



PHOWA RETREAT

PRESS CONFERENCE

By His Eminence 4th Tsikey Chokling Rinpoche and His Holiness 7th Phakchok Rinpoche
From Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery, P.O. Box 1200, Boudhanath, Kathmandu-06, Nepal
Held on Thursday 4 June 2009 at Rangjung Yeshe Buddhist Society Penang, Pulau Penang, Malaysia
www.rangjungyeshepenang.org

From December 2 to 6, 2009 at the Copthorne Hotel at Tanjung Bunga, Penang, His Eminence 4th Tsikey Chokling Rinpoche will be teaching for the first time in a large public setting in Malaysia the special **Phowa** practice. Phowa in Tibetan or transference of consciousness upon death is one of the most renowned skillful method employed by Buddhist practitioners to be reborn in Amitabha Buddha's Western Pure Land of Great Bliss. The following is a concise introduction in a simple question and answer format.

Does Amitabha Buddha's Western Pure Land of Great Bliss really exist?

Yes, according Mahayana Buddhism's *Pure Land Sutra*, Amitabha Buddha's pure land or buddhfield exists in the westerly direction. By the power of one of the most astonishing and unique vows borne from infinite great compassion of Amitabha while still a bodhisattva or a buddha-in-training, that if he becomes enlightened he must actualize the ability to emanate a pure land that any sentient being who has great faith, devotion to Amitabha Buddha, and compassion to sentient beings can be reborn there without regressing back into cyclic existence. At the secret level, Amitabha Buddha's pure land is actually the pure essence of our mind and hence intrinsic to each and every sentient being. If we can accept this key point then it would make sense that as our mind becomes purer, we will begin to perceive directly that all is divine and perfect.

When we arrive at Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land what happens to our bad karma and obscurations?

Reaching Amitabha Buddha's Western Pure Land of Great Bliss does not automatically free us of the effect of negative actions nor eradicate our obscurations that prevent us from attaining full and complete enlightenment. Otherwise, merely being reborn in Amitabha Buddha's buddhfield will be the equivalent of buddhahood. As is taught extensively in the *Pure Land Sutra*, after rebirth in Amitabha's buddhfield, we easily continue to purify our negativities and reach enlightenment. Because, infinite emanations of Amitabha are present everywhere to turn the wheel of dharma and everything in the environment from the inanimate (like sounds of wind, water, and so forth) to the animate (birds, bees, and so forth) emit sacred sounds of dharma and dharanis that turn our minds towards virtue and practice.

How can we go to Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land?

It is taught that four factors help facilitate our rebirth in Amitabha's Pure Land. Firstly we must have unstinting great compassion known as the heart of enlightenment (or *bodhicitta* in Sanskrit) towards all sentient beings and one-pointed faith and devotion to Amitabha Buddha especially at the point of our death. Secondly, while facing the westerly direction we must habitually make one-pointed aspiration prayer to be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Great Bliss, especially when we are dying. Thirdly, we need to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha while visualizing him in the space in front of us. Finally, annually we should do at least one Amitabha Buddha retreat for at least a day, a long weekend, or a month, if possible.

What is Phowa and how to practice it?

As mentioned earlier, phowa is one of many skillful means in Buddhism practiced by many past great masters and practitioners all over South Asia, the Himalayas, China, and the Far East to free themselves from cyclic existence and actualize enlightenment. Although the details are secret, the practice can be simply described as learning of how to send our consciousness to Amitabha's buddhfield through our ninth orifice, the gate of the central channel. At the same time we also learn to block off the remaining eight gates, namely, our anus, urinary orifice, navel, mouth, nose, eyes, ears, and the eight gate that is located above our hairline when we are still an infant. If we do not learn to block the lower eight gates, when we die our consciousness will leave through one of them and thereby perpetuate our rebirth in cyclic existence. That's why it is so vitally important to learn how to practice phowa and thereby free ourselves from suffering.