

Friday, 23rd September 2005

Dear Karmic Students of the Western World,

The 4th of October is the 1st day of the 8th month according to the Tibetan lunar calendar. From the 4th to the 10th of October, all monks in every Bönpo monastery will take part in a ritual known as *dka' thub* (ascetic fasting). During these seven days, all monks in Menri will follow the monastic discipline practiced by the Buddha Tonpa Shenrab during his lifetime.

When the Buddha Shenrab was thirty-one years old, he took a vow to follow an ascetic way of life. He left all belongings, relatives, and followers behind as a wild grass one will leave at the time of detachment. He went to a solitary place and practiced enlightenment and the difficulties of ascetic fasting (*dka' thub*) for three years. During this time, he spent one year as a bird, another year as a monkey, and the third year as a human.

During the first year as a bird, Buddha Shenrab took only a grain of rice offered by the king of swans, *Chu-byed* (one who can separate milk from that mixed in water) and a dewdrop of water per day. He also preached a Bön of virtues and non-virtues to all birds during that year.

In the second year as a monkey, Buddha Shenrab spent his days taking no more than one piece of fruit per day offered by Anuma, the king of monkeys. He preached them a Bön, too.

During the third year as a human, Buddha Shenrab took a piece of grass (vegetable) offered by the King of Shang Shang (a kind of bird with human head), a leaf full of the essence of honey from a flower offered by the king of bees, and a handful of water offered by a turtle.

Lord Tonpa Shenrab practiced in such a way for three years for the purpose of reducing his desire and attachment. Particularly, there are three different kinds of ascetic fasting (*dka' thub*): fasting through body, speech, and mind. According to the body, one has to limit eating and drinking, and, in particular, avoid all wrong activities of the body such as killing, sexual behaviors, etc. According to the speech, one has to avoid rude words, meaningless speech, etc. And, according to the mind, one should give up harmful thought and poisonous thought.

During each day of *dka' thub*, monks wake up at 4 am and gather in the main temple to purify their negative emotions by prostrating to the thousand Buddhas of ten directions. Afterwards, the monks will be served breakfast followed by a teaching and explanation of the monastic way of life. During this teaching, Ponlob Rinpoche explains the proper way of eating, clothing, and behavior according to monastic tradition. All the beings of *nagas* and earthly spirits will also be pleased and satisfied by the offerings of water and cakes (*gtor ma*), so that they can provide rains in time to have a good harvesting, and to keep the illness and evils away. All the monks will do offerings and prostrations to the

thousand Buddhas and will stay in meditation with peaceful mind until the noon. After lunch, monks recite *nirmana kaya* mantras (*a dkar a med du tri su nag po zhi zhi mal mal so ha*). This is the mantra that rescues us from the three lower realms. Afterwards, all monks circumambulate the main temple.

All foods offered during these days must be pure vegetarian. Nothing is eaten after the mid-day meal until breakfast the next morning. We do not eat after mid-day to keep awake, avoid sleepy mentality, ignorance, desire, and all the emotions that interfere with the practices. These obstacles will disturb your practice and make your experiences unclear. At around 6 pm, all monks will perform prayers for world peace so that this world will be freed from the fear of illness, starvation, and weapons, etc. All these virtuous deeds will be dedicated to all the sentient beings and will be shared among those present in this world. This practice of praying, prostrating and offering will last until 11 p.m. This same practice will be repeated each day for the entire seven days.

I hope I have given you a message of value for this upcoming month of October. I will write again next month.

Menri Ponlob Rinpoche