

Dr. Nida Chenagtsang: Karmamudra, The Path of Great Bliss

[Dr Nida]: Good morning, everyone. First of all, I want to thank the central monastic body. And of course, behind all this great conference, the support of the Royal Family and the central government.

I'm very honored to be here to share my presentation about karmamudra. It's a very hot topic. Yesterday, Khenpo Jordon Portela was complaining: "Why did you get thirty minutes and I only got twenty?" I said, "Because my topic is very hot." My topic is very hot but also challenging, and very complicated too.

So I'm going to talk about karmamudra, the path of great bliss. Before I start my talk, I want to pray to my gurus. As you see, I have gurus from all traditions: from the Nyingma school, from the Kagyu school, Sakya, Gelug. And now I've also met my Jonangpa master, so I'm going to receive Kalachakra teachings too.

So firstly about karmamudra. Karmamudra has different names in Tibetan originally. The Sanskrit name is Karmamudra. As you see, I'm not going to read the text, so you can read it by yourselves. Karma means the action and mudra is the seal. In a very simple way, you can translate it as "karmic partner," the practice of yogis and yoginis, or as partnership practice.

In Tibetan it's also known as Jorlam; I think this is Ian Baker's translation. Jorlam means "the path of union." And then there are other different names, also Tablam. Tablam means the path of method, and so on. But originally I prefer to use "le-kyi chag-gya" in Tibetan, because that's the direct translation of karmamudra.

Today, Mahamudra is very well known, and karmamudra is much less known. And because karmamudra is a hot topic and also a top secret teaching or practice, that's why it's also causing many misconceptions and misunderstandings. So I think it's a very important time to talk about karmamudra.

If we talk about karmamudra, according to the Nyingma school and the Sarma school — here I've just used all schools together — in the Nyingma school we talk about three yogas: Mahayoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. And according to Longchen Rabjampa, his statement is very clear about these three yogas. Mahayoga is an

antidote for anger. Anuyoga is an antidote for desire or attachment. And Atiyoga is an antidote for ignorance or confusion.

We believe that, as Buddha said, the primary cause of all suffering is our mental poisons. That's why in the Nyingma school, the old school, the highest three yogas are targeting the primary causes of suffering.

And then in the Sarma school tradition, all schools together, they speak of four types of tantra: Kriya Tantra, Charya Tantra, Yoga Tantra, and Anuttara Yoga Tantra. And karmamudra is the topic of Anuttara Yoga Tantra. Anuttara Yoga Tantra has different translations; the easiest is "the highest tantra."

And then different schools give teachings according to different tantras. For example, Guhyasamaja in the Gelugpa tradition, Chakrasamvara, and Yamantaka Tantra. According to the Kagyupa, we have Chakrasamvara. I'm sure in Drukpa Kagyupa we have Chakrasamvara. Many different forms of Chakrasamvara Tantra, Vajrayogini Tantra, Vajravahini Tantra, and so on. And then in the Jonang tradition, mainly Kalachakra. And in the Sakya tradition, we have Hevajra and so on. Those are the most important Anuttara Yoga Tantras in the Tibetan tradition.

In the Vajrayana tradition, here it is Dongak Sonjuk. Normally the Buddhist tradition in Tibet or in Himalayan areas, Bhutan and different regions, we call Dongak Sonjuk: the union of sutra and tantra. And it's also important to know what the difference between sutra and tantra is. We're not saying one is special, but it's important to know which parts are the same teachings and which are different methods.

In particular, the transformation of Tsa, Lung, and Thigle. I'm very happy because for the first time we all received teachings directly from the venerable Khenchen Sanjay Duba. This morning's teaching I really loved. Normally at a conference we share thoughts and ideas, but I didn't expect to directly receive teachings from Khenchen Sanjay Duba.

That was the teaching. That was one of the highest teachings from Vajrayana, a direct teaching from Anuttara Yoga Tantra. He was talking about the transformation of Tsa, Lung, and Thigle: the channels, the energy or prana, and the thigle, the bindus or energy drops. He gave us the full teaching: the creation stage teaching (gerim), the completion stage teaching, including the bardo process (nangche tosum), and the clear light state.

For me, I was really impressed, and at the same time happy to receive these teachings directly. Normally, as Khenpo Rambodjian said, we have to receive empowerment, then we have to do preliminary practices, and then we receive the

teachings. Today, I think we are all lucky. We received the essence teaching directly from Khenchen Sanjay Dupa. And we are so lucky. That's why I'm not going to talk much more about that.

Here I have the chakras. According to Vajrayana, we have five chakras. According to Indian tantra, there are seven chakras. Do you know the difference? The Indian system's chakra number one is the base chakra, it's down there. Vajrayana chakra number one is on the head. And then, as the Khenchen explained this morning, the energy drops, the solar energy and lunar energy.

Anyway, so you see there are five chakras. And why do we use the five chakras? Because here we have the direct transformation of the poisons into the wisdoms. We can call it an alchemical system. We know from medical science: every poison is a medicine and every medicine is a poison, right? If you think of antibiotics: if you take the wrong medicine, it's a poison. And even if it's a poison, if you take the right dosage at the right moment, it's a medicine.

That's why our inner poisons, mental poisons or mental afflictions, are like poisons. But if we know how to use them, especially how to transform them, everything can become wisdom. That's the key point of Vajrayana: the transformation of the poisons.

Common myths and misconceptions about karmamudra. First: karmamudra is a secret that can never be discussed. Well, it's a top secret. And many people say nobody can mention it. But as Khenpo Rambodjian said, many of us, probably all of us, have received the Kalachakra Tantra empowerment. Who received the Kalachakra empowerment? Not so many. There are many new students. And who received Chakrasamvara? Korlo Demchok and Vajrayogini. Not so many. Wow.

Alright, so we've received many Anuttara Yoga Tantra empowerments. And if you notice, the third and fourth empowerments are about the practice of karmamudra.

Misconception two: karmamudra is a lost or dying tradition. Some people think — for example, in Bhutan we have Drukpa Kunle, and Drukpa Kunle's practice was karmamudra. So many people believe that tradition doesn't exist anymore. That's a misconception too.

Next, karmamudra is the same thing as Kama Sutra. I wrote a book about karmamudra, and some people complain there are so few images. They say, "I have a karmamudra book full of images and positions." They say, "Your book is so boring. There are over three hundred and sixty pages and very few images." Then I told them, "Read carefully. It's not Kama Sutra, it's Karma Mudra." But I'm happy — people are buying that book thinking it's the Kama Sutra.

Another one: to practice karmamudra you need to have many sexual partners. That's the challenging part, especially in Bhutan. I think the problem is our cultural influence. Everybody reads the Drukpa Kunle stories. Drukpa Kunle had hundreds of consorts. And then we try to imitate Drukpa Kunle. Especially those who believe they are Vajrayana practitioners or Kagyupas — we pretend to be Drukpa Kunle. I think that's something very dangerous and a big misconception.

Number five especially: karmamudra practitioners are male practitioners. Yogis or monks or lamas. And if a woman or yogini practices karmamudra, I think we can have a very different view of that person. It's similar to the kings: the king can have a hundred queens, but if one queen has many kings or many partners, perhaps we have a different view.

And there's another misconception: some people think the actual karmamudra practice doesn't exist in the Anuttara Yoga Tantra, that they are only symbolic explanations.

According to Yuthok Ninti: I myself have received many teachings, but my personal practice is more Yuthok Ninti, because I'm a Sowa Rigpa doctor. Yuthok Yonten Gonpo was the founder of traditional medical science. And he also gave a spiritual teaching, the Vajrayana teaching, called Yuthok Ninti. And in this Yuthok text, he speaks very clearly about the difference between karmamudra and mahamudra.

Yuthok speaks of Oggo Dechen Lam and Tingo Namchö Lam: the upper gate of liberation and the lower gate of liberation through bliss. One is karmamudra and one is mahamudra.

And even the great Saraha said: "Without Karmamudra, there is no Mahamudra." And today we always receive teachings on Mahamudra but we don't receive teachings on karmamudra. And we think they are something completely separate. But the founder of Mahamudra, the great Indian master, the Mahasiddha Saraha, stated this: without karmamudra, there is no mahamudra.

If you want to know more details, you can read this part. Actually this is the last part of the Chak-gya Chenpo Gangga-ma, the Mahamudra of the Ganges River. He speaks about how, if you cannot practice Mahamudra, or if Mahamudra is not working for you, then as a second option we should practice karmamudra. And the practice of karmamudra itself and the result of karmamudra, and the main practice — there are four main steps — everything is mentioned in this text. We don't find a specific teaching from Tilopa or Naropa only about karmamudra, but mostly we find that karmamudra was taught as a mahamudra teaching.

[Moderador]: Karmamudra and Bhutan. It's very interesting. I tried to find the patriarch Drukgom Shigpo and his consort, Khandro Sonam Peldon. I know you don't know her name. Most Bhutanese don't know her name.

[Dr Nida]: This is interesting for me. I tried to find more information about Khandro Sonam Peldon. And most Drukpas don't know about her. Of course everybody knows Drukpa Kunle. The founder, the Drukpa tradition's founder, is Phacho Drukgom Shigpo. And he had the prophecy — that's why, as you know, the Longten Samba. He met his consort.

For me it's a very interesting story because the Drukpa tradition started through a Ngakpa family, a yogi family. For me, Phacho Drukgom Shigpo, of course he was a great Naljorpa — but in the Nyingma tradition, the Naljorpas we call the Ngakpas. He was a great yogi, a great Ngakpa. He married Khandro Sonam Peldon and they had four sons. That family is the founder of the Drukpa tradition.

So today if we talk about the Drukpa tradition, in Bhutan of course everybody is talking about Phacho Drukgom Shigpo. It seems everybody knows about him. But the real story is: his wife, his consort, and their four sons. That's why for me it seems like the whole family is involved in founding the Drukpa tradition. And that's why I think the Ngakpa tradition, the Ngakpa lineage, is very important in Bhutan.

As I said, our problem here is that we misuse karmamudra because we try to imitate Drukpa Kunle. But for me, Drukpa Kunle was a great artist. He was a great musician. He was a great writer. He was a great traveler. He had this crazy wisdom, because of his artwork too.

But today the interesting thing is that many Vajrayana practitioners try to imitate Drukpa Kunle. But I don't know if anyone knows how to play an instrument like Drukpa Kunle. If you are able to write teachings and songs like Drukpa Kunle — I'm not talking about Drukpa Kunle's magical power, I'm just talking about the aspect of art. That's why I respect Drukpa Kunle. You see this image of Buddha: it's a beautiful golden statue, he's holding a damaru. And you see he's a great musician, right?

And if you were to look at the paintings of Drukpa Kunle in Tibet, he looks very dirty, he looks like a beggar, an alcoholic. We know that story. But we don't know the other part of Drukpa Kunle. That's why I think in Bhutan we need to do more research about Drukpa Kunle, especially his artwork, as a musician, as a painter, as a writer, and probably also as a hunter. I think we have to do a lot of research about that.

Both spiritual and medical education is necessary in order to inform people about proper authentic spiritual practice as well as sexual health.

I have to give you bad news too. The spread of HIV in Bhutan is not that small. We really have to think. We can find HIV today in the villages, even in the monasteries, and in different parts of society. And of course hepatitis B and hepatitis C. There are many sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), or sexually transmitted viruses. We really need a lot of information. We have to give education to the younger generation.

And that's why when we talk about karmamudra, actually the reason I wrote this book: first I wrote it in Tibetan for Tibetan young people. If you talk about medical health and how to prevent STDs, nobody reads my book. I said, "I'm writing something about Kama Sutra and Karma Mudra," and young people, they like to read that. So my first goal in writing that book was to promote education. And then later it became a book.

And then another big obstacle or big problem that Vajrayana is facing now on the world stage is sexual scandals. The big news: BBC, New York Times, The Guardian, Telegraph, all these world-renowned news outlets. Especially in the last two or three years we have had so many of these kinds of bad news. Most of this bad news is connected with sexual scandals. And that's why this is a really, really big challenge. And also, of course, it is the biggest obstacle for the development of Vajrayana worldwide in the future. That's why I think we really have to take action.

We really have to take action. And especially I really wish that in Bhutan — it is a Vajrayana country, the only and unique Vajrayana country — there would be more education about these things. Because when we talk about karmamudra, sexuality, and Buddhism, all that can be easily combined with medical science. The practitioners don't have enough medical education or medical knowledge. So that's why I think we can combine the knowledge from medical science and Vajrayana science together. We really have to promote education: education for the young generation, education for the public, and probably we need to give some education even to those who are called gurus or masters. I think that's something very, very important.

There are two different communities: the monastic community and the Ngakpa community.

In this part I quoted one talk from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and he is very precise about this. In Tibet there's a proverb: people are acting — we don't know if they are real monks. Sometimes they're acting like yogis, like a mixture. The cocktail of the monk and the yogi mixed together. It seems like a monk but has

lovers or girlfriends, doing different things. This kind of thing, we call it "neither monk nor yogi" — the enemy of the Buddhist tradition. That's why His Holiness's statement is very clear.

I think we need to focus more on the Ngakpa tradition and the yogic community. And also for the public, it should be clear, not confusing. And to be transparent is very important, because that will be the future of Buddhism and the future of Vajrayana. Because today, the reality is, we are in the age of social media. If lamas or gurus do anything, it goes so fast on Facebook, WeChat, and so on. It's unstoppable. That's why I think we really need to take action on this.

Now, great female yoginis. Khandro Yeshe Tolma, Momo Tashi Chitten. She is one of my favorite gurus from Bhutan. And if you notice, she has many great teachings. And I think it's also very important to give importance to female practitioners. Among the Ngakpas, there are yogis. I can see there are some Ngakpas, and there are very few Nagmas. I think empowering the Nagmas or yoginis is very important, especially when we talk about karmamudra.

And here again, I used Khandro Sonam Peldon and Drölma Peldon. And historically, those female figures, Momo Tashi Chitten and the others — those are great, amazing historical figures in Bhutan. And today they are almost forgotten.

Just to get that photo, I had to walk. I asked my translators, my tour guides, many times: "I need her photo, I need her photo." I couldn't get it, and then I went there to Longten Samba and found this place. I showed some Bhutanese people. They said, "Where did you find that? Where did you find it?" From all these little stories I can see that the great female practitioners are forgotten. That's really a pity. I'm not complaining, I'm just giving you some information.

As the committee has said, I think education is very important. Education on Vajrayana, education about karmamudra, and education on medical health. The issues are very, very important.

The last one. I have a dedication. As I started my speech by praying to my lamas, I close with a dedication. May the teachings flourish, Dorje Chang. May all beings benefit.

Thank you very much.