This morning His Holiness is going to give teachings concerning Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Boundless Light, and His Pureland. In conjunction with the teachings in general, this afternoon, His Holiness will teach how to obtain the transference of consciousness to the Pureland of Amitabha Buddha through this practice. Specifically, He will teach you how to practice the text of which all of you should get a copy. It is the daily sadhana for the practice of Amitabha Buddha. Yesterday, you received that empowerment.

Generally, it can be said that there are many purelands, many paradises of Enlightened Beings we call Buddhas. The Pureland of Great Bliss of the Buddha of Boundless Light, Amitabha, is quite a unique place. There are purelands in the four directions, East, South, West, North, and in the center. Among them, the Pureland of Amitabha is the easiest to get to and therefore quite special. By formulating a special aspiration to be reborn in the Pureland of Great Bliss, one can accomplish the transference of one’s consciousness to that pureland. The power of prayer, the power of devoted and fervent aspiration, is all that is necessary. It is said that the Pureland of Amitabha Buddha, in relation to our universe, is in the western direction and above our universe. We have to adopt a cosmic view and realize that there are many world systems throughout space. This is a very vast system of which I am speaking. Let us get our bearings here. What I am speaking of, in terms of the grand scheme of things, works like this: Lord Buddha Shakyamuni is the chief enlightened being in one great chiliocosm. This means that our entire known universe, with its suns and moons and stars and planets, is one unit. Multiply that by one thousand and then multiply that by one thousand and multiply that by one thousand. That is one trichiliocosm. Lord Buddha Shakyamuni is the lord of one of those. The realm of the Buddha of Boundless Light goes beyond even that cosmic scale. I am teaching right now, from a prayer for expressing this powerful aspiration to be reborn in the Pureland of Great Bliss, composed by Karma Chagne Rinpoche. In the prayer, Karma Chagne Rinpoche says the Pureland of Great Bliss is on such a vast scale, so greatly distant from our ordinary reality, our flesh eyes can never behold it. It is not something that can be beheld physically. It is so vast; its scale is incommensurate with any kind of scale we know that it is beyond the possibility for our senses to perceive. It is so far and vast, so completely beyond our abilities to measure. We can see stars and travel to the moon, but we will never be able to appropriate to the reaching range our senses the actuality of Land of Great Bliss. It is that vast and distant from our ordinary thinking and perceiving. In that sense, it cannot be reached by any material means. However, our own minds, when purified, when stripped of their faults, when returned to their own primordially pristine condition can directly experience the reality of the Pureland of Great Bliss. The way to perceive the
Pureland is through the mind, not through the senses. So, establish that vision in your mind and imagine that, in the center of the vast, all-encompassing Land of Great Bliss, resides the Lord of the Pureland: the Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Boundless Light. He is red in color and he looks like Shakyamuni Buddha. He has all the 80 major marks and the 32 minor signs of a fully enlightened manifestation of nirmanakaya. He has, for example, the crown protuberance that you see on the statues and thangkas of Lord Buddha. He has wheels on His hands and so forth, so, as you can see there are many different signs. He holds His hands in the posture of meditative equipoise, the Dhyana Mudra, and in His hands is a begging bowl. He looks quite like Shakyamuni Buddha, only His skin is a deep, ruby red color. He is resplendent and radiant. He sits on top of a lotus and moon seat. Behind His back is the Wish Fulfilling Tree. To His right is Lord Avalokiteshvara, Chenrezig, white in body color. To His left is Vajrapani, the Lord of Powerful Means. These are the three chief lords of the Pureland of Great Bliss. To give a little bit of history of the formation of the Pureland of Great Bliss of Buddha Amitabha, it is a pureland, which has no flaws. It is perfect in every way. The realization of that pureland did come without cause. What was this cause of this perfect paradise? Very many aeons ago, before he was a Buddha, the Buddha Amitabha was a monk whose name was Dharmakara, which literally translated means ‘the origin of Dharma’. When He was in training as a bodhisattva, He formulated a series of prayers, or powerful aspirations, about the way things should be when He becomes completely enlightened. He said, “There are so many purelands that exist and can be reached by those sentient beings who abandoned non-virtue, who accumulated a great deal of merit, and assiduously practiced the Dharma. They can reach those purelands, but that is very difficult. What about all those who have not abandoned non-virtue, who have not accumulated a great deal of merit, and cannot practice in a rigorous way? Let me establish a pureland that can be easily reached by them. May I liberate all those sentient beings who don’t have those supernal qualities of the practitioners that reach the other purelands of all the other Buddhas.” There are many versions of the prayer (or vows), of Amitabha Buddha formulated when He was Dharmakara. There are 500 different versions of the prayer in Tibet alone. In China there are many texts concerning the formulation of the Great Vows of Amitabha. In general, it can be said that all of His powerful aspirations can be subsumed under 48 Great Vows. The Pureland of Great Bliss was brought into reality because of one of the 48 Great Vows. This is the cause for the existence of Pureland of great Bliss. This pureland does not exist causelessly, nothing does. The cause for it was the activity of the bodhisattva who became the Buddha Amitabha. In general, all the Buddhas hold all sentient beings in the core of their heart with love and compassion. Out of their great compassion, they formulate powerful aspirations. They make great vows. They work through many lifetimes; while in training as bodhisattvas before they became Buddhas to affect all sentient beings in vast variety of ways. Just as you can create fire by rubbing two sticks together, long enough and hard enough, so, by the accumulation of merit and primordial wisdom, anything can be accomplished. What was accomplished, in this case, was the establishment of the Pureland of Great Bliss in the western direction of our universe by the Buddha Amitabha through His vast store of merit and primordial wisdom. Let us, again, examine the metaphor of the two sticks that are needed to create fire. Fire does not spring automatically from one stick. You need two sticks and you need the effort of rubbing them together in a particular way over a period of time. Eventually a spark leaps from the conjunction of the sticks and fire begins. In a similar way, all phenomena, all reality, all dharmas, manifest by the conjunction of emptiness and interdependent origination. Everything is totally interrelated with each other thing. That is called interdependent origination. That is one stick. The other stick is emptiness. The truth of emptiness, the complete lack of inherent existence of any phenomena. The two sticks together, are the actual nature of reality. This is true of everything, of all realities. Leave aside the pureland for a moment and let us examine the realm in which we live. Our world is the same. Our world is the product of non-dual union of clarity and emptiness, of appearance and emptiness.
Things appear in a completely unimpeded way, and yet they have no essence. Their essence is empty. That means that all possibilities of experience derive from the non-dual union of appearance and emptiness. Let us examine the manifestation of our world or of the pureland. Everything is not a mere emptiness because it appears, does it not? We can clearly see everything. Everything seems to have existence and everything seems to have a material basis in our world. That is the side of the equation indicating the clear manifestation of phenomena, of experiences. However, that side could not exist if it were not for emptiness. If anything, at all, had solid substantial, material, inherent existence, nothing could exist. It is because of emptiness that things can manifest as appearances. Only because there is emptiness, can anything exist at all. Without emptiness, there would only be one indissoluble monolithic blob. There would only be one thing, if that. Nothing could possibly come into relative existence without the ultimate grounding in emptiness. Therefore, it is because of emptiness that our world exists. Because of emptiness, the Pureland of Great Bliss was established through the power of the aspiration, the accumulation of merit, and the primordial wisdom of the enlightened being Amitabha. This is quite difficult to understand if you are new to Buddhism, I understand that, but it is only because there is emptiness that there is appearance. Let us now continue with our examination of the particular qualities of the Pureland formulated by the aspiration of Amitabha Buddha known as the Land of Dewachen. There are many other buddhafields, as has been said, but in order to reach them, one must attain quite an exalted status. For example to reach the pureland of another Buddha, it is necessary to be a tenth stage bodhisattva, or approaching the portals of complete and perfect enlightenment, and to have accumulated a great deal of merit. It is very difficult for ordinary sentient beings to aspire to this. For us, Amitabha Buddha formulated His great powerful prayers of aspiration. Although His Pureland seems to be quite far from our world, it is relatively easy to reach for sentient beings like us. This is due to the power of Amitabha Buddha’s prayers and vows. As was said before, there exist many versions of the vows, prayers, and aspirations of Amitabha Buddha. To briefly encompass them in a single statement, it need be said that the essence of the vows, prayers, and aspirations are: “May a Pureland be established that is reachable by ordinary sentient beings of impure karma, beings of karmic evil, who have not abandoned non-virtue.” When you reach the purelands of other Buddhas, because of exalted status before going there, you become enlightened. In the case of Dewachen, you can get there, but it does not mean you become enlightened. What happens is that you will not revert to cyclic existence, rather, you will have, instead, all the positive and auspicious conditions for the accumulation of merit and primordial wisdom. You will be able to abandon all non-virtue there and practice to tame and train your mind until such point you are ripe for enlightenment. That is then a general introduction to the Land of Great Bliss.

Now I will give an explanation of prayer aspiring to be reborn in the Land of Dewachen composed by Karma Chagne Rag-Astrs Rinpoche. To begin with, I will start with a description of the topography of the Pureland itself. The earth is not like the earth on our world. It is not, rough, and covered with stones. It is completely smooth and completely even. It is composed of jewel dust. In the Pureland of Great Bliss, you always have a feeling of expansive view. It is very vast. There are no alterations of light and shade. A universal all-pervasive light derives from the physical form of the Buddha of Boundless Light, Amitabha. The entire realm is infused with the luminosity of the enlightened body of Buddha Amitabha. The ground is not hard. It is soft and if you fall on it, you would bounce. You would not stub your toe. Everything is very soft in Dewachen. As for the flora of Dewachen, trees, which are abundant, are wish fulfilling jewel trees, trees that grant you whatever you need. The branches are filled with birds of various kinds. They are all emanations of Amitabha Buddha. They have beautiful melodious voices. Rather than ordinary bird song, they sing Dharma teachings in such a way as to delight and pacify the mind. Everyone there who hears the melodious
sound of the Dharma become peaceful, happy, and content. There are many rivers and streams, brooks and rivulets. The water is not ordinary water. It is perfume. There are pools where you can rest and have a dip in perfumed waters. The land is filled with gloriously scented lotus blossoms, which open and emanate, from the pollen heart of each lotus, an abundance of light rays. On the tip of each light ray, is a Buddha. The Buddhas all teach the Dharma. They teach the Dharma in such a way that the mind is completely stripped of any negative emotions. In the Land of Dewachen, there is no sickness, no poverty, no old age, and no death. There is no distinction between one being and another. All are equally beautiful. All are equally replete with all positive qualities. There are no faults, no lacks, no stains, no suffering of any kind, not even the word ‘suffering’ can be heard in the Pureland of Great Bliss.

The way to take birth in Dewachen is to formulate a great faith and aspiration concerning the Pureland, and have a desire to be born there. When you give birth there, you are not born through any ordinary process. In our world, we all arrive in pain and travail in sorrow. Birth is a painful process here. In Dewachen, you are not born through a womb, but rather you are magically born in the pollen heart of a lotus blossom. If you pray with single-pointed concentration and great fervent faith to be born there, you will be born there. If you harbor any doubt, you will still be born there, but you will be born inside a closed lotus blossom. You are bathed in the effulgent light of the Buddha but you cannot see all the qualities of the pureland and you cannot wander about at will. You are in the closed lotus blossom until the last vestiges of doubt and negativity are eliminated. Then the lotus blossom will open. If you harbor no doubt whatsoever you are born in an open lotus. This pertains to the type of aspiration you make to be reborn in the Pureland that you make at the moment of death. Keep in mind this very important distinction between the two different births in the Pureland. It is very important to formulate the proper aspiration of rebirth at the moment of death. Do this powerfully without any doubt. If you allow doubt to enter your mind, you will be born in the closed lotus blossom. If you formulate this powerful aspiration at the moment of death then, without any intervening experience, take birth in the pollen heart of an open lotus blossom in the presence of the Buddha of Boundless Light, Amitabha. One of the marvelous qualities of being reborn in the Pureland of Great Bliss is this: if you had read the ‘travel brochures’ for other purelands, you could go there immediately just wishing it. You can magically transport to any of the other purelands by simply formulating the wish to go there. From this world, you cannot immediately go to any other pureland, but from the Pureland of Great Bliss, you can. You have passport, visas, and all tickets necessary to go to any pureland of any Buddha, in any direction any time you wish.

When you take birth in the open lotus blossom, you are not perfect yet. You have eliminated all negativities from your mindstream, but you take birth in a form that possesses many positive qualities that are like those of a Buddha though you are not yet a Buddha. You are born with a resplendent golden body. You have telepathic and extrasensory powers. There are five types of extrasensory powers you enjoy. Another quality you possess as a neonate is all the things that you need to offer to the Buddhas you now perceive with your physical eyes are automatically manifested from your hands. Thereby you can easily accumulate merit and perfect it to accumulate wisdom. Furthermore, the accumulation of merit and wisdom results, ultimately in Buddhahood takes place very quickly in the Pureland of Great Bliss. As opposed to other purelands, the process of accumulating merit and wisdom is very rapid in Dewachen. Buddha Shakyamuni himself said: “Therefore to pray to be reborn in Dewachen accumulates as much merit as if you were to offer the seven types of jewels and other precious substances filling the three thousand fold world systems (mentioned earlier).” In general, we can say that any sentient being that hears the name of Amitabha Buddha (in accordance with Amitabha Buddha’s Great Vows) formulates the aspiration to be reborn
in Dewachen and engages in that practice can be reborn in Dewachen. It is more difficult for those who have accumulated the negativity of the five inexpiable sins. Still, even for such great sinners, if they practice strongly, it is possible for them even to attain rebirth in Dewachen. In brief, concerning the teachings of the Buddha Amitabha and the Pureland of Great Bliss, in all Mahayana countries this practice is very prevalent. Why is this so? It is because of the nature of the vows of Amitabha Buddha. The practice of Amitabha Buddha and the Pureland is geared to ordinary people. Anyone can engage in the practice. You do not have to be a great exalted being who has abandoned all non-virtue. You do not have to be a superb practitioner. Depending upon the power of the vows of Amitabha Buddha, you can engage in this practice. This is a Sutrayana practice. Therefore, it is something that can work for anyone. It is very democratic and it is available to all.

Question and Answers

Q. “Are there opportunities, once you have obtained birth in the Pureland, to return to this world to help sentient beings attain enlightenment?”

A. “The purpose of attaining rebirth in the Pureland of Great Bliss is to attain Buddhahood. Therefore, the meaning of the Pureland of Great Bliss is that you have attained all the conditions that are auspicious and are militate towards the gaining of complete and perfect enlightenment. When you become completely enlightened, it is not one-sided enlightenment that rests in Nirvana. It is the Mahayana enlightenment which, grounded in emptiness, realizes that nirvana and samsara are something not to attach to. The keynote of all Mahayana practice is Great Compassion. The Pureland, itself, was established through the power of the Great Compassion of Amitabha Buddha. If you realize emptiness, then, compassion automatically manifests. That emptiness and compassion, together, which constitute Buddhahood, also constitute complete and perfect freedom. That is, finally, the meaning of freedom. When you become that free, you are not restricted to the Pureland of Great Bliss. You can to any pureland you want. You can enact any other mode of manifestation you desire. You manifest ceaselessly in an infinite variety of ways for the welfare of all living beings.”

Q. “On the one hand it sounds very simple to achieve rebirth in Dewachen. On the other hand, in order to have that true bliss at that moment one would have to have to establish oneself, truly wishing to achieve bodhicitta in one’s being. So that it seems to be the great challenge of being here is to establish the wish to help other beings and not just oneself. So perhaps it is not so easy.”

A. “The taking of rebirth in Dewachen is only difficult if you committed one of the Five Inexpiable Sins of Great Retribution. If you have not committed one of them, then is quite easy, because all you need to do is to depend upon the power of the forming of powerful aspirations to have rebirth in Dewachen. What that does is to unite you with the antidote to all your other obscurations and non-virtue. That is the power of the vow of Amitabha Buddha. The other element kicks in when you formulate the aspiration to connect with this practice and to be reborn the Pureland. Another reason why it is quite easy to attain rebirth is that the moment of death is every moment. The Dharma teaches that all things are in a state of flux. All things are impermanent and tending towards death all the time, therefore in every moment, something dies and something takes rebirth. How your mind is directed is how your experience will be. Your present thought will lead to your subsequent
experience. If you establish a continuity of aspiration from moment to moment, understanding that any moment could be the moment of death, at every moment you yearn to be reborn in Dewachen, you establish that continuity of aspiration. That will be your experience. The cause in that moment will create the effect in the next moment. Everything is mental transformation (His Holiness speaking in English).”

Q.
“Rinpoche, can you tell us more about the light in closed lotus? How does that light them?”

A.
“The light bathes all and everything in the Land of Great Bliss. Like everything else, in and about the Land of Great Bliss, it is an emanation of Amitabha Buddha. It is all part of Amitabha Buddha. Everything that is perceivable in Dewachen is an extension of Amitabha Buddha. The light is the Light of Compassion. It is Light of Compassion that ripens sentient beings.”

Q.
Unintelligible

A.
“The formulation of the prayer to take rebirth in Dewachen is an individual matter. You cannot develop an aspiration on someone else’s behalf. However, you can help someone else by repeating to them the name of Amitabha and acquainting them with the existence of Amitabha in the Pureland. It is said that even hearing the name Amitabha is very beneficial. Another thing you can do to help others is at the moment of another’s death that you can do Amitabha practice of various kinds. For example, at the moment of death you can do Ph’owa, and that is a practice of transferring that person’s consciousness from their dying body. Other rituals and pujas are done at that time. There is one called Shitje. It is ritual done at the moment of death. Many things can be done even if the person has already died. Their consciousness principle is addressed and instructed in various ways.”

Q.
Unintelligible question from the audience.

A.
“We have to talk a little about emptiness. The teachings of emptiness in no way claim that what we perceive does not exist absolutely. We are not saying that things made of atoms and molecules and have material reality literally do not exist, and in that sense, illusory. We are saying that they have no self-nature. They have no inherent existence. They have no solid, substantial, reality that corresponds to their mode of appearance. They seem to be inherently existent, yet they are not. This is the teaching of the great Middle Way School, Madhyamika. There a couple of different schools of thought here, the Mind-Only School (Cittimatra) says that everything is mind. The only thing that truly exists is the mind itself and everything else is a projection of the mind. Mahamudra teachings say that the actual nature of reality is such that it transcends postulation of either existence or non-existence, or both, or neither. This is called the ‘Four Extremes’. The Mahamudra view transcends them. From our relative level of truth in Tibetan they say ‘Kun-Zop Dempa’ which is a fascinating phrase. ‘Dempa’ means truth. ‘Kun-Zop’ means completely false. Therefore the ‘completely false truth’, the relative truth is a result of our mistaken perception. We perceive things to have inherent existence when they really do not. Our minds grasp at what we perceive as solid and real. Because of that mental grasping, we reify that which is in fact empty. That is a mistake. That is an error. All appearances are our experience.
They are experienced by and in our own minds. Other than that, there is no possibility of experience. All external appearance is a mental projection in the sense that it is experienced by the mind. It has no solid inherent existence from its own side. That is a mistake in perception.”

Q.
“Is there any way in which one can be in the Pureland, aside from literally at the end of existence. On the other hand, is this something that can be reached in this present existence? Can the Pureland be accessed in this life?”

A.
“Yes, when the last breath has been exhaled, before the next breath is inhaled. At that moment, there is a death and a rebirth. You can experience the Pureland there in the interval between breaths.”

Q.
“Rinpoche, you say that you can experience the Pureland in that interval, in that case, what is the Pureland?”

A.
“What is the Pureland really? The Pureland is one’s own stainless primordial awareness. If, from moment to moment, you regain and retain your own primordial enlightened nature: that is the Pureland. Everything comes from your own mind. Understand that, remain there: that is the Pureland.”

Q.
“If interdependent origination arises in emptiness. Then, how can this be if there is no elaboration in emptiness?”

A.
“Emptiness and interdependent origination are non-dual. They are one. Even to say non-dual is to miss the mark, because that implies that there might have been a duality that was overcome. From the beginningless beginning, they have always been one. There is no difference between them. It is not like there are two divisions. When you see emptiness and interdependent origination dualistically, it is the extrapolation of samsara, cyclic existence. Overcome duality and you see cause and effect at the same time. Then everything arises together. That is complete, non-dual emptiness and interdependent origination. In the text, many examples are used to illustrate this truth of the non-dual union of emptiness and interdependent origination. Nevertheless, let us take, for example, this cup. As a relative manifestation or appearance that be experienced by our perceptual mechanisms, the cup is something that is composite. It is made of smaller particles. Is it not? It is made of atoms and molecules that become particular substances: earth, air, fire, and water. All of those things are combined in such a way as to produce what we call a cup. Then it is decorated, painted, and carved. That is something that is made in Tibetan we say ‘Dütshe’: composite, something that has been created. Causes and conditions have been brought together in such a way to create a relatively existent manifestation that we can use and interact with and perceive as what we call a cup. However, from its own side, independent of causes and conditions, there is no ‘cupness’. There is nothing arising as the ‘cup’ in and of itself apart from that entire process of causes and conditions coming together. It has no essence. Its essence is empty. In the ‘Prajña Paramita Hydraya’ Sutra, the ‘Heart Sutra’, it says “Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. Other than emptiness
there is no form, other than form there is no emptiness.” All phenomena have that exact same nature. Whatever is experienced within either cyclic existence, or its transcendence, has that exact same nature. Its essence is empty and it is experienced as a result of interdependent origination. To perceive things as alternate visions of emptiness and interdependent origination is to remain an ordinary sentient being. To overcome the dualistic vision, to perceive things simultaneously as emptiness and interdependent origination, is to be Buddha. The great Arya Nagarjuna said: “Cyclic existence and its transcendence (samsara and nirvana) are not two. Understanding the nature of cyclic existence in itself is transcendence.”