



The 14th Shamarpa Mipham Chokyi Lodro In Loving Memory

Karma Trinlay Rinpoche

The quick and unexpected passing of our root teacher, protector and friend causes us all great sorrow. I feel a greater sadness than if I had lost the most precious and magical wish-fulfilling gem itself. In our grief if we reflect with loving appreciation on Rinpoche's lasting accomplishments and example, I believe we may see the infinite blessings he has bestowed upon us, and we will realize how fortunate we were to have known him and been his disciples. This may bring us a degree of consolation and help give meaning to our own lives.

Shamar Rinpoche was an extraordinary and marvelous being. Whether a follower or not, anyone who was in his presence would agree that he was special. He was genuine and unpretentious, simple yet regal and graceful, always joyful and spontaneous, and at the same time profoundly wise. Above all, he was truly selfless, the embodiment of pure kindness itself. One might consider him a marvel of nature, but actually he was the marvel of Awakening, a

Buddha, or according to tradition, one of the manifestations of the Buddha of Infinite Light – Amitābha.

In the following tribute to him, I offer my understanding of who he was and what he achieved in his 62 years of mortal life. A tribute such as this can only examine him in broad-brush strokes. It will take a book to do justice to him.

To understand Rinpoche, it is important for us to learn the spiritual and historical background of his life. We must see how he lived in accordance with the amazing principles of the bodhisattva's altruistic ideal and how he fulfilled the great responsibilities that were passed on to him.

The 14th Shamarpa was, from 1981 to 2014, the head and principal lineage holder of the Karma Kagyu, also known as Kamtsang order¹ of Buddhism, which is predominant in the Himalayas and now quite well established internationally. As the Shamarpa, he was regarded by tradition as a Buddha's emanation in the form of a bodhisattva – in other words, an awakened being who chooses to carry the burdens of ordinary life so as to benefit others directly. Such altruistic motivation deeply characterized all of Shamar Rinpoche's activities. He had an inexhaustible capacity and desire to help sentient beings without discrimination and, above all, to inspire them.

1. Origins and History of the Shamarpas' Incarnation Line

According to Mahayana teachings, an awakened being is considered, through his realization, to have the ability to manifest simultaneously an infinite number of his emanations in various places to help other beings. The Shamarpas are believed to be a series or line of such emanations who manifest to serve the historical Buddha's activity and to benefit the world. The Shamarpa's coming is considered to have been foretold by the historical Buddha Shakyamuni himself as recorded in a prophecy within the Bhadrakalpita sūtra.

The Karmapa, founder of the Karma Kagyu order, and the Shamarpa are actually considered to be two different manifestations of the one and same awakened being. The second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204-1283), foretold that he would take rebirth in the future as two different emanations. The third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339), declared his principal disciple Drakpa Sengge (1283-1349) to be his equal in realization and offered him a replica in red of his own black crown. Then the 4th Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje (1340–1383) reaffirmed in Khachö

¹ By order I translate ཚོས་ལྷགས་ (spiritual tradition) and at times in the historical context བཟུང་བ་ (dispensation or presentation). I understand the term order as designating a particular system of spiritual practice and all those who are devoted and engaged in its practices. The lineage (རྒྱུ་ལུགས་) is the unbroken line of successive gurus (དོན་བརྒྱུད་འཛིན་པ་) who each have mastered the teachings and gained realization. The 14th Shamarpa is the 42th master in the unbroken succession of realized gurus of the Karma Kagyu lineage stemming from the Buddha.

Wangpo (1350-1405) the continuation of the second emanation of Karma Pashi². Thereafter, the two incarnation lines were always known as the "Karmapa Shanagpa" and the "Karmapa Shamarpa," literally in Tibetan the black crowned Karmapa and the red crowned Karmapa.

The Karmapas are the first to have institutionalized the unique form of succession through rebirths or reincarnations known as the tulku system. This method of succession was later adopted in other Buddhist orders of Tibet, notably with the Dalai Lama within the Gelug order which emerged much later in the 15th century.

As the two main figures of the Karma Kagyu lineage, Karmapas and Shamarpas have alternatively recognized each other to their respective position and have thus produced two of the most famous lines of reincarnates in history. Each incarnation within the line has never failed to prove himself worthy of his illustrious predecessors in erudition and spiritual attainment as well as in accomplishments for the welfare of sentient beings.

It is mainly to the deeds of the Karmapas and Shamarpas that we owe the conservation of the historical Buddha Sakyamuni's legacy in all its aspects within the Kamtsang institutions for nearly a thousand years. They emphasized both the instructions of the great accomplished masters (Mahāsiddhas) of India brought to Tibet by Marpa (1012-1097) and the Mahāyāna approach stressed by the great Bengali master Atiśa (980-1054). In particular they maintained the ultimate legacy of the Buddha as transmitted through the very special and unique teachings known as Mahāmudrā. The practices of the Karma Kagyu order are, therefore, renowned to focus directly on contemplative experience beyond the ritualistic or dialectical approaches more common within other orders of Buddhism.

The activity of the Karmapas and Shamarpas brought the Karma Kagyu order to great renown in the regions of Tibetan culture as well as in their neighboring countries and particularly during the 15th, 16th and the first half of the 17th century to preeminence within Tibet. Because of this some early Shamarpas also had to bear important responsibilities of state. The most notable example is the 4th Shamarpa Chodrak Yeshe (1453-1524) who was requested to fulfill the religious responsibilities of the throne of Tibet during the Phagmodrupa dynasty at the turn of the 16th century. His spiritual accomplishment and erudition led many of the great Buddhist scholars of that time, even from different orders, to consider him as their principal spiritual master.

Later, despite the general decline of the Karma Kagyu institutions and forced conversion of almost all their monasteries to the Gelug order in the aftermath of the Mongol invasion of Tibet

² The Shamarpa as the second incarnation line of Karma Pakshi is also associated with previous Indian and Tibetan masters regarded as his earlier incarnations. In particular Dāsānanda ཁོལ་པོ་དགའ་ (11th century) a disciple of Tilopa (c. 988–1069), Sarvavid ལུན་ཟིག་ (11th century) the pupil of Nāropa (c. 1016–1100), Tsultrim Pal (1098–1132) a disciple of Gampopa (1079–1153) and Rechungpa (1110–1193), the masters Namkha Ö (1133–1199) and Tashi Drakpa (1200–1282) two eminent students of the 1st and 2nd Karmapa respectively. More generally the Shamarpas are considered to be the emanations of the Buddha Ratnāṅga དཀོན་མཚོག་ཡན་ལག་ as well as the Buddha Amitābha.

in 1640, the fame and prestige of the Shamarpas remained undiminished. Because of his prestige, foreign language skills and presence in Nepal, the 10th Shamarpa, Mipham Chodrup Gyatso (1741-1792), was solicited by both Tibetan and Nepalese authorities to mediate the Tibetan currency's minting rights and valuation issue. This ultimately led to what is now known as the Sino-Nepalese War (1788-1792). The 10th Shamarpa's assistance was used against him by influential Tibetan aristocrats who sought to alleviate their loss in this war. Falsely accusing the 10th Shamarpa of instigating the war, they confiscated all of his assets, coerced his seat monastery of Yangpachen to convert to the state's Gelug order, and succeeded in getting the Tibetan government to enforce a prohibition against the enthronement of any future Shamarpa.

The line of Shamarpa incarnations continued, nonetheless, and were in secret unofficially recognized by the Karmapas. According to a prophecy of the 5th Shamarpa Konchog Yenlag (1526-1583), he would take rebirth several times as the Karmapa's relative. Thus, the 11th Shamarpa was Chokyi Wangpo (c.1805–1880)³, the brother of the 14th Karmapa, and the 12th Shamarpa was Jamyang Chokyi Nyima (c.1892–1947), the son of the 15th Karmapa (1871–1922). They were both great masters in their own right. The 13th incarnation, Trinlay Kunchap (1948–1950), passed away as an infant.

After the ban imposed by the Tibetan state on the Shamarpa for political not spiritual purposes, other rinpoches of the Karma Kagyu order, most notably the Tai Situpas, fulfilled some of the main functions normally exercised by the Shamarpa, such as finding and recognizing the Karmapa.

When the 14th Shamarpa was born and soon after recognized privately by the 16th Karmapa (1924-1981), it remained uncertain if the ban imposed upon his predecessors could be lifted and if the incarnation would be allowed in Tibet to exercise fully his spiritual functions.

2. A Summary of the 14th Shamarpa's Life

Rinpoche was born in 1952 amongst auspicious signs into the Athup family, which was quite prominent in the kingdom of Derge located in what is now the Tibetan autonomous prefecture within China's Sichuan Province. His family produced political and religious leaders. His father, who died when Rinpoche was a year old, was active politically, and several uncles were respected rinpoches. Most notable among them was the 16th Karmapa.

In 1956 Rinpoche, together with his older brother Jigme Rinpoche, were sent by their mother to the Karmapa's main seat, Tsurphu Monastery, in central Tibet. For the next three years, they

³ Precise dates of the three previous Shamarpas are unknown. The 14th Shamarpa is sometimes counted as the 11th when considering the official throne holders, or the 12th Shamarpa when considering only the ones who had been enthroned (including privately), or also as the 13th because Trinlay Kunchap may be excluded as he passed away at the age of two before in fact being properly recognized.

lived there with their uncle but were not considered part of the monastic community. They led a carefree existence and did not receive any formal training or schooling.

2.1. Recognition, Enthronement and Reinstatement

A few months after his arrival in Tsurphu, Rinpoche first revealed his identity as the Shamarpa. During a major ceremony attended by people from different parts of Tibet, Rinpoche pointed to a group of pilgrims who appeared to be nomads. He told them they were his monks. As it happened, they actually were monks from the monastery of Yangpachen, the historical seat of the Shamarpas. Astounded, they immediately asked for his blessing.

The following day, dressed in their proper monk robes, the “nomads” requested an audience with the Karmapa and expressed their eagerness to have Rinpoche return to Yangpachen. The Karmapa refused, explaining he couldn't publicly proclaim Rinpoche as the Shamarpa because of the ban the Tibetan government still held in effect against the recognition of the Shamarpa.

In 1957 Rinpoche joined the 16th Karmapa for an extended trip to India, Sikkim, and Nepal. On their way back to Tsurphu, they stopped at Yangpachen. Although the monastery was administered by the Gelug order, the statues of the previous Shamarpas had not been removed from the shrines, though the red crowns of the figures had been replaced with the distinctive yellow hats of the Gelug hierarchs. The original crowns were left on the laps of the seated images. As Rinpoche was carried around into the different chapels, he pointed without error to the different statues of previous Shamarpas and said each time, “This is me,” and pointing to the red crowns, “That is my hat.” Also, when he saw certain objects belonging to his previous incarnations, he exclaimed, “This is mine.”

In 1958 at the invitation of the Karmapa, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, the head of state of Tibet, paid a formal visit to Tsurphu. Rarely had this happened before. The Karmapa took this occasion to request his honored guest to lift the sanction imposed on the incarnation line of the Shamarpas. The Dalai Lama agreed in principle to have his government do so but said the time was not yet appropriate to formally rescind the ban because of the ongoing turmoil in Tibet. The Karmapa took advantage of the Dalai Lama's tacit agreement and privately enthroned Rinpoche as the 14th Shamarpa during an internal ceremony at Tsurphu. He was then known as Dorje Rinpoche.

The Chinese Communist invasion in 1959 forced the 16th Karmapa (like many others) to leave Tibet. The Karmapa's party traveled to Bhutan where Rinpoche and his brother with a few others remained. At the invitation of the King of Sikkim, the Karmapa established his new seat at the old Karma Kagyu monastery of Rumtek where Rinpoche soon after joined him. Most of the important Karma Kagyu rinpoches as well as many important masters from other orders such as Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche had regrouped there around the Karmapa. Rinpoche commenced the traditional monastic curriculum, memorizing the Karma Kagyu liturgy and

studying Buddhist scriptures. He proved to be particularly gifted in learning thanks to his exceptional intelligence, capacity of mastering subtle and complex notions, innovative mind and uncommon photographic memory.

In 1960 the 16th Karmapa bestowed upon him the Kagyu Ngag Dzo and the Dam Ngag Dzo, two of the most important collections of empowerments, transmissions and key instructions that gather, respectively, the heart and source of the spiritual legacy of all the Kagyu orders and the eight great practice lineages of Buddhism that were brought from India to Tibet.

In 1964, Rinpoche was officially enthroned as the Shamarpa. The 16th Karmapa elevated him publicly to the highest position after himself within the Karma Kagyu order and appointed him as his main heir and as the next lineage holder. The 16th Karmapa addressed at this occasion a prayer of long life to the Shamarpa in which he wrote:

The most exalted, the lord of the lands of snow is Avalokiteśvara.
The coalescence of his essence is the glorious Karmapa.
Inseparable from his three mysteries, in the manner of the three lords,
Is his manifestation, the great emanation; the majestic sun,
Whom I invest now sovereign of the practice lineage's order.
By the power of scattering auspicious flowers of excellent virtue
Combined with the true words of the ṛishi's truthfulness
May he successfully and everlastingly be the sovereign of the order.⁴

The Dalai Lama's approval was not necessary, as he no longer held political authority. Nevertheless, out of courtesy the Karmapa sought to secure his consent. The Dalai Lama and his government were in exile and had their lost dominion; so the reinstatement of the Shamarpa was no longer an issue for them. The 14th Dalai Lama personally performed for the 14th Shamarpa the traditional "hair cutting" ceremony at his seat in Dharamsala, India.

2.2. Receiving and Upholding the Karmapa's Legacy

In the following years at Rumtek, Shamar Rinpoche dedicated himself fully to the study of the Buddhist classics (Abhidharma, Vinaya, Pramāṇa, Madhyamaka and Prajñāpāramitā) and to putting into practice the essence of the numerous transmissions he received from the Karmapa and other masters. Rinpoche showed his prodigious nature in many ways. To the great amazement of his teachers and fellow students, Rinpoche would bring up questions no one had thought of and come up with original solutions to complex problematics.

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ལྷ་དམར་ཚོད་པན་འཛིན་པ་སྐུ་འབྲེང་བསུ་གཉིས་པ་ཚེན་པོ་མཚོག་གི་ཞབས་བརྟན་སློན་ཚེགས་རྩོད་ཚེ་ལང་ཚོ་ཚོགས་པའི་སྐུ་དབྱངས་ལས།
འཕགས་མཚོག་གངས་ཅན་མགོན་པོ་སྐུན་རས་གཟིགས། རོ་བོ་གཅིག་བཟུས་དཔལ་ལྷན་ཀླུ་པའི། །གསང་གསུམ་དབྱེར་མེད་རིགས་གསུམ་མགོན་པའི་རྒྱལ། གང་དེའི་རྣམ་འཕྱུལ་མཚོག་སྐུ་ལ་ཉེན་བྱེད་དབང།
སྐུ་བ་བརྒྱུད་བརྟན་པའི་བདག་པོར་མངའ་གསོལ་ཞིང། །དག་ལེགས་ཤེས་པའི་མེ་རྟོག་འཛོལ་བ་དང། །དང་སྲིང་བདེན་པའི་བདེན་ཚེགས་བྱང་འབྲེལ་མཐུས། །བརྟན་པའི་བདག་པོར་རྟག་བརྟན་རབ་རྒྱས་ཤོག །

Once Rinpoche found unconvincing the explanations he had so far heard on how rebirth was possible. Knowing it was an important point of the teaching that needed an irrefutable explanation, Rinpoche thought about it carefully. As he was having difficulties, one morning the great Buddhist master Vasubandhu (c. 4th century) appeared to him in a vision and gave him in a verse⁵ a simple yet pertinent solution.

During this period Rinpoche received transmissions such as the Gya Chen Ka Dzo, the collected teachings of Jamgon Kontrul the great and the collection of Sādhanā assembled by the 9th Karmapa known as the Chig Shes Kun Drol. Most importantly, the Karmapa imparted to him the instructions of Mahāmudrā: the 9th Karmapa's Three Cycles of Mahāmudrā, the Indian sources of Mahāmudrā teaching gathered by the 7th Karmapa known as the Chag Chen Gya Zhung, all of Gampopa's teachings as well as oral instructions that had never been put into writing.

Being destined to be his sole successor, the Karmapa bestowed upon Shamar Rinpoche in 1976 the Kagyu Ngag Dzo for a second time in much greater detail. In 1980, the year before his passing, the Karmapa gave to the Shamarpa alone the lineage's very special and unique transmission of "Ultimate Realization" that had been passed without interruption, through lineage holder to lineage holder, from the Buddha Vajradhara and Tilopa up to the 16th Karmapa himself.

Besides the Karmapa, Shamar Rinpoche also received many important and rare transmissions from several other accomplished masters. For example, he received from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991) the Nyingthig cycle and the teachings of Longchen Rabjam; from Kalu Rinpoche (1905-1989) the Six dharmas of Naropa and the complete transmission of the Shangpa lineage's teachings; and from Ugyen Rinpoche (1920-1996) the Rinchen Terdzo and the Chokling Tersar.

Most specially in 1985, following the Karmapa's advice, Shamar Rinpoche obtained from Nenang Pawo Rinpoche (1912-1991), the last main living disciple of the 15th Karmapa, hidden key Mahāmudrā instructions never committed to writing. Later Rinpoche also received from Lama Guendun Rinpoche (1918-1997) a unique oral transmission that the Karmapa had given to him alone with instruction to later transmit it to the Shamarpa and the next Karmapa. This transmission related to the practices of transforming and mastering the process of life and death which empowered the practitioner with the ability to communicate directly with Buddhas in their respective realms. No other practitioner or teacher of Rinpoche's generation has been able to receive, let alone master, these particular transmissions.

In this way Rinpoche was – in addition to being a great Buddhist scholar and holder of the triple ordination (Prātimokṣa, Bodhisattva and Vidyādhara vows) – the true guardian of the Buddha's ultimate legacy. He had an unparalleled knowledge of the Buddha's teachings, and

⁵ Rinpoche kindly repeated the verse to me. I provide a translation of it at the conclusion of this tribute.

through its practice he gained not only experience but the actual realization of awakening, as the extraordinary example of his actions confirms.

This was, in my understanding, Rinpoche's greatest quality. He did not just hold a historical title and position. He actually embodied, through his spiritual realization, its true meaning and function. He was in this way truly equal to his predecessors, the Shamarpa, a Mahāsiddha and the unsurpassable lineage holder, and thus he was able to guide, without misleading or error, disciples towards their well being and awakening.

2.3. Glimpses of the 14th Shamarpa's Work for the Welfare of Beings

The 14th Shamarpa's activity was hampered by several circumstances not of his own making. First, he had to reestablish a highly responsible position that had been moribund for nearly two centuries. Stepping into the position, he didn't have a pre-existing administration to help him, and as an exile in India, he could not rely on the normal support system he would have enjoyed in Tibet. Further, he was challenged because without any formal Western and modern education he nonetheless had to deal with the modern world in which the teachings of the Karma Kagyu lineage, through the 16th Karmapa's wishes and activity, had started to spread for the very first time. In spite of these difficulties, in his eagerness to benefit sentient beings, Rinpoche showed from an early age onwards his great capacities.

2.3.1. His Accomplishments in India, Nepal and Tibet

As the Karmapa's destined heir and regent, Rinpoche represented him in numerous functions and traveled to teach in different Karma Kagyu centers and monasteries. In the late 1970s he restored the historical Karma Raja Mahavihara temple founded by his predecessors in Nepal next to the Swayambhunath stupa in Kathmandu.

After the parinirvāṇa of the 16th Karmapa in 1981, Rinpoche fully assumed the responsibilities of leading the Karma Kagyu order. He oversaw the welfare of Rumtek Monastery and also guided all the Karma Kagyu institutions, numbering over nine hundred, founded across the world under the blessing of the 16th Karmapa. Fulfilling the Karmapa's wish, Rinpoche published a new edition of the Buddhist canon's Tengyur corpus (240 volumes of Sanskrit exegesis in Tibetan translation), printing hundreds of copies offered to monasteries and temples all over India and Tibet. Rinpoche also saw to the completion of projects the Karmapa had left unfinished. One notable example was the Karmapa International Buddhist Institute built in New Delhi, India and inaugurated in 1990.

In the late 1980s the Chinese government granted the request of the monks of Yangpachen to revert to their original denomination and rejoin the Karma Kagyu order. The monastery had been completely destroyed after the communist takeover and the Cultural Revolution. The

reconstruction of the monastery and retreat center and more recently the Buddhist academy were all completed thanks to Shamar Rinpoche's support and guidance.

On the 2nd of August 1993, the Karmapa's main seat of Rumtek in Sikkim was unlawfully taken over by certain Tibetan factions, namely the present 12th Tai Situpa and his followers, who supported the Chinese Communist Party's recognition of a 17th Karmapa. With the backing of the then Chief Minister of Sikkim Mr. Bhandari, whom they had bribed, these people violently evicted all the monks as well as all the monastery's rightful caretakers chosen by the 16th Karmapa. This act violated both Buddhist ethics as well as Indian law and damaged all that the previous Karmapas had set up. Daily practices and ceremonies perpetuated during almost a millennium were interrupted for the first time. The Karmapa's monks of Rumtek were also subsequently left with nothing and nowhere to stay. Shamar Rinpoche assisted all of them in all material and spiritual matters. He ensured, even in these difficult times, that their needs would be fulfilled and that the thousand-year-old Karma Kagyu order's intangible cultural heritage would be preserved intact and perpetuated.

Later Rinpoche founded the Shri Diwakar Institute (in 2002) for higher Buddhist studies in Kalimpong, a primary school for young monks near Darjeeling in India and a three-year retreat center in Pharping, Nepal. He thereby also perpetuated the historical ties of his predecessors with the Buddhist communities of Nepal and the Himalayan regions.

One of Rinpoche's main aims was education and the preservation of the Buddha's legacy for future generations in the modern world. For that purpose one of his more ambitious projects is the Sharminub Institute on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal. Construction of this large complex began in 2003 and is now nearing completion. As Shamar Rinpoche considered the perpetuation of the purity of monastic discipline crucial, a special monastery was erected in the higher grounds of Sharminub. It is dedicated to elder monks who are committed to strictly follow the 253 rules of the Vinaya (Buddhist monastic code) and practice Mahāmudrā meditation.

Not only did Rinpoche provide the monks and disciples in all these different institutions and monasteries with education, but he also cared for most of their basic needs – food, clothing and medical support.

2.3.2. His International Accomplishments

The 14th Shamarpa's activity was, however, mostly international. He constantly traveled, sometimes going around the world several times in a year. Rinpoche had a great number of disciples across the world. The majority were from the Himalayan region, but Rinpoche also had many close and devoted disciples in the Far East and in the West.

To more committed disciples he imparted, in the setting of the traditional retreat centers, the vajrayāna empowerments and instructions for their practice. For example, from 1984 onwards

Rinpoche guided the in Dhagpo Kundreul Ling retreat centers in France as well as their affiliate retreat centers elsewhere in Europe. He transmitted there throughout the years to many hundreds of disciples committed to practice in retreat all the necessary transmissions. Rinpoche also cared for the monastic institutions in the West and encouraged the establishment within the Karma Kagyu order for the first time the full ordination for women.

To the greater number of his disciples, Rinpoche gave the precious Mahāyāna teachings on cultivating loving kindness, meditation and especially the practice leading to Buddha Amitābha's Pure Land of Bliss (Sukhavātī). To everyone Rinpoche particularly emphasized the teachings of mind training known as Lojong and the unsurpassable teachings of Mahāmudrā.

In this regard starting in 1996, Rinpoche founded a new international network of meditation centers called Bodhi Path. He wished them to be places where anyone from any cultural background could study and practice in their own language the genuine teachings of the Buddha free of the Tibetan cultural framework and any sectarian bias. He designed them for lay practitioners as places perfectly integrated into the secular modern world. He didn't want these places to be, or even appear to be, religious or cultural, but rather as places where anyone would be comfortable to pursue rationally and without bias the understanding and experience of the natural reality of their mind for the purposes of gaining greater wellbeing in their own lives and benefiting others. Rinpoche delineated precise guidelines of studies and practices, drawing on the most profound Buddhist teachings he deemed suited for our present day.

Rinpoche considered the Buddha's true message to be more than a set of beliefs and a faith. Rather, at the core of the Buddha's message is a genuine science of the true reality of mind's nature that can greatly benefit people. Rinpoche believed that if a point of Buddhist doctrine did not correspond to reality it should be abandoned.

Rinpoche successfully convened several symposiums called "The Sciences of the Mind" gathering Buddhist thinkers and highly trained scientists. They discussed and compared Buddhist and scientific understanding of the mind and its nature. Many interesting parallels were found, and the basis for further collaboration was laid.

The limited space of this tribute does not allow a complete and precise description of all of Rinpoche's various altruistic activities. To mention a few more important deeds very briefly, Rinpoche in his constant concern for the wellbeing of the world established several foundations such as Shanti Path for the purpose of helping and educating underprivileged women and orphans in India and Nepal and the Infinite Compassion Foundation for the care and humane treatment of animals around the world and especially in China where animals are commonly handled with much cruelty. Regardless of his dedication to the Karma Kagyu lineage, Rinpoche also helped and supported, whenever he could, many other charitable projects not linked to himself.

Last but not least, one must mention Rinpoche's writings. As a scholar and talented poet in Tibetan, Rinpoche wrote a number of books on diverse subjects ranging from traditional

commentaries on Buddhist classics, practice manuals, biographies, historical studies and original philosophical treatises to political theory in pursuit of describing the most ideal and transparent democratic system. Rinpoche thought that his concept for a democratic system could become especially useful in the future for Nepal.

However, above all, one of the most important accomplishments of the 14th Shamarpa, towards which he dedicated his greatest efforts, was the installment of the genuine 17th Karmapa Thaye Dorje.

2.4. The 14th Shamarpa's Recognition of the 17th Karmapa

The Shamarpa's position naturally carries many responsibilities, the most important of which is unquestionably the pure continuation of the Karmapa's spiritual legacy and for that sake the finding of the genuine emanation of the Karmapa.

The 17th Karmapa Thaye Dorje was born as Tenzin Khyentse in Lhasa, Tibet on the 6th of May 1983 to the 3rd Mipham Rinpoche and his wife Dechen Wangmo. At a very young age, when usually an infant is still unable to speak, he clearly declared at several occasions, notably in the presence of an old disciple of the 16th Karmapa, that he was the Karmapa.

2.4.1. Finding the 17th Karmapa

Early in 1986 the most senior master of the Sakya order Chogye Trichen Rinpoche (1920-2007) had a very vivid vision of the Karmapa and the same day a pilgrim offered him a picture of the infant Tenzin Khentse. This was a clear evidence for him that this child was the actual rebirth of the 16th Karmapa. Changing his schedule, he immediately went, from Kathmandu to New Delhi, to see Shamar Rinpoche and conveyed his vision and the coincidence.

Prior to this, an older and spiritually accomplished practitioner who had received a detailed prophecy of the 16th Karmapa regarding his next incarnation confidentially informed Shamar Rinpoche of this prophecy. Its indications also coincided perfectly in designating the same child born in 1983⁶. Furthermore, Rinpoche later learned of the 1st Mipham, Jamyang Namgyal Gyamtso's (1846–1912) prophecy that his future incarnation would father a Karmapa.

⁶ The 16th Karmapa had given indications also to other close disciples and friends which all confirm Thaye Dorje as the unmistakable Karmapa. As an example I shall disclose what I personally witnessed from the 16th Karmapa which I have never previously mentioned to anyone, including Shamar Rinpoche, until Karmapa Thaye Dorje finally arrived in New Delhi. Although I was only a six-year-old boy I clearly remember when accompanied by my father I saw at the Queen Mary's Hospital in Hong Kong the 16th Karmapa for the last time. He told us then not to be sad and that we would meet him again in the future, and he said specifically not to forget that he would come back after a year and a half and before two years. This time frame he gave to my father and me corresponds precisely to when Karmapa Thaye Dorje's birth took place.

In addition, Shamar Rinpoche performed special divinations in front of several sacred shrines in Nepal, and without exception, each time, the signs corroborated affirming beyond any possible doubt that this child was the genuine 17th Karmapa. Nevertheless, as the unmistakable recognition of the Karmapa was of utter importance, Shamar Rinpoche undertook during a contemplative retreat special examinations which led to clear visions that foreshadowed to him, with absolute certainty, that this child was the genuine emanation of the 16th Karmapa.

Subsequently, Shamar Rinpoche on three occasions discretely sent people to assess the child starting in 1987 with Lopon Tsechu Rinpoche (1918-2003) who was traveling to Lhasa for an official event. When one of these search parties without revealing their purpose approached the boy, he displayed his clairvoyance saying, "Have you not come here to find me?"

Shamar Rinpoche undertook all of this with absolute secrecy. He didn't inform any other rinpoche or even his closest relatives, as he feared external and political interference. If the 17th Karmapa were to get trapped in politics, he would lose his freedom to fulfill his spiritual activity. Later Rinpoche even traveled incognito to Tibet in an attempt to meet with the reincarnation and bring him personally to freedom in India. However, Chinese surveillance did not allow him to come close to the young boy or his parents.

2.4.2. Political Interferences

Rinpoche was faced, starting in the early 1990s, with a great number of obstacles set up by such formidable parties both outside of and within the Karma Kagyu order as the Chinese government who sought to take control of the Karmapa and Tai Situpa who openly collaborated with them. Because of this situation, Shamar Rinpoche couldn't, for the child's security, immediately reveal to the public the identity of the genuine 17th Karmapa.

Since the start of the Karma Kagyu order, temporal political powers, such as China or Tibet, never had claimed any legitimate authority or right to intervene in the recognition of a Karmapa, unlike the case of the Dalai Lamas. The Karmapa was always recognized by the principal lineage holder of the Karma Kagyu order, with the support of the Karmapa's administration. It was through the lineage holder's clairvoyant ability and in many instances also with the help of precise written or oral prophecies left by the previous Karmapa that his successor was found. The Shamarpas were the highest spiritual authority in the Karma Kagyu order after the Karmapa, and, when alive, they were the principal lineage holder and held precedence over all other rinpoches in the recognition of the Karmapa.

2.4.2.1. The Chinese government and Tai Situpa's collaborated involvement

Regardless of the above mentioned historical and Buddhist considerations, or for that matter even communism's own physicalist⁷ beliefs, the Chinese government passed legislation proclaiming their right to recognize Buddhist reincarnates, or "living Buddhas" as they call them. Only those officially recognized by the government would be allowed to teach in China. In this way the government could control Buddhist orders in Tibet. In 1992 they officially inaugurated this new policy with the enthroning of their "17th Karmapa." The Chinese government decided that their first official recognition of a reincarnate was going to be from the first and oldest line of reincarnated Buddhist masters in history: the Karmapa.

All of this was done with the support of Tai Situpa, the third highest-ranking rinpoche in the Karma Kagyu order. He and several other influential rinpoches such as, for example, Akong (1939-2013) had, starting in the mid 1980s, developed close ties and interests in China. During one of his trips to eastern Tibet in the late 1980s, Tai Situpa picked the boy Apogaga, later named Ogyen Trinley, as his candidate for the 17th Karmapa because of the boy's physical resemblance to the 16th Karmapa. Subsequently, Tai Situpa also forged a corresponding prophecy letter which he presented to the Shamarpa, the late Jamgon Kontrul (1954-1992) and Gyaltsap as being the 16th Karmapa's. He claimed that the letter had been in an amulet pouch presented to him by the 16th Karmapa and that he had recently discovered it.

Shamar Rinpoche, Jamgon Kontrul and Topga Yugyal who were all very familiar with the 16th Karmapa's handwriting and style expressed their strong doubts. Shamar Rinpoche naturally demanded an independent forensic analysis of the letter and refused to give his consent unless the letter was authenticated. Tai Situpa joined by Gyaltsap, however, did not comply. Tai Situpa, and his followers who had instigated false rumors and confusion had by then also managed to rally support within the exiled Tibetan community and with people in Sikkim.

2.4.2.2. The exiled Tibetan government's involvement

Eventually His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his government in exile got involved. Instead of remaining neutral, they publicly took the side of Tai Situpa and thus indirectly the Chinese government. Most astonishingly, they honored Tai Situpa who had, besides breaching his vows through his violent takeover of Rumtek, associated himself with the very tyranny they claim to stand against, while Shamar Rinpoche, who endeavored only to continue, in perfect conformity, a tradition almost a thousand years old, was shunned to say the least.

The situation was probably affected by China which at the time appeared to be leaning toward a rapprochement with the Dalai Lama's administration, or at least to be more understanding. Yet, for the Dalai Lama's administration, aside from trying to compromise with China, endorsement of China's 17th Karmapa candidate was, also an opportunity to impose, beyond

⁷ The belief that rebirth is impossible because the mind is thought to be a byproduct of the body.

the Dalai Lama's accepted temporal authority, his unprecedented supreme spiritual authority over all Tibetan Buddhist orders that his administration in exile had started claiming for him in the early 1960s. Joining the different orders under a single leadership associated with the Tibetan political movement was undoubtedly an important policy implemented in the hope of creating the needed unity in their feud against China within the dispersed and very diverse Tibetans community.

At first this union of religion and politics might seem irrelevant and anodyne, but if one looks closely, it has far reaching implications. It means, for example, that all Buddhist organizations and centers around the world founded by Buddhist masters of Tibetan origin would be subjected to the authority of the spiritual and temporal king of Tibet, the Dalai Lama, and compelled or at the least encouraged to follow his political agenda. It would also destine the different Buddhist orders to slowly lose their specific identity and heritage. This would reduce them to being only an aspect of Tibetan culture in contradiction with the universal, philosophical, and spiritual nature of Buddhism. Most importantly, the pursuit of political power and hegemony is completely antithetical to the altruistic and spiritual practice so characteristic of the Buddhist path.

A number of leaders of independent Buddhist orders of Tibet such as the 16th Karmapa, Dujom Rinpoche (1904-1987), Chatral Rinpoche, etc. voiced their firm opposition to this policy of mixing and submitting each of their independent orders to the temporal rule of the Tibetan government. The 16th Karmapa warned his disciples of the dangers of mingling religion and politics and told many people, my parents included, that his disciples who engaged in Tibetan politics would not meet his next incarnation.

In any event, after the Chinese government officially nominated Ogyen Trinley as the 17th Karmapa, the Dalai Lama endorsed him as such. By doing so he implicitly acknowledged the Chinese government's authority to recognize Buddhist reincarnates and has unquestionably set an unfortunate precedent for the future. Precedent or not, as we shall see, Shamar Rinpoche managed to save the institutions of the Karma Kagyu order that have remained faithful to Buddhist ethics and the genuine lineage.

2.4.2.3. Shamar Rinpoche's rightful and peaceful stand

Unsolicited, the different parties mentioned above, through the unlikely yet actual conjecture of their respective politics, invited themselves into the Karmapa's recognition process, illegitimately and deceptively proclaiming themselves authorities in the matter. The masses were confused with false arguments and particularly the forged prophecy letter. Because of the financial and political powers and the international media coverage, which Tai Situpa had managed through his connections to harness, it had become impossible for Rinpoche to prevent the usurpation of the Karmapa's name by Ogyen Trinley.

Shamar Rinpoche, even though he had been unjustly treated and suffered from efforts to undermine his authority, nevertheless constantly sought at all costs to maintain good and harmonious relations with all the different parties. He tried by all peaceful and honest means to find a compromise that would still keep the genuine Karmapa free from politics to pursue his spiritual activity.

Shamar Rinpoche never tried in any way to harm the Dalai Lama. Avoiding any association with groups, such as the Sugden followers, who opposed the Dalai Lama, Rinpoche was always very respectful towards the Dalai Lama, and he repeatedly told his disciples never to denigrate the internationally esteemed Buddhist teacher. It is worth recalling that some members of Rinpoche's family had given their lives for the Dalai Lama during the resistance against the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

The recognition of the Karmapa put Shamar Rinpoche under tremendous political pressure. Rinpoche received multiple overtures soliciting his approval of the Chinese government's candidate. It would have been easy, and certainly profitable, for him in a worldly sense to go along with this. However, he couldn't forsake finding the real Karmapa nor let the Karma Kagyu order serve a political agenda and lose its spiritual integrity. Rinpoche knowingly took upon himself all the burdens implicated in securing the freedom of the Karmapa and the purity of the lineage.

The position of the Karmapa, as of the Shamarpa, is neither political nor cultural, but solely spiritual and charitable, an institution dedicated to preserving the Buddha's legacy, which Shamar Rinpoche at great cost and hardship endeavored to perpetuate. In accordance with the Buddhist principle of non-violence, Rinpoche stood firm. Facing the powerful financial and political forces opposing him, he peacefully employed his one and only weapon – the truth of his legitimacy.

Historical precedent confirms that there is no person or institution above and beyond Shamar Rinpoche who can legitimately recognize the Karmapa. What is more important, without receiving the ultimate transmissions of the Karma Kagyu lineage from the 14th Shamar Rinpoche, who was then its sole guardian, even if a person were to be designated as the Karmapa he wouldn't be able to accomplish the Karmapa's actual function of being the lineage holder of the Kamtsang order, which is the Karmapa's only *raison d'être*. Tai Situpa and all the rinpoches following him have not received the ultimate transmission. Furthermore, Tai Situpa personally led the violent takeover of Rumtek monastery 1993. Because this act violated the three degrees of Buddhist ordinations (*śrāvaka*, *bodhisattva* and *vidyādhara*), Tai Situpa and his active followers have lost, according to Buddhist scriptures, the necessary qualification to give transmissions and ordinations. Having the title of rinpoche or being a genuine reincarnate tulku doesn't mean that one is infallible. A rinpoche can still be hindered by his own afflictive states of mind and come to engage in criminal acts.

All the complex and troubling events of what has come to be known as the “Karmapa controversy” are too many and long to be recounted here. Over time Shamar Rinpoche, almost

Chogye Trichen Rinpoche, the elder Luding Khen Rinpoche and Pewar Rinpoche from the Sakya order; from the Nyingma order Kyabje Tsikey Chokling Rinpoche, a living manifestation of the great Padmasambhava; and from the Karma Kagyu order Beru Khyentse Rinpoche and Khenchen Trinley Paljor Rinpoche.

Everything Shamar Rinpoche ever did was for the benefit of others and for the conservation of the Buddha's genuine legacy. His actions, as we may see by examining them, were never motivated by self-interest or even hope of recognition, gratitude or gain. Dedicating himself fully for others, he was the true and living example of all the Buddha's teachings: the unparalleled Bodhisattva.

3. A Portrait Sketch

Shamar Rinpoche's numerous accomplishments of historical significance for Buddhism and the Karma Kagyu lineage in particular are truly remarkable. However, they just faintly reflect his virtue. It is impossible to describe all his many extraordinary qualities, and let alone his great realization. Through recollections and anecdotes, I shall try to briefly describe certain of his unique characteristics, share aspects of what he has meant to me and thereby capture glimpses of the great being that he was.

I had the privilege of knowing Rinpoche throughout my life. As far back as I can remember, I was always impressed by the marvelous and extraordinary ways he embodied all the ideals of the Bodhisattva, the Tulku, as well as those of the perfect teacher. The epitome of the nine⁹ occupations of the Buddhist master, he was a symbol of perfection.

3.1. His presence

From my childhood I remember Shamar Rinpoche in his youth. Except for the *uṣṇīṣa* protuberance and the long earlobes, he looked as if the most magnificent and beautiful statue of the Buddha had come to life. Simply catching sight of him or being in his presence, one felt blessed. Afflictions in our mind dissipated, clarity arose, and at times ineffable understanding was experienced.

His speech was clear, articulate and naturally melodious. During transmissions Rinpoche would read out the scriptures so fluently and with such clarity that the listener's attention was naturally and effortlessly captured. Even during long sessions one would remain focused and undistracted. Although he read at a fast pace, the meaning of the text resonated so clearly in one's mind that comprehension was far more limpid than when reading it oneself. I have

⁹ Being engaged in the study, examination and cultivation of the Buddha's legacy, being knowledgeable, full of moral integrity and benevolent, and, for the benefit of others always teaching, writing and reasoning.

received transmissions from many of the greatest masters of our time, but I haven't experienced this with any of them.

When Rinpoche spoke in Tibetan, he was always very refined and eloquent in a kind manner, polite yet very straightforward. In whichever language he spoke, he was very pleasant, spontaneous, candid and often playful. He could skillfully adapt his presentation or explanation to his audience. This would make his point immediately clear or trigger listeners to question their assumptions. He knew how to shatter our illusions and fixed ideas. He was an extraordinary teacher. One felt he was gracious yet uncompromising with truth and reality. He always conveyed a sense of uplifting joy in all circumstances. It seemed as if he faced all situations with both the purity of a child, who is without prejudice, attachment, expectation or fear, and the ageless wisdom of a great sage.

Rinpoche's precise knowledge and faithful memory were extraordinary. In particular, he noticed certain things and found the relationship among them that most of us failed to grasp. When I accompanied him to a new place, he often seemed to know it already. Once, I was told, he went to a research center which had a text he was looking for. However, the center staff didn't know quite where to find it and told Rinpoche they would search for it. He then just pointed to a shelf and said, "Couldn't it be there?" They looked and discovered he was right.

I personally remember numerous times when he would mention a passage in a book, and then when I had a copy with me, he would randomly open it to the exact page with the passage in question. Sometimes he would say, "How lucky!" as if this feat were perfectly serendipitous.

There was always something marvelous about Rinpoche, as if he transcended at will the limits of our world. On numerous occasions when the weather was bad, I recall he would blow into the sky, and within the next minute the rain would stop. He would then wink at me and say with a smile, "Don't tell anybody!"

Seemingly nothing escaped Rinpoche's mind. Many times I had a question, or had thought of one many days ahead of seeing Rinpoche, and then before I could ask or even hint at it, he would look at me and with his usual discretion, during our general conversation, skillfully give me the answer. Or at times he would causally talk about a subject which would lead to clarifying my understanding and answering my question. It was as if he saw right through one's mind and knew everything about the person.

Rinpoche's kindness was so warm that one felt cared for and appreciated as with no one else. Being in his company particularly seemed the only meaningful and worthwhile place to be. In his presence, although most people seemed to be captivated by some aspect of his unique character, I always felt blessed to realize that I faced a manifest emanation of Awakening whose infinite radiant qualities were only dimmed by the veils of my mind.

3.2. His simplicity

The grace marked with dignity, joy and wisdom that Rinpoche exuded gave him a natural and regal charm. He never acted in an artificial way, nor did he stand on ceremony or display airs of superiority.

Within the Tibetan cultural sphere, many high-ranking Buddhist hierarchs through the ages, partly due to the influence of the Chinese imperial court, came to exercise or, to a degree, be associated with temporal authority and its trappings. As a result their demeanor was often that of a prince surrounded by an array of assistants. Even today some rinpoches are very attached to their rank and stature inherited from a legal structure long since bygone.

In striking contrast, Shamar Rinpoche couldn't care less about his lofty position. Although Shamarpas are historically one of the highest-ranking Buddhist masters, Rinpoche disdained the hierarchical system. He also made no pretense of being a reincarnate. When asked about a previous life, he would say, "I can't recall any memories of the previous Shamarpas." Rinpoche did not choose his position and its responsibilities, they were imposed upon him. Nevertheless, he selflessly accepted them and resolutely carried the burden of his primary function to serve Buddhism and benefit others.

Rinpoche was always very simple, genuine, easygoing and equally accessible to everyone. He never had a big entourage, and whenever he could, he dispensed with pomp and circumstance. He most often took care of himself, traveling alone with a single set of ordinary cotton robes, a pair of shorts, the sandals on his feet, which he wore in summer or in bleak winter alike, and a large t-shirt or two.

At times he would have to make use of the traditional thrones and ceremonial clothes for certain public events, but this appeared to make no difference to him. He could be seated on the floor or on a throne, it was all the same to him. He never demanded respect. He asked not to be addressed as "His Holiness." He instructed people not to prostrate to him before his teachings, which is the traditional practice. Instead, he requested them to join him in prostrating towards the Buddha.

Rinpoche once told us in a playful way that he was a revolutionary. In the best possible sense, I believe he really was. Rinpoche didn't submit to political, cultural, ritualistic or some other worldly goal, as most religious, spiritual and even Buddhist teachers appear to do. Rinpoche was committed to the truth of the Buddha's Teachings. He led us on the path to overthrow the rule of suffering in our lives, and like a great helmsman, he steered us on his ship through the fog of the cultural and ritualistic jumble and beyond the contrary winds of our afflictive states of mind to the free shores of the Buddha's ultimate legacy: the simple innate nature of our mind.

3.3. His truthfulness

Shamar Rinpoche endeavored to keep the Karma Kagyu order away from serving political or financial interests. He criticized the use of Buddhist teachings for personal gain. And he particularly cautioned people to be wary of some lamas' or masters' abuses perpetrated through using the "guru" position and the misuse of "samaya" commitments for worldly purposes.

These days many self-proclaimed masters who are unqualified to teach the Dharma abuse their followers. Unfortunately, even certain legitimate rinpoches also take advantage of their followers and use their position to extend their personal influence and power. Some, for example, have taken to recognizing many hundreds of reincarnates (tulkus), often from influential backgrounds, in order to create for themselves large support bases both in Tibet and in exile.

Shamar Rinpoche's commitment to truth extended to all aspects of his life and activity. One of his greatest achievements – the identification and installation of Thaye Dorje as the 17th Karmapa – was met by widespread resistance and outright attacks. Yet whatever the threat, he relied solely on truth and peace to counter it. He never tried to gain support by any means other than claiming the validity of his legitimacy.

A person of unimpeachable principles, Rinpoche never contravened Buddhist ethics or human law. He always responded truthfully and with kindness. He constantly reminded his disciples of the natural law of Karma. What counted for him was, above all, spiritual practice and genuine altruistic action. Pursuit of power did not appeal to him. The very few tulkus he recognized, he did so only because they were genuine, not because he harbored an ulterior motive.

Through his unwavering devotion to the 16th Karmapa and the Karma Kagyu lineage, Shamar Rinpoche's main concern was to preserve its purity and protect it from political influence. This was his responsibility as the principal lineage holder.

Rinpoche's wholehearted commitment to the Karma Kagyu lineage notwithstanding, he truly was a non-sectarian master. He actually upheld the teachings of all the different practice lineages of Buddhism that had been introduced to Tibet. He never engaged in glorifying his own lineage by belittling others or even other religions or philosophies. He sincerely and profoundly respected genuine teachers of all Buddhist orders as well as people of science, integrity and altruism. Making Buddha's teachings accessible to all beyond their cultural and linguistic frame, bridging cultures, bringing people together in harmony, contributing to peace and the well being of humans and animals were among Rinpoche's main wishes.

Rinpoche was not attached to the cultural or ritualistic aspects of Buddhism such as the tantric ritual choreography, arts, chants, etc., even though he was steeped in these subjects and knew better than anyone how to appreciate them. However, he considered them external, secondary

expressions of the ultimate essence of Buddhism. They are partly manifestations of latter developments of Buddhism as influenced by Indian and Tibetan culture and historical contexts. The most important thing for Rinpoche, and what he tried the most to convey, was the actual meaning behind these aspects and the original, genuine teachings of the Buddha.

Shamar Rinpoche sought to perpetuate not just a true intellectual understanding of Buddhism, but also the actual contemplative experience of its practice. “Students, most scholars even, when explaining the progression on the spiritual path to awakening, only list the different levels and instances and are unable to explain the actual experiences. They should be called enumerators¹⁰, since they have almost more to enumerate than the sāmkhya," Rinpoche said in jest.

One of the last wishes Rinpoche conveyed to me was to gather both Mahāyāna and Theravāda practitioners and experts in a conference at Sharminub on the topic of the twenty kinds of saṅgha. He was always open to discussing and questioning all points of the teachings as well as his own views. He wished only to dispel confusion and benefit sentient beings.

Amidst the surrounding darkness of confusion fueling the perpetuation of saṃsāra, Shamar Rinpoche was the beacon of truth that illuminated the path to awakening for sentient beings.

3.4. His Kindness

Shamar Rinpoche without preference treated everyone with equal kindness. He didn't make distinctions. He was comfortable with people of all origins and cultures. Were they rich or poor, powerful or weak, it made no difference to him. He was always the same and benevolent with everyone, even those who tried to hurt him.

At the Karmapa International Buddhist Institute in New Delhi, on March 17, 1994, as the official ceremony for the 17th Karmapa's recognition was about to conclude, a violent mob of mostly Tibetans gathered by Tai Situpa's administration physically attacked the building with stones, sticks and small weapons. Many windows were shattered. Luckily some participants managed to shut the gates to the main hall in time to save most people from harm and injury. Some of the monks and laymen attending the ceremony were infuriated and, considering the life of Karmapa in danger, wanted to fight back and repel the attackers. Shamar Rinpoche forbade them from doing so, telling them if they wanted to use violence they were no longer his disciples. Rather, they should go out to join hands with the assailants.

Throughout the 38 years of my life that I knew Rinpoche, I can't remember ever seeing him once get truly angry. At times he would show some wrathfulness to disciples, though never

¹⁰ Sāmkhya གྲངས་ཅན་པ་ A non Buddhist philosophical school in India.

through self-concern, but always through compassion. He was like a parent who out of affection would scold, or tease, his children in order to protect them.

When Rinpoche was attacked or when he had to defend his position, mostly in regard to his recognition of the 17th Karmapa, he calmly would give his reasons, using perfect logic backed up with examples. Often, with his great sense of humor, he gave an amusing twist to his arguments. Where others would get upset, Rinpoche always remained serene. At times he even seemed amused by the pointlessness of those who were against him. He was deeply saddened, of course, by the harm human beings caused each other. When they harmed him, he was moved not by resentment, only by compassion. He tried as much as he could to benefit even those who wished him harm and who had done so. He actually repaid with benevolence all those who opposed him.

For example, even though Tai Situpa and his supporters had contravened history and tradition by enthroning a Karmapa of external political choice, Shamar Rinpoche went so far as to concede, for the sake of peace, that the boy who wasn't the rebirth of the Karmapa could nonetheless use the name of Karmapa. To cite another example, in 2008 prior to giving permission to Ogyen Trinley to leave India for his first tour in the West, the Indian government approached Shamar Rinpoche and assured him that if he had reasons to oppose the decision they would not authorize the trip. Though he easily could have blocked Ogyen Trinley's travel, Rinpoche did not do so. It has occurred to me that not only did Rinpoche try to benefit those who harmed him, but he also tried to take upon himself their negative karma.

Shamar Rinpoche supported his disciples according to their needs and protected them. Not only did he guide them on the spiritual path, he also provided, whenever he could, those in difficulty with material assistance. He was accessible to all and always made himself available.

Rinpoche seemed, like the great bodhisattva Avalokitesvara who in his clairvoyance watches over and cares for us. I remember him reaching out to me, with startling synchronicity, at crucial moments in my life. For example, without having told him about it, I would receive a reassuring phone call minutes before a family member's surgery or before an important decision I had to make. He was there always when you were in need.

Shamar Rinpoche has, particularly, imparted to us the entirety of the profound and priceless teachings of the lineage. We can't be more fortunate, as there is nothing more precious. We can't benefit from any greater gift than this. The great master Saraha (c. 8th century) said:

If while living
you do not change,
then there is nothing but to grow old and die;

through the guru's teaching,
awareness is purified—

that's wealth, what's worthy besides that?¹¹

Shamar Rinpoche embodied benevolence. His deeds and accomplishments are a lasting witness to his great kindness. His life is an incomparable and most inspiring example for all of us to follow. In everything Rinpoche did, he always manifested genuine simplicity, truthfulness and kindness.

4. Parinirvāṇa

Looking back at the events surrounding Rinpoche's death, one can clearly see that he was awakened and had mastery over his lifespan. It appears that not only was he aware of his imminent death but he actually chose the precise moment as well.

Long before his death, Shamar Rinpoche told many of his disciples that he would not live very long and that he would pass away at the age of sixty. Chögyam Trungpa (1939-1987) performed a mirror divination and foresaw that Shamar Rinpoche's life span would not exceed five cycles of twelve years. However like a Buddha who has control over the length of his own life, Rinpoche extended it by over two years in response to his disciples' and especially the 17th Karmapa's repeated requests for him to live longer.

In the months and weeks preceding his passing, Rinpoche gave us many indications. He told me he would not be teaching much more in his Bodhi Path centers and that he counted on me. At the last dinner we had together, an older couple, perhaps in their late sixties, was sitting at another table. Rinpoche looked over at them and told us, "I will not be that old. I don't want live to be that old."

In similar and even more direct ways, Rinpoche let all his disciples know that he was going to leave us soon. He insisted on speaking of impermanence, the meaninglessness of saṃsāra, and the pointlessness of fearing death if one knows how to practice at that moment. He mentioned he was going to take a vacation and that he had basically finished his work. At other times he told us we should not wish him to live too long, for this would be wishing him to be old and diminished.

These hints about his impending death notwithstanding, Rinpoche at the same time spoke about many projects, more it seemed than at any other time. In retrospect, this now appears to me like his final will, his last instructions on what he wanted us to accomplish. This was his way of skillfully associating his disciples to the great merit of his vast awakened activity.

As a teaching to remind us of impermanence and the inevitability of death, on the morning of June 11, 2014, in the presence of his brother and a few disciples, Shamar Rinpoche suddenly

¹¹ འོ་ཏ་མཚོ་དབྱི་གླུ་ལས། གསོན་པ་གང་ཞིག་རྣམ་པར་མ་གྱུར་པ། །དེ་ནི་ཆས་ཤིང་འཆི་བར་འགྱུར་རམ་ཅི། །ལྷ་མས་བསྟན་པ་དེ་མེད་ཚོ་གོས་ནི། །དེ་ཉིད་གཏེར་ཡིན་གཞན་པ་གང་ཞིག་ལོ།

yet most peacefully withdrew his manifestation from this world and entered into Parinirvāṇa, the pristine awakened state. Over the following two days, his body remained in the seated meditative posture and appeared as if alive with none of the usual signs following death. During this period, disciples in their practice felt Rinpoche's blessing ever greater.

At dawn on the very auspicious day of the anniversary of the historical Buddha's awakening (June 13), signs that Rinpoche's meditation was completed appeared. Subsequently the silence in the sacred body's presence was broken with a solemn request beseeching Rinpoche to emanate his benevolent manifestation in this world again. A tulku or emanation is the manifest expression of an awakened being's compassion. Tulkus do not appear in the world through attachment to an identity but because they are truly selfless. Their activity is thus limitless.

It is true that we have lost the most marvelous and incomparable teacher. It is all the more sad that such a genuinely realized master is extremely rare in our times, like the rare bee in bleak winter or a visible star at noon. We are extremely fortunate to have met Rinpoche, and now it is evermore important that we put into practice his precious teachings as death awaits us all. If we do not make progress in this life, it is uncertain whether such fortune will be ours again. The mind in its nature is immortal, as the following verse which appeared in Shamar Rinpoche's vision of Vasubandhu proves:

[The mind's] arising continuously being without hindrance
Is the evidence that proves its start is in infinity,
All the causal conditions [for its arising] being present without hindrance
Is the evidence that proves its end is in infinity.¹²

The great Milarepa (c.1052 – c.1135) said he did not fear death, just rebirth. Considering this, we should all strive through discipline and meditation to become masters of our own mind and thus of our destiny. Shamar Rinpoche, because of his great affection for us and all sentient beings, will never forsake us. We may be confident that his blessing will perpetually accompany us until we are able to reach his high ground of complete and true freedom.

I remember once someone asking Shamar Rinpoche if there was a formulation or prayer specific to the Shamarpa like the well-known "Karmapa khyeno" (Karmapa know of me). Rinpoche just looked out into space, as he sometimes did, and said in English, "Shamarpa knows." He added nothing else, which I interpreted to mean you don't have to say anything special because I already and will always know your situation and care for you anyway.

Shamar Rinpoche has shown us how the meaning of life is found through cultivating bodhicitta. His own practice of this should inspire us all to emulate his example. It is time for us to renew our vows, be steadfast in our practice and follow the steps Rinpoche has laid before us. Although he is no longer physically with us, his blessings and legacy are forever present. Nothing can hinder Rinpoche's activity. He will continuously manifest infinite emanations until

¹² མྱེ་ལ་རྟལ་ཏུ་ལོགས་མེད་པས། །རྟལ་ཏུ་ལྷི་མ་མཐའ་ལུག་མེད་གྲུབ། །རྟལ་ཏུ་ལྷི་མ་མཐའ་ལུག་མེད་གྲུབ། །རྟལ་ཏུ་ལྷི་མ་མཐའ་ལུག་མེད་གྲུབ། །རྟལ་ཏུ་ལྷི་མ་མཐའ་ལུག་མེད་གྲུབ།

samsāra completely ends. However, for us to always be in his blessing and have the privilege to meet his future emanations, it is important we join in harmony our prayers for his swift return. It is said that without the ring of devotion the hook of blessing can't pull us out of the ocean of samsāra.

May Shamar Rinpoche, the Buddha Amitābha, soon manifest his presence again in this world for the benefit of all sentient beings!