

Thaye Dorje, His Holiness the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa, shares the following message about this year's Kagyu Monlam in English.

Dear Dharma friends,

This year's Kagyu Monlam will be the 19th gathering since the first Kagyu Monlam in our time, which was organised in 1994 at Lumbini, the birthplace of our historical Buddha Shakyamuni, at the instigation of His Holiness the late 14th Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche.

All the following Kagyu Monlam gatherings, from 1996 until 2019, were held at the sacred place of Bodhgaya, under the Bodhi Tree where all the 1002 Buddhas of our Fortunate Aeon reach the state of complete awakening.

Every year on this auspicious occasion, thousands of monks, nuns and lay practitioners from around the world would gather for seven days during the month of December to conduct aspiration and dedication prayers for world peace and the wellbeing of all sentient beings.

Then last year the COVID-19 pandemic struck the entire world in an unprecedented manner, making international travel and physical gatherings of large numbers of people impossible.

However, the pandemic did not stop us from holding a Kagyu Monlam – we simply adapted the way it was held to the requirements of the situation: instead of the venerable Sanghas, lay practitioners and devotees physically assembling at Bodhgaya, the Monlam prayers were conducted locally, in the safe environments of the monasteries in India and Nepal, and the practices were audio-streamed from Rumtek monastery, in order to make it possible for practitioners around the world to join in the practices.

While it was of course regrettable that we were not able to come together in person, I nevertheless felt that we were very fortunate indeed to have the necessary technology to allow us to practice together.

This year, while the situation around the pandemic has improved to some extent, I still feel that it wouldn't be safe for all of us to come together and meet in Bodhgaya in person.

Therefore, I have asked the venerable Sanghas to once again conduct the Monlam prayers in the safe environments of their monasteries, just like last year. Also like last year, there will again be a live-stream from Rumtek for practitioners around the world to join in.

I am personally grateful that we have been able to keep up this pattern of meeting once a year and practising aspirations together for many years now without interruption, because I feel that this tradition satisfies a deeply rooted belief that we as human beings share: it is in our nature to be deeply convinced that in order to achieve anything, or earn the right to enjoy anything, we must first put in a lot of effort and hard work.

While Buddha Shakyamuni understood that this belief of ours is not really in accordance with how things truly are, he also knew that since we are driven by this belief the only way for us is to go through with it and experience for ourselves whether it is true or not.

Thus, out of his immense mother-like compassion, he provided us with a path comprising a variety of means and methods that allow us to explore this notion of ours to the fullest.

The practice of aspiration is one of these means that let us to explore our beliefs all the way, a method to see for ourselves whether what we consider to be the truth is indeed 'it'.

Therefore, dear Dharma friends, let us come together once again this year and use the platform provided by this Monlam gathering to fully explore what we believe.

Let us practice aspirations and dedications for all sentient beings – especially all those affected by the pandemic and the various tragedies that have taken place such as natural and even man-made calamities – without doubt or hesitation, but with whole-hearted enjoyment!

Let us aspire from the bottom of our hearts, without any sense of burden, without any expectation of success or fear of failure.

Just like last year, I will be joining the aspiration prayers along with all of you around the world.

May this auspicious meeting further strengthen our connection and sow and nurture seeds of infinite merit and wisdom, which in turn – through the interdependence of all phenomena – will have a positive influence on all outer circumstances.

May the pandemic come to an end soon, and may we be able to meet again in person to share and practice the Buddha Dharma together!

With prayers

His Holiness the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa Thaye Dorje

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