

## The Purpose of Going On a Pilgrimage - Shangpa Rinpoche 4th October 2009

As a Buddhist, we should perform wholesome actions and think wholesome and beneficial thoughts. One wholesome thought and action is to plan for and go for a pilgrimage. Buddha Shakyamuni said that after he entered parinirvana, all the places he has visited to give teachings and performed special retreats should be visited by followers. By visiting, they would get inspiration for practice, remember Buddha's teachings and do reflection on their own practice.

Related to that, we should visit the 4 main holy places of Buddha Shakyamuni, Lumbini (where Buddha was born), Sarnath (where Buddha first turned the wheel of Dharma), Rajgiri (where Buddha gave the teachings on the Heart Sutra) and Kushinagar (where Buddha passed into Parinirvana). Likewise we should also visit Vaishali, where Buddha spent much of his time and gave many important teachings.

From the Vajrayana point of view, there are 24 sacred places to be visited. There are many other holy places to be visited related to these 24 places. These are connected to the outer (phenomena) and the inner (our own body with channels and bindu). By visiting these holy places and meditating there, we purify our inner defilements of mind, which is inseparable with our body, in the form of channels, winds and bindu. For that reason, we should go on pilgrimage.

Tantric holy places such as Muktinath are also holy places, as taught by Guru Rinpoche and explained in various tantras. Visiting Muktinath is beneficial to tantric practitioners.

There are actually 3 categories of pilgrimages. 1st is when one feels bored with where one's staying and want to refresh oneself by finding a special place to relax in. One is like a tourist. It does help to visit holy places as these places have blessings and special energy. You will feel joy when you are there. However, this is not the best type of pilgrimage. The 2nd category is when one knows the Dharma and wants to clear one's obstacles and believe that visiting holy places can clear one's obstacles and increase one's fortune. The last is pilgrimage without worldly attachment, to simply go to holy places to be inspired to follow in the ways of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This is the best type of pilgrimage. Even though the 1st and 2nd categories are not the best, still the pilgrimage will be meaningful to us. If you take an arduous journey without knowing the meaning of

going on a pilgrimage, only to see a few rocks or a pool of water at the end, you may feel frustrated. But if you have the right purpose and know the meaning of going on a pilgrimage, you know that it represents that the quality of enlightenment is already there for us to realize.

Going on a pilgrimage is also a kind of purification, one with the suffering of sickness and discomfort. We try every means to purify our karma, if we can successfully overcome hardship encountered during the process of going on a pilgrimage, that is definitely purification.

Muktinath is both a Hindu and Buddhist holy place. Tantra is earlier than both Hinduism and Buddhism. Hindus use tantra to aid in their practice, just as Buddha Shakyamuni also taught tantric practices. In that way, many places are regarded to be holy to both Buddhists and Hindus. This does not mean that Hindus and Buddhists share the same view. It is simply that there is some connection due to the origin. To Hindus, this is a holy place of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. The Hindus have their own version of the story behind this place. The Buddhist explanation of the story behind this place is actually not published. 7 to 8 years before, someone brought an old scripture which he found inside a statue. He came to Pokhara and showed the scripture to Rinpoche. Rinpoche examined it and found that it is the explanation of the holy place of Muktinath. Rinpoche typed out the contents of the old scripture in his PC but did not translate it into English.

Guru Rinpoche had blessed this place. Later, the 84 saints also blessed this place. The 84 saints felt that this place could benefit a lot of people in the future. They had supernatural powers and put the Ralpochen mountain from India in their hands and put the mountain in Muktinath for blessing. There is a lake behind this place which is poisonous and may be disastrous for future generations. The saints therefore placed the mountain upon the lake. After this, they visited Mount. Kailash and circumambulated and bathed in Lake Manasarovar. They each brought some water from that lake and poured the water down at the newly installed mountain. This became the spring waters of the current day. The 84 saints had a vision that the mandalas of the 74 tantric deities are surrounding the mountains of Muktinath. The mandala of Vajrayogini and Hevajra in union form at the western side, Maitreya Buddha's mandala is at the golden mountain at the eastern side. In between the black and white mountains are colorful mountains which are the mandala of

the 21 Taras. In the south, is the yellow mountain which is the mandala of Buddha Shakyamuni. There are so many mountains representing the mandalas of different deities.

The mountain which we see tomorrow where the spring waters flow is called Sons of Jewel. In front of the flow of spring water, Guru Rinpoche did a ganacakra. While doing this, many dakinis from the mountains came and enjoyed the tshog offerings. All the dakinis present received the offerings visibly. Now, maybe they are there, but due to our karma, we cannot see them. During the 84 saints' time, they came and gave blessings and their realization increased. Through that realization they developed bliss and danced. They left many footprints in the rocks. 20 are hidden and only two are visible for everybody to see. Only the fortunate are able to see these footprints. At a small structure in Muktinath, one can hear the flow of the river where the King Dechega Ngamo made offerings to the mandala deities. If you are fortunate, you can find this place, circumambulate it and listen to the sound. If you walk for a while, you can find a place where there is a flame burning from the water. The flame of fire arising from water is the bliss developed by the union of Cakrasamvara and Vajrayogini, manifested as fire. This shows Cakrasamvara and Vajrayogini's presence. There is also a place where fire comes from the earth. The significance is similar and the two places are nearby each other. In earlier times, there was also a flame from a rock, which was a lamp offering the the mandalas. If one is fortunate, one will receive blessings of realization at that place.

Due to the blessings by the 84 saints, if one drinks from or bathes in the spring water, this would purify lots of one's karma. Even if there is karma left, this would manifest lighter. The water can cure many sicknesses because of the aspirations and blessings of the 84 saints. At that area, one can see many old trees. It is said that the trees are where the 84 saints left their walking sticks which miraculously developed into trees. Now there are 108 trees scattered around the holy place.

There is also a rock which we can circumambulate, on which is imprinted a scorpion which is a symbol representing the wrathful form of Guru Rinpoche, Guru Dragpo. If one walks further, there is a knee imprint of Guru Rinpoche which he made while making a wish that everyone has happiness. Somewhere around that area, there is a vajra-shaped stone which marks hidden treasures. The local people do not know these explanations. There is another spring which is the dakinis' drinking water. There is a naturally embossed Garuda somewhere there. At a village below called Puram, is a rock with Buddha Shakyamuni's

footprint. If we walk far away, there is a stove-like stone with holes. This is said to be Guru Rinpoche's cooking stove with utensils imprinted. These are the special places blessed by Guru Rinpoche and the 84 saints.

Whoever with full devotion meditates and does short recitations of mantra in front of the spring will be able to purify his/her karma and fulfill his/her aspirations and gain realization in his/her next life. Nearby the spring is a holy shrine which Hindus believe is the holy place of Lord Vishnu while Buddhists believe is the place where Avalokiteshvara subdued the Nagas. Whoever prays there will have sickness and unfavorable circumstances purified. There is a statue made by the king of a country called Zomla which flew there. The Zomla king tried to find it and finally found the statue but it was too heavy to move. The king therefore left it behind and built a temple there. The people of Zomla came once a year to cry in front of the statue and ask why it had to fly there.

According to Tara's prophecy, the 100 spring waters are the residence for Nagas and different types of spirits. It was also the palace of Cakrasamvara. If one tried at least to stay one day and practice there, one can purify lots of karma and achieve an irreversible stage of practice. If one practices diligently, one can gain the merits to achieve the state of the universal monarch. If one takes a bath in the spring waters or drinks from the spring waters, even the negative karma from committing the 5 heinous deeds can be purified. Guests visiting are thus protected from fears and sufferings and will not be born in places with famines and disasters and born where there is wealth and prosperity.