was 200% connected to himself. After both Trungpa Rinpoche and H H Khyentse Rinpoche had passed away Rigdzin Shikpo developed a friendship with the Kagyu Lama Ringu Tulku Rinpoche who always referred to Rigdzin Shikpo as a Dzogchen Master and as a good friend of his. After Rigdzin Shikpo's 3 year retreat under the personal direction of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche said that he had given Rigdzin Shikpo Rinpoche the whole of his Dharma teaching, omitting nothing. In other words, it was one full vessel pouring its contents into another. Various other Lamas including Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche admired the strength of Rigdzin Shikpo's samaya with Trungpa Rinpoche and his student's faith in him. This is traditionally regarded as a sign of the greatness of a teacher.

We have been so fortunate to have been able to meet and learn from such a master and to be in possession of his legacy in terms of writings and recorded materials and his relics. His students now have the opportunity to continue to teach from what they have received through his adhisthana and their own devotion, connection, study and practice.

May all his students work together harmoniously to preserve and pass on these teachings and the connection to the adhisthana of his lineage for generations to come. Any mandala manifests on the basis of mysterious connections that cannot be accessed through analysis and conceptual thought. Yet the connections form our world and it's our misperception of and failure to relate to these connections that lead to the endless experience of the suffering of samsara. Awakening is to recognise the significance of all our connections. In Tibetan this is called tendrel and is often translated as auspicious connections. Stupas, rituals, relics, pilgrimage and our faith and connections with the Guru and each other create auspicious connections that hasten our Enlightenment and that of all beings. The world of manifestation is not separate from mind. That's not to say everything is mind as opposed to material. It's saying what is material and what is mind are not different – they are reality and cannot be separated. To think of relics as merely material ashes is a mistake. When Rigdzin Shikpo Rinpoche was alive they were him and they still are him. What could that possibly mean?

Since every point in space is dimensionless and an instant of time has no duration, every point in space and instant of time interpenetrates every other – this is known as Emptiness which means although every thing manifests distinctly nothing is separable from anything else. What seems to arise, stay and cease is simply an illusion, mistaken perceptions that we lay over the real, ungraspable, mysterious connections that are Reality. In other words, Totality is without separation - , it's not in space and time.

Take a rock for example, which has millions, if not billions of years of history. If all that had arisen, stayed and ceased in time and space, there would be no record and in fact no stone at all. The stone is like a visible manifestation of billions of connections that have never gone anywhere. The relics of a person are the same, they are their whole mandala through countless lives in the past and those to come. If we respect their relics as the centre or essence of their mandala, then we are engaging and empowering that mandala and it is empowering us. In this way, as we consecrate Rigdzin Shikpo's ashes in his stupa here at Ty'n y Gors, we are empowering it. We are empowering his relics through time honoured ritual actions which create a mandala structure that we can further empower by focusing on it with faith and ritual actions. The more people that focus on it with faith, the more its adhisthana is activated, its reality is accessed and can enter us and our own reality. Ritual is magical transformation. Even prostrating to a stupa or shrine has magical power. It's not simply that it has a psychological or social effect. It is far more than that.

The universe is not separate from mind or beings – it's nothing more or less than beings and their worlds. When people look out into the vastness of the universe and say it makes them feel small, it's because they are trying to look at it as separate from themselves. It's neither all "out there" nor all "in here" – it's without inside and outside. It's really hard to sustain such a view. Momentarily we might be able to intuit it, but it takes a great deal of training (purification, faith, prayer etc.) to actually realise it i.e. to really make it real for ourselves, as opposed to simply leaving it as a mere flash experience. Enshrining Rigdzin Shikpo's relics in a stupa is in fact a cosmic act – a ritual act , a magical transformation. It creates a mandala that we can enter and empower. We can open to its power and influence, which is to open to the whole interpenetrating universe of all Buddhas and their realms. Rigdzin Shikpo understood this when he said he wanted his relics in a stupa at Ty'n y Gors. This is his Bodhichitta heart-wish and intention. His presence, his adhisthana and pranidhanas emanate from here and from wherever his relics are enshrined.

Rigdzin Shikpo said many things about his wishes and vision for Ty'n y Gors to a number of his students at different times, but unfortunately he never formalised any of them. Therefore we only have his last will and testimony to go on. This has left me as his widow in the position of having to decide what to do with his property and legacy, including Ty'n y Gors. I see this as a responsibility to his students and to the world for generations to come. Ty'n y Gors has become a sacred place because of the practice that has gone on here over the decades and the intrinsic sacredness of this place of which RS was so acutely aware. We came here in 1997 with the intention of placing an image of Guru Rinpoche on an island in a lake following H.H.

Khyentse Rinpoche's advice to us at the cremation of Vidhyadara Trungpa Rinpoche in 1987 and thereafter.

When Rigdzin Shikpo passed away in 2023, I sought the advice of various Lamas as to the proper way to enshrine his relics. Rigdzin Shikpo had already sought advice from Lama Khenpo Namgyal in quite some detail, but still left no clear instructions of what exactly he wanted to happen. The advice I got from the lineage Lamas I consulted was to seek Lama Puntsok Rinpoche's help and then do as I thought best. Lama Puntsok Rinpoche had already consecrated our stupa at Hermitage only 20 minutes drive away in 2011. He had met Rigdzin Shikpo at that time and like so many Tibetan Lamas, he seemed to recognise immediately and intuitively Rigdzin Shikpo's qualities as a realised Dzogchen practitioner. As soon as I asked Lama Puntsok Rinpoche's help he clearly intended to enshrine his relics in a manner appropriate to his spiritual status. He is thus empowering them so that Rigdzin Shikpo's Bodhichitta activity will spread without obstacles both widely and deeply for the benefit of this and of generations of practitioners to come.

Lama Puntsok Rinpoche and his Lamas will be performing the consecration rituals in the Tibetan language, following the tradition of Chag-Dzog Zung Juk – Mahamudra and Dzogchen combined. Rigdzin Shikpo received an empowerment from Trungpa Rinpoche in the early 1960s, making him one of the first westerners to be empowered as a lineage holder of the Chag Dzog tradition. In 2020 Rigdzin Shikpo transmitted to us Trungpa Rinpoche's Sadhana of Mahamudra which again unites the Mahamudra lineage of the Karma Kagyus with the Dzogchen lineage of Guru Rinpoche. Lama Puntsok Rinpoche is conducting all the rituals in full accordance with this transmission lineage. Although Rigdzin Shikpo liked to emphasise the uniqueness of the Longchen Foundation transmission lineage, unfortunately he did not live long enough to pass on the details of his vision for it. It will take his students time to formalise Rigdzin Shikpo's unique transmission lineage. That remains something for the future.

In the meantime Rigdzin Shikpo has asked us to respect Mandala Mother, Sally Sheldrake as his representative and to follow her lead in terms of his Longchen Foundation mandala. So we are grateful for her leadership in terms of the enshrining of the ashes at Ty'n y Gors with a second small portable stupa to be kept at Beechey Ave, the place Rigdzin Shikpo did his 3 year retreat and lived for the last 4 decades of his life.

Lama Puntsok Rinpoche flew from Nepal arriving at the Hermitage on Friday 6th September early in the morning. He was accompanied by three Lama disciples whom he has trained from childhood and who are now the chief Khenpos of his own monastery of Lekshey Ling in Swayambhu Kathmandu Nepal. Their names are Dorje Lopon Khenpo Darjay, Khenpo Kunzang and Acharya Pasang (who is currently acting as Lama Puntsok's personal attendant).

Lama Puntsok Rinpoche is famous as a ritual master and builder of stupas worldwide. He comes from a very poor village in Western Nepal where the inhabitants are culturally Tibetan. As the only son of the family his father didn't want him to be a monk but he insisted, being greatly inspired by HH 16th Karmapa. He

struggled to get an education for himself so that once he had completed his training in study and meditation practice he wanted to make it easier for the next generation than it had been for himself. He built a monastic school and trained monks to become khenpos and teachers of the next generation. He has been tireless in his devotion to his monks and students and in travelling around the world helping at Dharma centres everywhere. Yet he always radiates a kind of inner calm and kindness as if nothing is too much for him. A wonderful example to us all. He has given us a few copies of his life story produced by his Taiwanese disciples. He works very closely with H.H. Karmapa Urgyen Thinley Dorje.

Lama Puntsok Rinpoche and his Lamas began work on preparations for the consecration the very afternoon of the day of their arrival, visiting Ty'n y Gors and sketching out a plan of action for the coming week. The next day they performed the ritual of *rudrub* and *tsadrub* on Rigdzin Shikpo's ashes and created 13 small tsa tsa (moulded clay images of 8 stupas) to put in the two stupas. Lama Dashon, Lama Tara, Dan and a few other volunteers were able to participate and take pictures of the proceedings for future reference.

The following afternoon the stupas were filled at Ty'n y Gors ready for three days of sadhana practice from Wednesday to Friday. This is what constitutes the consecration ritual itself. It is drawing down the power of the lineage into the stupa through the practice of sadhanas.

On Monday, Lama Tulku Sherdor and on Tuesday, Lama Tashi Mannonx arrived to help in various ways with the rituals and translation. Both are three year retreatants trained in the Kagyu tradition that Lama Puntsok will be following. Tulku Sherdor is a Nyingma Tulku – who worked closely with his Tertön teacher for many years after his three year retreat in the Kagyu tradition. He is now a student of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche (the eldest son of Urgyen Tulku) of the Kagyu Nyingma tradition as well as of many other teachers including Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. He has visited us in Wales a number of times offering us a number of transmissions including that of Longchenpa's great work, the Choying Dzo (Treasury of Space).

Lama Tsering Tashi Mannonx was an early student of the Longchen Foundation when Rigdzin Shikpo started the Nitārtha school in Oxford in 1983. He was a teenager then, but felt awed to have met Longchenpa in person when Rigdzin Shikpo gave the Longchenpa transmission on Longchenpa day. He later completed a couple of 3 year retreats at Samye Ling and trained in Tangka painting and calligraphy for many years under the great master Sherab Palden. He became the head monk for many years and worked with Lama Puntsok on the rituals for the Samye Ling stupa. He is the world's most renowned expert on Tibetan calligraphy and is currently writing a manual that is eagerly awaited by khenpos and calligraphers worldwide. He came and did an enso workshop several years ago and promises to do so again!

We are honoured to have such a line up of emanant Lamas and Khenpos to lead the rituals for this stupa consecration event. But that is not to downplay the importance of the contributions from so many students world-wide contributing financially, practically and spiritually, making offerings and connections especially those who have made the effort to be here in person and others online and many more in spirit.

Thanks are due to the Ty'n y Gors ad hoc management team including Jonathan Shaw, Pat Macdonald, Dan Raymond, Tobi Jaekle and Sudhana (Adrian Finter), without whom nothing would have been possible. Thanks also to a stream of volunteers and Mike Stubbs for preparing the island and plinth and pagoda and much else as well.

Gratitude to Khenpo Namgyal and his brother Khenpo Norbu for all their help and advice from Nepal over the months, helping us get everything together, and the Lekshey Ling monks who rolled the mantras and helped us by sending everything we needed in advance, including the stupas. There have been a lot of people involved both in the East and the West!

It is wonderful to see how all Rigdzin Shikpo's students are willing to work so hard together to honour his relics and empower them for the benefit of this and hopefully many generations to come.

On Wednesday, the sadhana rituals will be focused on Amitabha whose Pure Land is Sukhavati. There is a sutra called The Arya Amitabha Vyuha (no 18 'The land of utmost Bliss' in CC Chang's 'A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras'. On this day we focus on the meaning of a Pure Land – the sambhogakaya manifestation of a Buddha's mandala of activity for the benefit of beings. The Pure Land is the essence of our heart in which all mandalas interpenetrate and from which our own Pure Land will manifest as our Buddha Nature is revealed through our faith, practice and adhisthana of the Buddhas. Rigdzin Shikpo gave amazing teachings on the Sutra Principles of this topic at Karma Ling in France decades ago. When we sing his prayer it refers to Rigdzin Shikpo as uniting the teachings of Mahayana and Maha-ati – the inseparability of Guru Rinpoche and Shakyamuni – so its very apt that we begin the consecration focusing on the Mahayana Sutra teachings of Amitabha's Land of Utmost Bliss (Sukhavati).

You will be provided with a booklet with the Samantabhadracharya Pranidhana taken from the Avatamsaka Sutra and a prayer to be born in Sukhavati. The Lamas will be reciting these prayers in Tibetan. They invite us to join in English at the beginning and end of each session. Lama Puntsok Rinpoche wants us to join in as much as possible and to feel an integral part of the proceedings.

On Wednesday evening, there is the opportunity to hear Stephen Hinde, one of Longchen Foundation's senior teachers giving a talk, live on Zoom about Death and Dying. Stephen writes, "This tradition emphasises that practising meditation while alive, is the only useful preparation for the process of Death and Dying."

We are also very honoured to have David Lacelles (Lord Harewood) of Harewood House and estate just north of Leeds. On Thursday evening, he will give a short talk and show a film of the construction 20 years ago of a Bhutanese stone stupa in the grounds of the magnificent Himalayan Gardens on the Harewood estate. It was consecrated by a Nyingma Lama and attended by King Charles just before his marriage to Queen Camilla. Lama Puntsok Rinpoche and party are planning to visit the stupa on Sunday the 15th, to then leave the same evening from Manchester airport straight back to Nepal. This is their late summer break from monastic duties!

Lama Puntsok Rinpoche says he and the Lamas will be doing two sessions of puja, 90 minutes long each morning and afternoon. Everyone is invited to join them as they begin and as they end even if not everyone is keen on sitting through three hours of Tibetan chanting. If they prefer, participants may practise in the tent outside for sessions of chanting and/or sitting to be set up on request. Otherwise people may prefer to find a quiet spot for themselves where they can simply sit and absorb the atmosphere – meditating in silence or quietly chatting outside earshot of the practice tent and shrine room. There is much to ponder and absorb – as we recall the kindness of our Guru Rigdzin Shikpo Rinpoche and practice Guru Yoga in whatever way our heart prompts us. For some, volunteering to help create and maintain the event and sacred space is their particular way of honouring and participating in the event.

Thursday will focus on Milarepa and Mahamudra. In the booklet there are various prayers for realisation of Mahamudra including Rangjung Dorje's Prayer of Mahamudra. Tulku Sherdor translated it quite early in his training together with the commentary by the great Pandit 9th Situpa.

Friday is Guru Rinpoche day and the grand finale of the three day consecration. The theme is the Konchok Chindu – Union of all the Jewels by the great Nyingma tertön Jatson Nyingpo. Rigdzin Shikpo gave a whole series of teachings from this practice – especially the Tarpay Delam Ngon Dro practice in the early 2000s. The recordings of these teachings are in his archive and are an invaluable resource for his students in the future. It is very apt that the consecration finishes with Guru Rinpoche. There will be a small image of Guru Rinpoche in the front of the stupa on the island, so finally we will have a Guru Rinpoche image on an island in a lake just as Rigdzin Shikpo and Trungpa Rinpoche always envisaged!

We will be reciting various prayers to Guru Rinpoche that are in the booklet.

Saturday is for Rigdzin Shikpo's students and friends to celebrate in English, according to the way Rigdzin Shikpo taught us to practise. We can circumambulate the stupa and make pranidhanas that this place always remain sacred for the practice of Dharma – especially Dzogchen and Mahamudra and all the practices Rigdzin Shikpo held dear and taught us. The day will end with a Ganachakra, the details of which are still being finalised. We will end on a note of celebration, joy, gratitude and forward looking for the vision of Rigdzin Shikpo, Trungpa Rinpoche, H.H.Khyentse Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche to be fulfilled – indeed the vision of Longchenpa to be fulfilled.

Lama Puntsok Rinpoche talked of the possibility of a fire puja on Friday, but if that doesn't work out we can do a Longchen Foundation Smoke Offering puja on Saturday at some point.

It has been a real roller coaster time for me and my team - with Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche passing away, a quick trip to Nepal and being carried away with the transformative power of being present at Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso's cremation. That alone would have sufficed for the year, but comes on top of an earlier visit to see Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche alive for the last time.

All this with so much to do to prepare Ty'n y Gors for the consecration. I am amazed how it has all worked out – it demonstrates excellent tendrel and a promising future for Rigdzin Shikpo's lineage.