

Why the International Kalachakra Network is important to me

By Andy Wistreich

I first took refuge in the summer of 1980, and met Shan in November. Shortly afterwards, she told me about the Kalachakra Initiation to take place in Madison, USA the summer of 1981, and we decided to go. I did not know why I agreed.

As preparation I read Tantra in Tibet by Tsong Khapa and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and when I saw a reference to the conventional and ultimate Buddha nature [1], I asked my teacher, Geshe Wangchen about this. The topic drew me, and when the questions came at the pre-Initiation teachings in Madison, I was able to ask His Holiness to explain it. Later, in the eighties, my teacher spent three years teaching Uttaratantra [2], and I got to learn about Shen Tong [3] and Rang Tong [4] approaches to realising emptiness, and how these relate to the Jonang and Gelug lineages of Kalachakra [5]. We ran Christmas retreats at our Manjushri London Centre, on the Six-Session Guruyoga and on the Nine Deity Sadhana, during the eighties. Around the time of the Rikon Initiation in 85, I had the idea for a Kalachakra Institute to support practitioners. I thought it could be somewhere in Europe. The Dalai Lama said we should do a feasibility study. Lama Zopa Rinpoche was very supportive of the idea. It didn't happen, but the idea just lay there, waiting.

In the early nineties a few of us started to meet occasionally to recite the Mind Mandala Sadhana, so the idea of the Kalachakra Practice Group began. One member Beth Arrowsmith made a strong connection with Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoche, and he agreed to come to London to give the Initiation. This happened in 1996 and we announced the existence of the group. It suddenly took off, with about twenty people meeting once a month, and gradually learning to practise. At first we recited the Six-Session Guruyoga according to Kalachakra by Ling Rinpoche, but later switched to The Jewelled Heart by Buton Rinpoche, that Ed Henning translated especially for us. More recently we have moved to regular recitation of the Mind Mandala sadhana by Detri Rinpoche, and annually reciting the full Body, Speech and Mind Mandala sadhana by the Seventh Dalai Lama.

David Reigle published his book, Kalachakra Sadhana and Social Responsibility, I contacted him, and he came to England in 1997 and stayed with me. We decided to set up the International Kalachakra Network (IKN) to support practitioners by helping groups and by encouraging translators. Around this time, I first began using the Internet, and soon after the first version of the website was launched. The IKN really took off when Rudy Harderwijk designed a new website which gave us the chance to have a download of materials and to have discussion groups. Then we took the idea to the Graz Initiation in 2002, where we met with representatives of the groups from France, Italy and Austria plus some translators, and the IKN Memorandum of Intent was developed and agreed. The people who met became the IKN Executive, and the IKN has continued to develop since then.

When I first took the Initiation in Madison, it deeply affected me. I felt so happy at the end of the second day, as the evening sun shone down across the site to where we were waiting for the buses. The peacefulness was so deep. On day three I felt I knew all the vajra family at the site, personally. As I drove away after the Initiation, I sensed all the

Kalacakra seeds spreading across the globe, as everyone made their way home. Next day I began my daily practice of Kalacakra.

In those days, very little was available in English, and even those translations that already existed were not available for someone like me, who the translators had never heard of. Gradually due to the kindness of Alex Berzin and Bob Thurman, I was able to get practice materials and commentaries. My teacher, Geshe Namgyal Wangchen was very supportive of my practice, and slowly books appeared. I was always too busy with work and family to learn Sanskrit or Tibetan, so I have always relied upon translators. They are precious links of gold in the chain of transmission.

After my first Initiation I began to feel that to practise Kalacakra and to help others to practise it was somehow doing work for His Holiness. This is always a very important part of my motivation for this activity. Also, I can say that the Kalacakra is certainly very beautiful, so I just feel happy when I am doing it.

The practice of Kalacakra is very profound and powerful. I find it helpful to see it as a non-dual tantra. In a teaching on the Majushrinamasamgiti, another non-dual tantra [6] with fundamental similarities to the Kalacakra, His Holiness explains that, in the generation stage [7], when you recite the mantras, you visualise deities emitting from your heart, and this accomplishes your own purpose. They then travel everywhere and benefit others, which accomplishes the purpose of others. They then return and dissolve back onto your heart, which is non-duality.

In Kalacakra, accomplishment of ones own purpose (the Dharmakaya [8]) and accomplishment of the purpose of others (the Rupakaya [9]) are the unchanging bliss [10] and empty form [11] respectively. These are non-dual in the way that the mind of clear light is a unity of subjective-objective reality. At Madison, in response to my question about the conventional and ultimate Buddha nature, His Holiness discussed the objective and subjective clear lights. These are only different for explanation, but in reality are one.

Interestingly, the Shen Tong approach to realisation, beloved by the Jonangpas, works via the subjective clear light, whereas the Rang Tong approach emphasises the method of the objective clear light. Since the clear light is one, we can speak of the union of the Jonang and Gelug lineages. Nowadays these two great lineages are still practised by Tibetans. The Gelugpa teachers seem to emphasise the generation stage, whereas the Jonangpas emphasise the completion stage. We need both, to maintain a ladder to enlightenment for present and future practitioners.

It is my heartfelt wish that the IKN can help to support the evolution of a new Kalacakra culture for the world. David Reigle points out in his book that there have been key points in history where society was helped to move to a new phase, through Kalacakra. From the past, he cites the teaching at Shri Danyakataka [12] in south India, by the Buddha, the historic Initiation of the yogis of Shambhala by Manjushri Yashas [13] and the revelation of the Kalacakra in India [14], as important Kalacakra moments in human history. David believes that the present time, in which His Holiness and other great Lamas are giving the Initiation so often, all around the globe, is just such another time. I agree, and believe that this is why the IKN, based on the Internet, is worth doing.

The Majushrinamasamgiti is part of a bigger tantra, called Illusions Net. By connecting practitioners around the world, using the Internet, I like to think that the IKN is threading illusions net of unchanging bliss and empty form a mandala for our time.

Completed on May 16th 2003, the anniversary of Lord Buddhas manifestation as Kalacakra at Shri Danyakataka

Notes:

- [1] The Buddha nature is the essence of the mind and its potential to become fully enlightened. The conventional Buddha nature is the mind's clear nature. The ultimate Buddha nature is the mind's emptiness of inherent existence.
- [2] Uttaratantra, The Peerless Continuum, by Maitreya, is an important commentary on sutras from the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, and it teaches about the Buddha nature, among seven vajra topics.
- [3] Shen Tong means 'empty of other', and refers to the conventional nature of the mind as being empty of conceptual thought. The Kalacakra master, Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen, founder of the Jonang tradition, took this further and taught that the Buddha nature is what is found after all conventional phenomena have been eliminated. Tsong Khapa, founder of the Gelug tradition taught that it is not correct to abandon conventional phenomena, as even the Buddha has a conventional aspect.
- [4] Rang Tong means 'empty of self'. The Jonangpas say that if something were empty of itself then it wouldn't exist at all, but the Gelugpas say that 'Rang Tong' means empty of existing by itself.
- [5] These traditions emerged around the thirteenth century C.E. and conflicted not only in philosophical debates but also politically, with the Fifth Dalai Lama closing down the Jonangpa monasteries. The Gelug was predominant politically from that time to the present, and the Jonang was influential in the nineteenth century within the Ri-me (non-sectarian) movement together with Nyingma and Kagyu teachers.
- [6] Father tantra emphasises the practices of the illusory body. Mother tantra emphasises practices of the clear light. It can be said that Kalacakra is a mother tantra. Alternatively it can be called non-dual, since the empty form and unchanging bliss of Kalacakra are of the same nature. In Kalacakra all materiality is abandoned, so it is said that mind and body are one.
- [7] The generation stage is practised following initiation. It is conceptual and centres on generating oneself as the deity, and the environment as the mandala.
- [8] The Wisdom Body of the Buddha is said to be the accomplishment of one's own purpose because it is the highest happiness, and the manifestation of the full potential of one's mind.
- [9] The Form Body of the Buddha is said to be the accomplishment of the purpose of others because it is through its manifestations that all sentient beings can be led eventually to full enlightenment.
- [10] Unchanging bliss means a bliss that is never lost, unlike ordinary bliss which is only temporary.
- [11] The empty form first appears to the practitioner during the first yoga of the completion stage. This is practised following the generation stage, is non-conceptual, and is the means for actualising the state of Kalacakra. The empty form is a form without materiality, is said to be made of space particles, and is an aspect of the clear light mind.
- [12] At Shri Danyakataka, during the Buddha's lifetime, it is said that he manifested as Kalacakra and taught the tantra at the request of Sucandra, King of Shambhala, a

kingdom to the north.

[13] Manjushri Yashas abbreviated the tantra brought back to Shambhala by Sucandra. He averted a potential schism between Vedic and Buddhist practitioners by initiating them all into Kalacakra and making them into one vajra family.

[14] This happened in the eleventh century C.E. around the time of early Mogul incursions into India, which eventually led to the demise of Buddhism in India. With its common Hindu and Buddhist iconographic aspects, Kalacakra potentially sustained the indigenous religions in the face of the common enemy. From India, the Kalacakra tradition found its way into Tibet during the same century, where it was sustained down to the present.