We Are 25!
Celebrating Our Silver Jubilee, 1989 - 2014
Seeing Real ‘T’, the Real Meaning of Refuge (Part 2)

Here is Part 2 of Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s teaching at the Refuge Ceremony on 10th March 2013. This concludes our five-part series on teachings by Rinpoche from his 2013 visit to ABC.

What is the focus of the clearest mind? Is it true existence? All that disappears, gone. There is nothing to hold on to, gone. That shows it is not true, nothing to hold on. There is no ‘T’ to hold on to. It disappears.

When it happens, then you entered into the path, pleasing all the buddhas. Please understand this is my speech. This is the real, real, real, real, real, refuge—ultimate, like you take food or whatever, real. Not that I have realised emptiness at all, but due to blessing of the guru, just some understanding of that meaning. This is according to my view, real, TRUE, REAL that is really TRUE.

No matter how many people—learned people, meditators—no matter how many people in the world say Lama Tsong Khapa is wrong, that Lama Tsong Khapa’s teachings is wrong, I cannot accept. Because you have tasted the food, the teachings, some taste; even if other learned people say this is wrong, don’t follow just the words, what they say. It is your own proof, your own experience. I just want to tell that, and this you can remember in the future.

What do we really see?

Now, you see White Lotus as merely labelled by your mind. As a second goes, a minute goes, then oh, real White Lotus, existing from its own side. If you analyse your view, how did you get your view—existing from its own side, never came from your mind! Not only not merely labelled by your mind but even, not labelled by your mind. Even that never came from your mind.

In ‘nama rang gyurpa’ Middle Way View, Madhyamika-Svatantrika (Autonomy Middle Way), it is labelled by the mind. The ‘T’ or
whatever, is labelled by the mind, but not merely labelled by the mind, because it exists from its own side. This Madhyamika believes things exist from its own side. So therefore, they can’t accept “merely labelled by the mind”. For them, “merely labelled by the mind” doesn’t exist. If you cut up a bunch of papers and you call it a billion dollars, a billion dollars. You label it. You go shopping. “Oh, this is a billion dollars. I want to get a billion dollars!” The supermarket won’t accept it. Will you think you are crazy, and then they send you to prison? ‘Rang gya’pa is, not existing from its own side, not at all. That is ‘gazgha’ (object to be refused).

According to the Consequence Middle Way School, it is ‘gazgha’. What the Autonomist School says is correct, that is ‘gazgha’. According to the Prasangika School, it is ‘gazgha’. There is nothing from its own side. So the T or White Lotus, existing from its own side, not merely labelled by the mind, existing from its own side, even if you agree that it is labelled by the mind, but existing from its own side. You have the hallucination. Then besides the hallucination, you have existing from its own side—White Lotus and T, without depending on the “seven consciousness” [mind-basis-of-all] according to Mind Only School (the “seven consciousness”, the hair of samvara and nirvana, tchanshi namche). Everything that exists, by leaving imprint on that, then manifests as subject and object, manifests as the mind and not the object. Like the colour blue and the mind, the sensory consciousness which perceives blue and the blue object both came at the same time due to the imprint left on the “seven consciousness”. Without depending on the imprint on the “seven consciousness”, just existing from its own side—we have that view. What we call White Lotus or the T, believing in that way, that it exists from its own side. We have that wrong view.

Then on top of that, the T as self-sufficient, without depending on the aggregates, self-sufficient, in the view of what you call the child—White Lotus as self-sufficient, T as self-sufficient. Mind Only School, Sutra School, Vaibhavika School, T as self-sufficient—the wrong view is there. ‘T, true, good, good’. On top of that, in Hinayana, in Buddhism, there are four schools: Vaibhavika School, Sutra School, Mind Only School, Madhyamika School. Aggregates, T is impermanent, the T, self, the person, is impermanent in nature. Not permanent, impermanent; under the control of causes and conditions, not existing alone, depending on causes and conditions, not existing independently because of depending on the parts. There is T that has continuity, that has parts, that doesn’t exist, independently, depending on reality. In our view, all those incredible, incredible, good, good, all the wrong views we have, because of how we perceive the T.

White Lotus, as time goes, a second, a minute, an hour, no idea of the mind, which labels you, the White Lotus you labelled, you have an idea your mind has labelled, existing from its own side. Then that becomes stronger and stronger, which is a hallucination projected by ignorance.

For example, when you look at these scarves—yellow scar, red scarf—from its own side, or when you look at the light—light from its own side. You don’t see as merely labelled by the mind. The mind is reality, but the light is reality from its own side. The ‘thangka’, the colours there, the brocade—yellow, blue, red—everything from its own side. When you look at me, Lama Zopa, existing from its own side, when I look at you, you exist from your own side, real. A hallucination projected by ignorance, but ignorance exists from its own side. Whatever appears, appears as real. T, action, object, the six sense objects, nothing exists from its own side—totally empty. I am not saying they don’t exist. They exist in mere name, merely labelled by the mind. From beginningless rebirth until enlightenment, whatever appears real exists from its own side. T, action, object, from beginningless rebirth until enlightenment, nothing exists. Whatever appears real, what we believe as real does not exist at all, in reality. When we realise emptiness that is what we see. That is what happens.

Why are we reborn again and again?

T, action, object, while it is empty from the beginning, never becomes real at any time, but appears as a hallucination. The projection of the true reality. If you ascribe to the mind, you believe as real. Due to that ignorance, we have been suffering in samsara from beginningless rebirth.

Why have we to be reborn in samsara, why have we to be reborn again and again, through beginningless rebirth, is because of ignorance. We haven’t realised emptiness, we haven’t ceased ignorance, the root of samsara, ignorance, holding T as real, the aggregates as real. We haven’t ceased the root of samsara, the ignorance.

Why we experience old age, why it is existing only in our own side. We haven’t ceased ignorance. We are under the control of ignorance.

Why we have to die? Because of ignorance, the root of samsara, the ignorance believing it as real while it is not and never has been that way, now and in the future. Why we have to die is because of ignorance.

Why do we get sick? The reason is because of ignorance. The root of suffering is ignorance. That is the mother of the disease. That is the greatest disease, chronic disease—ignorance, root of samsara. This is a wrong concept. Form, feeling, cognition, compounded aggregates, consciousness, we have the five aggregates. By clinging to the aggregates, the mind focused on the base of the aggregates, by depending on that, the mind merely imputes T. When it is merely imputed T, right after that the big problem is: it is merely imputed by the mind right now, but when it appears back it doesn’t appear in that way. To us, when it appears it doesn’t appear as merely imputed by the mind in which reality. It appears back as TOTALLY opposite, existing from its own side, real. What they say in the world, ordinary people, as real, truly existent, T appears like that. Then after that, you don’t have to believe, even though like those who have realised emptiness, the arya beings when not in equinose meditation, they have the appearance of the truly Autonomist reality, but they don’t believe. They have direct perception of emptiness so they don’t believe it is real. They see it is like a mirage, a dream, like an illusion.

Here we believe. Big problem is the big BElIEVE! WE BELIEVE. WE BELIEVE! That creates, THAT is the biggest problem in life. THAT is the basic problem. Why we have to die, why we have to be reborn, why we have old age, this and that, suffering of pain, suffering of changes—enormous pleasures, pleasures of change, the pleasures of food, pleasure of music, pleasure of sex, pleasure of whatever, the riding on the waves, surfing, pleasure in the sky (skydiving). You go by aeroplane, then you carry the rucksack, and then in the sky—in America, I don’t think in Singapore—you hold each person’s hand and then you go around. Sometimes, people drop! You reach out for pleasure for the real T, while it is not there. To achieve happiness, you will do anything. You become a bullet in the machine [cannon]. The machine shoots you to the other side. I saw that in a movie. People do anything for pleasure for the real T which is not there, very interesting, which you cannot find. Not there. Appearing as real from its own side, 100 per cent, true. And this 100 per cent, true. I believe, do everything for the not truly labelled T, truly existent T, which is not there, everything!

Where does suffering come from?

A person who has collected a million dollars, trillion dollars, zillion dollars for the real T which is not there, billion suffering is not dependent upon you to imagine? Then trusting or believing, oh, then that concept becomes the root of samsara. That is the root from where you get death. You have to die, get reborn, old age, sickness, all those pleasures, suffering, suffering of change. You experience all that. Then the pervasive compounded suffering. From where true suffering is pervasive compounded suffering. Because these aggregates are under the control of karma and delusions, so that is why this is pervaded by suffering. This is the nature of suffering, karma and delusions.

You do like this [Rinpoche presses his arm]—pain. This pain proves reincarnation, karma, pain. Your aggregates are under the control of karma and delusions. So there is pain. If you are free from karma and delusions, if you are free, then there is no pain. You don’t experience pain. If your aggregates are free from karma and delusions, there is no pain. Then you don’t experience rebirth, old age, sickness and death, all the samsaric pleasures in the nature of suffering, the suffering of change. Then also you don’t experience from where those true sufferings arise, pervasive compounded suffering, if you are free from delusions and karma, the cause of suffering.

The second meaning of pervasive is your aggregates are the contaminated seed of delusions. That is why it is also in the nature of suffering. Then there is compounded suffering because there is continued consciousness from past life. From this, it goes to
This January, Amitabha Buddhist Centre turns 25! While still radiant with the glow of youthful years, ABC has travelled a long and sometimes rocky road to arrive at an age of stable maturity.

What is the main factor that has led ABC through 25 years till the present, and will bring us continued success in the future? We asked our President Tan Hup Cheng, who has served as ABC’s director for over 20 years, and played an active role in the centre’s development since the beginning, to share his thoughts.

“I would say our biggest and most beneficial contribution to Singapore and all the students, has been offering Dharma education to one and all who come to our centre; and that is really also fulfilling the vision of Lama Zopa Rinpoche of spreading Dharma to as many people in Singapore as possible and putting them on the path to enlightenment.

Rinpoche, I have known him for so many years, is really serious on leading beings to enlightenment. And what other way can you lead sentient beings to enlightenment than by offering them the precious teachings of the Dharma? Because if you don’t study, you don’t know the Dharma, there’s no way you are going to be enlightened.

So that has been our core activity, our principal factor for success as a teaching centre in Singapore. We are one of the few Dharma centres here that offers Buddhist teachings in English, on many levels to a very wide audience of students here, from beginners to intermediate, to the advanced philosophical study students, and meditation students.

ABC offers all these activities, and they are offered free of charge and that has attracted over the years, many, many, many students who have come and gone. I would say at least ten thousand students have come in the last 25 years. And we will continue to focus on the main core activity of providing the precious Buddha teachings at as many levels, to as many people as possible.

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What is the key success factor of Amitabha Buddhist Centre? I would say unquestionably, it is our precious guru Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche. The things we have been able to achieve over the years, the last 25 years in fact, from the most humble beginnings, which started off with only about 30 students, and subsequently growing to the present strength of about at least a thousand members.

I would say all of us would be inspired, would be drawn, to offer our time, energy and finances, to really make this centre a living, thriving Dharma centre, for the benefit of so many people. And that will be our success factor for another 25 years. That maybe a newer generation of students will come into contact with Lama Zopa Rinpoche while he is here in our centre, again to be equally inspired, to be equally moved, to give their lives, their energies to the growth of the centre, to benefit even more people to come.”
The Resident Teachers of ABC

Ven. Sangye Khadro, a senior FPMT teacher from the United States, was assigned by Rinpoche to be ABC's resident teacher in the year that the centre was actually established. Ven. S.K., as she came to be known, stayed in Singapore for the next eleven years. Besides teaching meditation and the lam-rim, Venerable played an active role in developing various aspects of the centre's spiritual programme, from leading students in retreat, on pilgrimage and nursing home visits, to writing advice columns in the newsletter. She also saw the need for ABC students to advance into philosophical topics and made the request to Rinpoche to send over a qualified geshe.

Rinpoche agreed to Ven. Sangye Khadro's request and invited Geshe Dawa, who was from Sera Je Monastery, to teach in Singapore. Geshe Dawa became the first resident geshe at ABC and stayed for four years until 1999, when he returned to India. Geshe-la did not speak English and so a Tibetan translator from Kopan Monastery, the former Ven. Damchoe, served as interpreter for Geshe-la's classes. Besides teaching Buddhist philosophy, Geshe-la gave talks and led pujas during our major prayer events, including the annual Vesak Celebration. Geshe-la passed away peacefully at the age of 81 on 8th December 2011, in Sera Je Monastery.

Khen Rinpoche Geshe Thubten Chonyi, Resident Teacher (since 1999)
After Geshe Dawa's departure, Rinpoche appointed another resident geshe. Geshe Chonyi arrived for the first time in Singapore in October 1999. There may have been a notion then that geshe teachers were elderly monks. It was therefore quite unexpected when a contrastingly youthful new teacher showed up at the airport! 2014 marks Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi's 15th year as ABC's resident teacher. For over a decade, he has steadily guided ABC students as teacher, counsellor and spiritual friend. We pray that this will continue for many more years to come.

How was Amitabha Buddhist Centre actually established?
The classes given by Dieter Nath and the next teacher, Ven. Thubten Chodron, drew a regular audience of students who were interested in learning the Dharma, taught in English. Alice Chua was among the students. Alice recalls attending those classes in 1988 and being very struck by the teachings. From there, the idea soon arose to establish a proper Dharma centre. She consulted Lama Zopa Rinpoche who gave his approval and blessing.

Supported and aided by other like-minded students, Alice went ahead with the groundwork for the official launch of Amitabha Buddhist Centre. Among the steps Alice took was to convince a young newcomer named Tan Hup Cheng to join the committee. The registration of Amitabha Buddhist Centre took place on 1st January 1989, and two months later at its first Annual General Meeting, Tan Hup Cheng was elected as president of the new society.

ABC's early pioneer, Alice Chua, is now in her seventies. She has long relinquished her role in running the centre. During those early years, Alice and Hup Cheng both recall the efforts that they and fellow pioneers poured into setting up the centre while juggling with very limited resources to organise teachings, pay the bills, and provide for the welfare of the resident teachers.

Relying on Tara
by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Back to the Beginning

How did our precious guru, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, become the Spiritual Director of ABC?

Rinpoche himself has mentioned several times how he developed a powerful urge to visit Singapore, while on retreat in India around 1985. That instinct compelled Rinpoche to arrange his first visit to Singapore soon after he completed the retreat. With the assistance of a Singaporean that Rinpoche had met previously in Nepal, Lim Kwee Hock, Rinpoche introduced the first FPMT teacher to Singapore, the former Ven. Dieter from Germany, in 1986.

That inspired visit in 1986 was significant in two ways: it spurred on the eventual creation of Amitabha Buddhist Centre, a centre which Rinpoche himself initiated. And it spelt the beginning of Rinpoche's connection with his many students in Singapore.

We Are 25!

It's our Silver Jubilee! 25 years since Amitabha Buddhist Centre was officially established on 1st January 1989. Throughout 2014, TASHI DELEK celebrates this milestone with a special coverage of our growing years and those who walked with us, believed in us and kept the faith, and made us what we are today—a place that inspires the learning and practice of Dharma.

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“Announcing the arrival of our new Resident Geshe…
GESHE THUBTEN CHONYI
Here’s a brief biography of Geshe-la…

Geshe-la was born in 1962 in Solokhumbu, Eastern Nepal, in a small village known as Phaplu. At the age of twelve he was ordained by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche after arriving in Kopan Monastery. From twelve to eighteen years of age, he studied basic philosophy, logic, painting and English at Kopan. At the age of eighteen, Lama Yeshe decided to send a group of monks to Sera Je Monastery including Geshe-la. Sera Je Monastery was settled in India, and so, he went there in order to practise more advanced Buddhist philosophy for the next seventeen years. In 1997, after completing his studies he received his Geshe Lharampa Degree and after that, attended Gyudmed Tantric College in South India for one year. He then returned to Kopan Monastery and started teaching Buddhist logic and philosophy to Kopan monks.

This is what Lama Zopa Rinpoche said of Geshe-la…

“He is the first Kopan monk who has completed the study of the Geshe Lharampa Degree, and has a very good understanding of the Dharma. He is well known in Sera Je Monastery, and is also well praised by the elder monks there. He has studied very well, and his lifestyle, his behaviour and conduct are well respected by the monks.”

So, if you are keen to meet Geshe-la, do find out more from the centre as Geshe-la will most probably grace the Dharma Celebration at Yesi’s Building on 6, 7 and 8 November.”

Before the advent of the Internet and e-mail, ABC members received their updates in the post, in the form of an A4-sized centrefold, called “News Update”. Mentioned in the “News Update” of December 1999:

• A special edition ballpoint pen with silver and crystal casing
• 25th Anniversary commemorative 2014 desk calendar
• 25% discount on regular purchases from Tashi Delek Retail Store*

These gift privileges are yours if you…

• Are an existing ABC member (your personal Gift Vouchers will be delivered to you by post)
• Renew or upgrade your membership (1 / 3 / 5 years or Life) between 1st January – 31st December 2014

* Terms and conditions apply
Drolma Yuldog Puja for the ABC Family

To ring in the keynote year of our Silver Jubilee and the Lunar New Year on an auspicious note for the centre and our family of members, students and benefactors, ABC is conducting our very first 'Drolma Yuldog' puja on 8th February 2014 (full details on the back page). Read on for an explanation about the powerful benefits of this puja, which is a practice of Mother Tara.

The Origin and Benefits of the Drolma Yuldog Practice

“The Drolma Yuldog ritual was written by the great Indian master Nagarjuna, a Nalanda scholar who was born 400 years after the Buddha. In the “Manjushri Root Tantra”, the Buddha had prophesied that Nagarjuna would come to clarify the ultimate nature of reality as taught in the Perfection of Wisdom sutras.

Nagarjuna had created the practice out of compassion for sentient beings of this degenerate age. He composed it to repel career, black magic, unfavourable astrological influences, to ward off the harms of wrathful gods and spirits, stop epidemics, and halt misfortune. In short, it was to turn away all bad forces and to increase all the good.

According to Nagarjuna, the benefit of performing this puja is that by the power of the transcendental deities and worldly beings, all undesirable problems are averted.

Nagarjuna said: “This ritual is like a wish-fulfilling jewel from which all that one wishes can be fulfilled.”

In the past in eastern India, there was a king who killed the son of a daughter. These are very common problems, such as a life-threatening problem; you will recover from disease; help you recover from disease; and whichever they want, a son or a daughter. That’s very common experience. Through Tara practice, you can obtain any happiness of this life that you wish.”

Tara, Dispeller of Obstacles

“The amazing benefit of relying on Tara, explained by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

“Many Indian yogis relied upon Tara. By taking refuge in Tara, they completed the path and did great works for the teachings and for living beings, leading uncountable numbers in the path to temporal and ultimate happiness. For example, the great pandit Lama Atisha, who completed the whole graduated path to enlightenment, relied upon Tara.”

“Tara is quick to grant success in obtaining the ultimate happiness of enlightenment. You receive much good merit, or cause of happiness; it prevents a suffering rebirth in your next life; you receive initiation from millions of buddhas; and you achieve enlightenment. Besides these, however, Tara practice has many other benefits. Reciting the 21 Tara’s prayer with devotion, at dawn or dusk—or remembering Tara, singing praises and reciting mantras at any time of the day or night—protects you from fear and dangers, and fulfils all your wishes. If you pray to Tara, Tara is particularly quick to grant help.

There are also many temporal benefits from Tara practice, either reciting the Tara mantra or the 21 Tara prayer. Tara can solve many problems in your life: liberate you from untimely death; help you recover from disease; bring you success in business; help you to find a job; bring you wealth. When you have a really serious problem, such as a life-threatening disease, if you rely upon Tara, very commonly you will be freed from that problem; you will recover from that disease. If you eat poison, if you rely upon Tara, the poison will not harm you. By doing Tara prayers and mantras, couples with difficulty having a child can have a child; and whoever they want, a son or a daughter. These are very common experiences. Through Tara practice, you can obtain any happiness of this life that you wish.”

Coming Soon… Our Chenresig Statue

Here is good news as we celebrate our 25th anniversary! The long-awaited statue of 1,000-armed Chenresig for the altar in ABC’s second floor prayer hall is now in the works! The sculpting of this ten-foot tall statue of the Buddha of Compassion has been put in the expert hands of Peter and Denise Griffin, the husband-and-wife duo who have helped Lama Zopa Rinpoche create many excellent holy objects for FPMT centres. At ABC’s request, the Griffins began official work on the statue on 24th November, the auspicious merit-multiplying day commemorating Buddha’s descent from the God Realm of 33.

Many members have long wondered about when the statue would manifest, ever since our move into our seven-storey premises in 2007. The reason is really that our precious guru, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, has checked through all our plans and proposals in exacting detail to ensure that the statue would be strictly rendered. The Executive Committee’s latest proposal to commission the statue from the Griffins received Rinpoche’s full approval. The statue is being carved precisely according to how Rinpoche envisages it.

Work on the statue will be in progress throughout 2014 as it will take an estimated year or more to complete, and perhaps another month to fill it with mantras and install it. Now, it is just a matter of time before we welcome the arrival of a magnificent Chenresig into our gompa that will form the central focus of the Nyung Nying merit field mural soon to adorn the altar.
For the first time, the Drolma Yuldog Puja at Amitabha Buddhist Centre—an auspicious start to 2014 relying on Tara, swift dispeller of obstacles.

Especially organised and dedicated for the ABC family—all members, students and benefactors—with the wish for everyone to be blessed with peace, happiness, health, success and prosperity throughout the coming year, our 25th anniversary. Most importantly, dedicating for our success in the three-fold activity of learning, reflecting and meditating on the precious Dharma.

All are welcome to attend this special all-day puja where extensive prayers and requests, and elaborate, distinctive and unique offerings will be made to the Tara merit field along with a host of deities, protectors and worldly beings, for the accomplishment of all enlightened activities.

“This ritual is like a wish-fulfilling jewel from which all that one wishes can be fulfilled.”

The Indian master Nagarjuna, composer of the Drolma Yuldog ritual

Donations are voluntary. To accumulate skies of merit, contributions of any amount are welcome. Cash offerings and personal dedications can be dropped off at our office from 8 January up to 8 February.