

Farewell Banner for Gyalwang Karmapa XVI

HIS HOLINESS RANGJUNG RIKPE DORJE, Gyalwang Karmapa XVI (1924-1981), was the spiritual leader of the Karma Kagyü lineage. He was a teacher of the Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, who invited and hosted him on three teaching tours of North America, in 1974, '76, and '80. The Karmapa was known for his presence as a living buddha and his natural radiance of warmth and kindness in everyday life. This was displayed in the Black Crown ceremony, where he manifested the compassion of bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

We recently rediscovered this poem by the Vidyadhara, written during the second or third visit of the Karmapa to North America. After composing it, the Vidyadhara had it calligraphed by Karma Thinley Rinpoche, who had a beautiful hand. It was silk-screened and made into a banner, which the Vidyadhara presented to the Karmapa as a farewell gift. Lama Ugyen Shenpen had a second copy, which his widow, Alexandra, recently offered to Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, to be placed in the Karmapa Center 16 in Zion, Illinois. We have a translation of this, which we believe Rinpoche dictated not long after he composed the poem. We offer this translation here, lightly edited by the Translation Committee.

The Vidyadhara's poem is a powerful evocation of Karmapa Rangjung Rikpe Dorje. In the first stanza, Rinpoche extols him as the embodiment of "original, nondwelling wisdom" and "immovable simplicity," a poetic description of the ultimate dharmakaya, or "the body of truth" of a buddha. He is likened to the dignity of the "seven aspects of union," frequently a reference to Vajradhara, the primordial buddha in the Kagyü tradition. The aspects are also a detailed description of the sambhogakaya, or "body of enjoyment." And then in the second stanza, he is described as the "nirmanakaya of unchanging oneness" or as a living buddha in a "body of manifestation."

The poem first recognizes the Karmapa as Vajradhara, but then also as Vajravarahi (Vajrayogini), the principal Kagyü female yidam; Chakrasamvara, the principal male yidam; and Mahakala, the principal protector of the lineage. He is also likened to previous Kagyü lineage-holders, Gampopa and Rangjung Dorje, in verses eleven and twelve.

The Vidyadhara understands the Karmapa as an embodiment not only of the Kagyü Buddhist tradition, but also of the Shambhala tradition. The ninth stanza evokes the four dignities of Shambhala and equates the Karmapa with King Gesar. The fifth stanza recognizes the Karmapa as Vajrasattva, the embodiment of purity, and describes him as possessing "peaceful white light." In Tibetan, this is the name of "Shiwa Ökar," the embodiment of purity in the Shambhala tradition.

In the second to the last stanza, the Vidyadhara credits his discovery of the Great Eastern Sun, here called "the Great East, the sun of mind," to the Karmapa's buddha activity, which enables Rinpoche himself to radiate buddha activity. He ends with a pledge of his service and loyalty, even at the cost of his life.



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On a high, unconquerable lion throne,
Invincible dignity of the seven aspects of union,
Always holding the original, nondwelling wisdom,
Immovable simplicity, I prostrate to you.

In the mandala of profound and brilliant vajra space,
Supreme guru, simplicity free from samsara and
nirvana,
Vajra luminosity, beauty beyond words,
Possessing the great-bliss wisdom of the herukas,
Nirmanakaya of unchanging oneness,
Rigpe Dorje, how wondrous to see your actions!

You dwell nowhere.
You are produced by no one.
Your actions are unceasing.
Karmakah, I continually prostrate to you.

With no beginning and no end,
Possessing the profound and vast dharma,
Ever in the form of Dorje Chang,
You are the Vajradhara.

Eternally possessing peaceful white light,
Treasure of spotless simplicity,
Indestructible essence of all,
You are the Vajrasattva.

At the center of your navel, from the source
of dharmas,
HA RI NI SA naturally resound.
Treading on King Brahma,
You are the Vajravarahi.

Immovable vajra, dharma dance,
Form of the essence that is beyond dharmas,
Bhagavat, glorious heruka,
You are the real Chakrasamvara.

Subjugating terrible enemies,
You hold the copper knife of the four karmas.
Your actions are penetrating.
You are the real Mahakala.

Splendid wonder of Tiger Lion Garuda Dragon,
Having the confidence of Profound Brilliant Just
Powerful All-Victorious,

Supreme father god of Mukpo Dong,
You are the real King Gesar.

You are the guru, you are the dharma,
You are the noble sangha.
There is no one like you.
You are the root guru of all.

In the form of a youthful bhikshu,
You bring down the rain of wisdom on the fire of the kleshas.
Following the example of the physician from Takpo, [Gampopa]
You are the ocean of discipline.

Compassion without beginning or end
Arises as your moonlike face of bodhichitta.
Since you are Rangjung Dorje, [Karmapa III]
You are the primordial bodhisattva.

Having bound all movement in the lalana, rasana, and avadhuti
Within the ushnisha,
Possessing the power that unifies sun and moon,
You are the ultimate master.

I am utterly young,
Fallen into the darkness of desire,
But, through the dawning of your buddha activity,
I have found the Great East, the sun of mind.

I rejoice in sending out a hundred rays of buddha activity.
Therefore, not caring for my body and life,
I will always be at your service.

Thus, to the Buddha Karmapa, a few verses of praise, rejoicing with great respect for your profound and unsurpassable kindness in setting your lotus feet again in the powerful country of America, where the people have been blessed with the dharma of the practicing lineage. These verses were written by this lowly one who has for many lifetimes been under the protection of you, the supreme holy one, and who, in order to propagate your buddha activity, supreme protector, has with great confidence, unflinchingly and without care for body and life, emulating King Gesar and the Imperial Rigdens, established this magnificent kingdom, the heart of the practicing lineage.

With countless humble prostrations, this is presented by Karma Ngawang Chökyi Gyatso Künga Sangpo on this auspicious day of the month. May excellent virtue increase.