

# 100 Million Six-Syllable Mantra Retreat

-Teachings by His Eminence Druwang Konchok Norbu Rinpoche

Than Hsiang Temple, Penang

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1. All sentient beings in the six realms wish for happiness and want to be free from suffering. However, only sentient beings endowed with a precious human life have the greatest capacity to achieve this. All of us present at the retreat have obtained a precious human life, are disciples of the Buddha and practice the Dharma. We can be said to have planted the seed for Enlightenment. Buddha Shakyamuni gave many teachings but it is difficult for us to fully understand all these teachings. The easiest and best practice for us to do is the practice of the six-syllable mantra. There is no other practice better than this practice in helping us gain liberation from samsara and gain happiness. The six-syllable mantra is the essence of the wisdom of all past, present and future Buddhas. It is also the essence of all the teachings of the sutric and tantric path, the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha, and the heart mantra of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. We should therefore concentrate on this practice so as to attain the fruit of Enlightenment, the three kayas of the Buddha: the Dharmakaya form Buddha Amitabha, the Sambogakaya form Buddha Avalokiteshvara, and the Nirmanakaya form Buddha Chenrezig. When we recite the six-syllable mantra, we need to aspire and believe in Chenrezig. As samsara is suffering, we should also aspire to liberate all sentient beings from suffering through our practice.
2. Buddhist practitioners can be divided into those of lower, mediocre and higher capacities. Those of higher capacities can realize their Buddha nature through the six-syllable mantra practice while those of mediocre capacities can gain rebirth in Pureland through this practice. Even those of lower capacities, those with not much wisdom, will be able to take rebirth in the three higher realms through doing this practice. The six-syllable mantra practice is a very rare and precious practice. People who know, understand and do this practice are very rare indeed. This opportunity to do the six-syllable mantra retreat together is an opportunity that is the fruit of our past positive karma.
3. It is important that we pronounce each of the six-syllables accurately and clearly. We cannot miss out any one of the syllables because each syllable closes the door to one of the six realms of samsara. The six-syllables together prevents us from taking rebirth in the six realms of samsara; the heavenly being realm, the human realm, the Asura realm, the animal realm, the hungry ghost realm, and the hell realm. The benefits of the six-syllable mantra practice are not only conceptual. Many blind people in Tibet regain their sight through reciting the six-syllable mantra. This example shows that the benefits of this practice can be seen in this

very life. Going beyond this life, this practice enables us to purify our negative karma, increase our wisdom, and take rebirth in Pureland. If we are able to cut the root of samsara, we would then be able to take rebirth in Pureland.

4. It is also important to have the right motivation and aspiration when we do the six-syllable mantra practice. We should understand that all sentient being in the six realms have been our parents at one point in time or another. There is no sentient being who is an exception to this fact. Hence, just as we owe great gratitude towards our parents of this life, we too owe our past parents the same gratitude. We should therefore aspire to benefit all mother sentient beings and dedicate merits to them. Although when we recite the mantra, we often have other problems (career, family etc) at the back of our minds, we should understand that all these problems are the result of our past actions and negative karma. Suffering does not arise by itself. In samsara, we have accumulated inconceivable amount of negative karma due to our past actions. Although we are unable to recall the negative actions of our past lives, we are still able to recall the negative actions of this life; negative deeds we committed during our childhood, our teenage years and old age years. We should use the six-syllable mantra practice to counter these negative karma generated from our past negative deeds. We must recollect our negative actions when we recite the six-syllable mantra, and pray to Chenrezig with repentance, and aspire not to commit these harmful deeds again. It is said that no negative karma is so great that it cannot be purified; it can definitely be purified through practice. Now that we have met our guru, heard the Dharma and obtained a chance to practice, if we do not make the best use of this opportunity, then we would definitely suffer when the time of death comes. It is important for us to aspire not to create any more negative karma. It is also important that we should not be attached to merits. When obscurations are removed, merits will naturally be generated. In this way, positive karma will arise.
5. Everyone at the retreat would gain the merits of having recited 100 million times of the six-syllable mantra if we are able to hit our target of 100 million recitations. However, we should be cautioned against reciting the mantra too quickly. This is because when we recite too quickly, we might not pronounce the **Om** syllable and the **Hung** syllable clearly or might miss out one of the syllables. We should also avoid idle talk and engage in this practice seriously so as to benefit others and ourselves. Rinpoche beseeched us to bear these instructions in mind.

**7 Dec 2003**

1. All those present at the retreat are sentient beings that have positive karma. It is very rare for one to obtain a precious human life in samsara, more rare than obtaining a wish-fulfilling jewel. A precious human life is one that is endowed with the 8 freedoms and 10 richness; it is the result of our accumulation of past positive karma.

2. In this degenerated age, many great masters stress the importance of the six syllable mantra practice. All sentient beings understand the suffering that disasters bring with them hence we fear these disasters. This fear leads us to seek a mean to counter these disasters. Everyone will use his own means to avert disasters. Of course, we can use wisdom and compassion to counter disasters but that is not easy to achieve. The best method is to use the six-syllable mantra practice to counter disasters. However, the practice of the six syllable mantra should not be solely for the purpose of averting disasters. All sentient beings possess the Buddha nature, the seed for Enlightenment. The six syllable mantra practice is the Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' most skillful practice for benefiting sentient beings. All the Enlightened Ones, qualified teachers and great masters understand the benefits of this practice hence they stress the importance of this practice and preserved the transmission of this practice till today.
3. On a deeper level, we must aspire to liberate all sentient beings from the six realms of samsara. There is a saying that "All sentient beings are the Buddha but clouded by ignorance. Once the obscurations and obstacles are cleared, we would see the Buddha within". Our obscurations and negative karma cause us great suffering and prevent us from seeing our Buddha nature. We are controlled by our afflictive emotions and get too attached to our external and internal problems. In this way, we create negative karma. It is necessary for us to know the path to Enlightenment. In the sutras, they say that the Buddha nature is unchanging and exists regardless of the realm of existence you are in. The Buddha nature after Enlightenment is no different from the Buddha nature of sentient beings. On the other hand, our obscurations are temporary and can be eliminated through wisdom. Due to our obscurations and afflictive emotions, we do not see our true nature, our Buddha nature. We get attached to the five aggregates and develop a dualistic concept of self and others. Due to this dualistic concept, we develop greed, hatred and ignorance and in this process, create negative karma. We must recognize that we take rebirth in samsara due to our negative karma and our worries and problems. This is the root of samsara. Rebirth is created by none other than ourselves.
4. Therefore, Enlightenment also depends on ourselves. We should use the six-syllable mantra practice to counter our problems and worries and cut the root to samsara. We must respect and develop faith and devotion towards Chenrezig, whose nature is Bodhicitta, so as to end our suffering since beginningless time. The Buddha is one with perfect wisdom, compassion and Bodhicitta. The Buddha's Bodhicitta pervades the entire Dharmakaya and all sentient beings that exist within the Dharmakaya. We should develop loving kindness, compassion and wisdom in our practice. Once we see our Buddha nature, we will naturally view all sentient beings as the Buddha. With such a realization, loving kindness, compassion and Bodhicitta will arise by itself. Hence, when we practice, we should have faith and devotion towards Chenrezig and aspire to liberate all

sentient beings. We must eliminate our obscurations so that we can see that our true nature is the Buddha nature.

5. We should transform our delusions into wisdom. We must cut the vicious cycle of samsara or else we will continue to take rebirth in samsara endlessly. When problems arise, we should not be attached to them. Afflictive emotions cause us suffering but with devotion in the six syllable mantra practice, we will be able to counter these afflictive emotions. Otherwise, we will create more negative karma. When our concentration on this practice is not strong enough, we allow ourselves to be controlled by our afflictive emotions. Hence, it is very important that we transform our minds. If we have confidence in this practice, we will see that the Buddha is not external but is in us. Buddha Shakyamuni once said in the Vajrachhedika sutra *“If via form one looks for the Tathagatha, or via the sound of the voice beseeches me, this person walks a corrupt path and is unable to recognize the Tathagatha”*. We must see our innate Buddha nature and understand that the six syllable mantra is the Buddha. Although we will not be able to realize this immediately, we must persevere. To understand our Buddha nature, we must counter our five poisons: anger, greed, ignorance, pride and jealousy. Once again, we must remember that the Buddha nature of sentient beings is no different from the Buddha nature of the Enlightened Ones. When we see our Buddha nature, then there are no teachings to learn or listen to. We would understand the three kayas, the body, speech and mind of the Buddha are within us. All sentient beings have the innate capacity for Enlightenment.
6. As the aim of the six syllable mantra practice is to purify our negative karma, obstacles would sometimes arise due to the immediate ripening of our negative karma. When obstacles arise, we should develop greater belief and devotion in our practice. This practice then gives true meaning to our precious human life. Nothing is more important than the six syllable mantra practice.

### **8 Dec 2003 (15<sup>th</sup> day of the month according to Tibetan calendar) Morning Session**

1. The 15<sup>th</sup> is a very special day as it is the day of Buddha Shakyamuni's Enlightenment, Parinirvana and his first turning of the wheel of Dharma. Practice done on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month generates the greatest merits. Hence, Rinpoche gave several important teachings on this day. Rinpoche said that his instructions are not self-constructed, but are the instructions passed down by the Buddha and all the lineage masters.
2. The six syllable mantra is the Buddha. It is not something external; it exists within our Buddha nature. Through the six syllable mantra practice, our Buddha nature will appear as obscurations are removed. However, in our practice, it is very important that we understand loving kindness, compassion and Bodhicitta and develop these three qualities towards all sentient beings. We must understand

that whenever we took rebirth in samsara, we had to depend on our parents. We do not have an independent existence. As we took countless rebirths, we have had countless parents since beginningless time. From this perspective, all sentient beings have been our parents. Sometimes, we took rebirth in the three lower realms. At other times, we took rebirth in the three higher realms. This has occurred not just once, but countless times. All sentient beings, like us, have wandered endlessly in samsara. When we see animals, we must understand that they too have been our parents. The chance for sentient beings to be liberated from the three lower realms is very small. Even within the human realm, there is a big difference in the number of sentient beings who are Buddhist and those who are non-Buddhists. We must repay the kindness of all sentient beings as they have showed great kindness towards us in this life and all previous lives. As sentient beings in the six realms of samsara have very little chance of liberation from samsara, we should cherish this chance to practice seriously so as to liberate them.

3. We should use the force of loving kindness, compassion and Bodhicitta to liberate all sentient beings. Loving kindness is like the earth on which all that moves and all that is stationary depends on for their existence. Likewise, loving kindness is extremely important in our practice. We should cultivate loving kindness towards all sentient beings just like how the earth supports all life. On the basis of loving kindness, we can then develop compassion. Compassion can be compared to a seed on the earth. It is also the seed of Bodhicitta as it is necessary for the development of Bodhicitta. When we understand the suffering of all sentient beings in samsara, then we can develop true compassion, which is equanimity towards all sentient beings. We should practice compassion in our daily lives so as to repay the kindness of sentient beings. How do we develop Bodhicitta ? Deep in our hearts, we need to develop all-embracing love towards all sentient beings and the wish to liberate all sentient beings from samsara. This is the seed of Bodhicitta. Only when one develops infinite compassion on the basis of loving kindness, can one develop Bodhicitta. With such an aspiration, our practice of the six-syllable mantra will be able to benefit all sentient beings, liberate them from suffering and repay their kindness. The ultimate aim of this practice is to repay the gratitude we owe to all sentient beings. Only with Bodhicitta could one perfect one's wisdom. Wherever there is space, there are sentient beings. Wherever there are sentient beings, there will be delusions and problems. Delusions and problems cause suffering and lead to the creation of negative karma. From the view of emptiness, one should develop true equanimity, which is all-embracing loving kindness and compassion towards all sentient beings. When one has realized emptiness, one would be able to see one's Buddha nature and recognize samsara as an illusion. To illustrate the point on equanimity, Rinpoche said that he does not differentiate between his friends, his relatives, his parents and others. He does not differentiate between all sentient beings. Through his wisdom, he views all sentient beings as equal and possess all-embracing loving kindness and compassion towards them. Only when one has realized emptiness and possess equanimity, loving kindness and compassion

- towards all sentient beings can one liberate sentient beings. And only when one has liberated oneself can one lead others to liberation.
4. We should use wisdom to transform our mind, not follow our afflictive emotions, and clear our delusions so as to liberate ourselves from samsara. How do we clear our obscurations ? We use Bodhicitta to clear our obscurations through the six-syllable mantra practice. There is also a Tibetan saying that one should kill one's father and mother. What does this saying mean ? It is very important for one to have the guidance of a guru in the practice of the Vajrayana tradition. Without the guru's blessings and instructions, one might be misguided. For instance, we might misunderstand the meaning of the Tibetan saying above and take it literally. The meaning of the saying is not that we should kill our parents. What it means that we should use wisdom to cut our attachment to self, which is the root of samsara. There is no other enemy apart from ourselves and our dualistic concept of self and others. Due to our dualistic concept, we develop the concept of my parents, my wealth, my power and so on and so forth. When the attachment to self is very great, it is hard for one to have a great aspiration to benefit sentient beings. To stress the importance of transforming our minds, Rinpoche jokingly asked the English translator if she has transformed her mind through the six-syllable mantra practice. If she has not, then he would hit her. The same applies to all the participants at the retreat. We must eliminate attachment and clear our three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance through practice so as to benefit and liberate ourselves and all sentient beings.
  5. Rinpoche ended his teachings at this session by saying it would be wrong of him not to share his realization and understanding with us. Now that he had shared his realization, he hoped that we would practice seriously and understand the meaning of his words. Lastly, Rinpoche repeated how rare the six-syllable mantra practice is and asked us to chant more of the mantra and transform our minds through this practice. He then jokingly asked all the males present to become monks while the females present to become nuns on this auspicious day.

### **8 Dec 2003 Afternoon Session**

1. It is important that one understands how one became a Buddhist. The most basic criteria is to take refuge. Refuge in the Triple Gems is required for all practices. Rinpoche advised us to recite the refuge prayer whenever we do our morning prayers or evening prayers. Without refuge, we would not be considered a Buddhist regardless of the practice that we do. It is necessary for one to know the object of our refuge (the Buddha), the Buddha's teachings (the Dharma) and the Buddha's disciples (the Sangha). Once we have taken refuge, we can then be considered to be truly practicing. Refuge is very important to the six-syllable mantra practice and makes the practice very special. When we take refuge, we must aspire in our hearts and minds to walk on the path towards Enlightenment in our daily lives. We must not walk in the opposite direction, away from the goal of Enlightenment.

2. As a Buddhist, we practice so as to benefit self and others hence we do the six-syllable mantra practice. However, when we eat meat be it chicken, pork, fish or eggs in our daily lives, we are creating immense negative karma. If on the one hand, we chant the mantra and on the other hand, we eat the meat of mother sentient beings, then our words and actions do not tally with one another. We are not doing as we preach. Can this be considered as loving kindness and compassion towards sentient beings ? Is this doing good and abstaining from evil? We take refuge in the Buddha because his teachings could benefit all sentient beings. As a Buddhist, we should understand the essence of the Buddha's wisdom and teachings, which is to do good and abstain from committing evil deeds. Abstaining from evil means that we have to keep our precepts. Hence we should not take meat. When we are sick, old or near death, we would go to the doctor, we would practice and do anything possible to extend our life span. However, when we take meat, we are killing sentient beings that are healthy. How great is our compassion and loving kindness if we treat sentient beings in such a manner ? We should abstain from killing because it generates immense negative karma. Instead, we should develop loving kindness and compassion towards all sentient beings.
  
3. In countless rebirth, all sentient beings have been our parents. When we took rebirth in the human realm, we had human parents; when we took rebirth in the animal realm, we had animal parents and so forth. Samsara is such. We need to generate a sense of gratitude towards our parents in this lifetime and those of our past lives. Hence, we should be vegetarians and abstain from taking meat. In such a way, we would do good and give meaning to our practice. By doing so, our practice of the six-syllable mantra would be able to benefit ourselves and others, and also aid in the flourishing of the Dharma. There are some people who say that their doctor has advised them against becoming vegetarians, as they would suffer from malnutrition. This is a sign that the determination of these people is not strong enough. For if one has strong determination, one would avoid doing evil deeds at all cost and under any circumstances. Hence in our daily lives, we should stop committing the negative deed of eating meat. On this basis, the merits generated from our refuge and practice of the six-syllable mantra would be inconceivable. We should try to change our lifestyle towards vegetarianism. We would certainly face difficulties in becoming full vegetarians. However, when such obstacles arise, we should remember how every sentient being had at one point or another been our parents. When we remember this, then we would not take meat just as we would not eat the meat of our parents of this lifetime.

*The above translation has been done to the best of my ability. Should there be any merits generated from the translation of this teaching, it is due to my guru's blessings and would be dedicated for the liberation of all sentient beings. Any mistake in the translation is due to my incompetence and I hereby seek the forgiveness of all dharma brothers and sisters for any mistakes made.*

-Konchok Tenzin Drolma