

## Modern Day Kadampas

### The History and Development of the New Kadampa Tradition

By James Belither

The New Kadampa Tradition is a special Kadampa tradition of Mahayana Buddhism founded by Venera Kelsang Gyatso. Although established as a distinct tradition in 1991, the New Kadampa Tradition arose from all Buddhist traditions, from the teachings, example, and blessings of Buddha Shakyamuni. These were transmitted through a lineage of realized Buddhist Masters, including the Indian Buddhist Master Atisha founder of the Old Kadampa Tradition, and the Tibetan Buddhist Masters, Je Tsongkhapa and Kyabje T Rinpoche, the root Spiritual Guide, or Guru, of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso.

#### Buddha Shakyamuni

Buddha Shakyamuni, or Gautama Buddha, (circa 6th Century BC), is the fourth of the thousand Buddhas who will appear in this world during what is called the 'Fortunate Aeon'. As a Supreme Emanation Body, he performed the twelve principal deeds, and by 'turning the wheel of Dharma', presented the Sutra Teachings both Hinayana and Mahayana, and appearing in the aspect of Buddha Vajradhara revealed the Vajrayana Tantra, teachings.

#### Lineage

The lineages of these teachings, both their scriptural transmission and realization, were then passed from Teacher to disciple, and spread first within India, then throughout much of Asia, and now to many countries throughout most of the western world. Buddha's teachings, or Dharma, are likened to a wheel that moves from country to country in accordance with changing conditions and people's karmic inclinations. The external form of presenting Buddhism may change as it meets with different cultures and societies, but its essential authenticity is ensured through the continuation of an unbroken lineage of realized practitioners.

Initially, there were two principal lineages passed down from Buddha Shakyamuni, known as the wisdom lineage of Nagarjuna and the method lineage of Asanga. The wisdom lineage of the profound path, which emphasizes the teachings on emptiness, or ultimate truth, passed from Buddha Shakyamuni to Manjushri, Manjushri to Nagarjuna, and then to Chandrakirti and further Indian Buddhist Masters. The method lineage of the vast path, which emphasizes teachings on conventional aspects of the path such as moral discipline and compassion, passed from Buddha Shakyamuni to Maitreya, from Maitreya to Asanga, and then to Vasubandhu and further Indian Buddhist Masters.

#### Atisha

Later, the great Indian Teacher Atisha (982-1054 AD) gathered together the teachings of these two lineages and re-introduced them into Tibet. Although Buddhism had been introduced some two hundred years before by Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita, Buddhist practice had largely been destroyed during the anti-Buddhist purges of the Tibetan king, Lang Darma (circa 836 AD), a follower of Bön, the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. Invited by Jangchub Ö, a ruler of Ngari in western Tibet, Atisha was asked to present a Dharma that everyone could follow and that would show how all the paths of Sutra and Tantra could be practiced together. In response, Atisha wrote *Lamp for the Path*, the original Lamrim text that served as the basis for all subsequent Lamrim instructions. The revival of pure Buddhist practice in Tibet at this time was largely due to Atisha.

#### Kadampas

The followers of Atisha are known as Kadampas: 'ka' means 'word' and refers to Buddha's teachings, and 'pa' refers to Atisha's special Lamrim instructions, known as the stages of the path. By integrating their knowledge of all Buddha's teachings into their practice of Lamrim, and by applying this into their everyday life, Kadampa Buddhists are encouraged to use all Buddha's teachings as practical methods for transforming daily activities into the path to enlightenment. The great Kadampa Teachers, the Kadampa Geshe, are famous not only for being great scholars but also for being spiritual practitioners of immense purity and sincerity.

After Dromtönpa, Atisha's principal disciple, three lineages of the Kadampa tradition developed. These lineages are still being practiced today and are distinguished principally by the scope of their study: the Kadampa Shunyata study very extensively, the Kadampa Lamrim study less extensively and the Kadampa Manngagpas study the sutras extensively. However, they all have Lamrim as their main practice and integrate all their study into the practice of Lamrim.

#### Je Tsongkhapa

The Kadampa lineages passed down through generations of famous Teachers, including Geshe Potowa, Geshe Langri Tangpa and Bodhisattva Chekhawa, to Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), who gathered them together

the basis of special instructions received directly from Buddha Manjushri, established the Kadam Dharmic Garden doctrine. Up to the time of Je Tsongkhapa the three Kadam lineages are called Old Kadam line from the time of Je Tsongkhapa to the present day they are called New Kadam lineages.

Je Tsongkhapa lived at a time when, although outwardly Buddhism appeared to be flourishing in Tibet, in fact confusion about the doctrine and practice was destroying its spiritual essence. Through his teachings, writings of great clarity and comprehensiveness, an immaculate personal example, and tireless energy Je Tsongkhapa single-handedly revitalized Buddhism in Tibet, giving it a fresh impetus that was to last up to the present day. The followers of Je Tsongkhapa later became known more usually as Gelugpas, the 'Virtuous Ones'.

Although Je Tsongkhapa appeared as a simple monk he was an emanation of the Wisdom Buddha Manjushri. Je Tsongkhapa's appearance was in fulfillment of a prediction made by Buddha Shakyamuni that after he had passed away, and his pure doctrine had disappeared, Manjushri would appear as an ordinary being, perform the duties of a Buddha and establish Ganden, the 'great Protector', in Tibet. Ganden, or 'Joyful Land', refers both to the Ganden Monastery founded by Je Tsongkhapa and to the Ganden doctrine, the special Buddhist dharma which comes from Manjushri's wisdom.

### **Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche**

The lineages of scripture and realization of Je Tsongkhapa's teachings were then passed through generations of great Teachers, including Khädrupje, Togden Jampäl Gyatso, Gyalwa Ensäpa and Panchen Losang Choje Je Pabongkhapa (1878-1941) and his disciple Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche (1901-1981). Je Pabongkhapa was most highly regarded as a Gelugpa Teacher of his generation, as was Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche. Geshe Kelsang likened Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche to a vast reservoir from which all Gelugpa practitioners of the present have received 'waters' of blessings and instructions. Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche was Geshe Kelsang's root Guru and instrumental in Geshe Kelsang coming to the west.

### **Geshe Kelsang Gyatso**

Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche is a highly respected meditation master and scholar. He was born in Tibet in 1931 and ordained a Buddhist monk at the age of eight. He studied both philosophical and practical subjects of Buddhism under many highly qualified teachers, especially Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche. After leaving Tibet in 1959, he spent the next eighteen years mainly emphasizing retreat in various locations in the Himalayan region and northern India.

Geshe Kelsang arrived in England in late August 1977 at the invitation of Manjushri Buddhist Centre, then the Manjushri Institute. Manjushri Institute had been established in 1975 by Lama Thubten Yeshe, also a close friend of Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche and a former classmate of Geshe Kelsang. He encouraged his English students to establish a centre in England and promised to arrange for a Teacher to be sent. After initially organizing the centre in the London area, Manjushri Centre moved to Conishead Priory near Ulverston, on the northwest coast of England, in August 1976. Lama Yeshe had already begun looking for a suitable Teacher. At that time, Geshe Kelsang had accepted an invitation by the Christian monk and writer, Thomas Merton, to live and teach at a centre planned in Canada, but after Thomas Merton's tragic death this was no longer possible. Geshe Kelsang was then free to come to England, and Lama Yeshe requested Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche to ask Geshe Kelsang to become Resident Teacher of Manjushri Centre. Geshe Kelsang later recounted that Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche asked him to go to England, teach Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Chandrakirti's *the Middle Way* and Lamrim, and then check whether there was any meaning in his continuing to stay in England.

Shortly after he arrived, Geshe Kelsang, or Geshe-la as he became known, first gave a short Lamrim teaching as well as a practice for extending life as an auspicious sign. That autumn he began a six month teaching of Shantideva's *Guide*, which later formed the basis of his first published work, *Meaningful to Behold*. He also taught Chandrakirti's *Guide* and gave Lamrim teachings based on Yeshe Tsöndru's *Essence of Nectar*. The students of Manjushri Centre wrote a letter requesting Geshe-la to stay. We are most fortunate that he accepted!

### **Inspiring example**

From his earliest days at Manjushri Centre, Geshe-la worked tirelessly to guide and inspire his students in every aspect of their spiritual life, and continues to do so for the benefit of his many disciples throughout the world. Geshe-la has given extensive commentaries on a great range of subjects from both Sutra and Tantra. In addition to formal teachings Geshe-la has always been available for private consultations, helping students with their personal problems and being concerned with their health and welfare. Geshe-la has always encouraged students to present Dharma in a way appropriate to their own culture and society without the need to conform to Tibetan culture and customs. Realizing that it would be difficult for many of his students to learn Tibetan, Geshe-la taught himself English. Understanding the importance of presenting authentic commentaries in English

other languages, he devotes himself to writing and editing, as well as organizing the publication and distribution of his books. All the royalties that he receives as author of these books he donates to Manjushri Centre.

### **Books**

All of Geshe Kelsang's books are commentaries to Je Tsongkhapa's teachings. Indeed, Geshe-la has said that he regards all these books as coming from Je Tsongkhapa, with himself as being like a cassette recorder into which the Wisdom Buddha, the Dharma Protector Dorje Shugdän, has placed the cassette of Je Tsongkhapa's teachings. So far he has written seventeen books, ranging from highly accessible books for beginners to detailed and lucid expositions of the profundities of Buddhist philosophy and Tantric practice as well as practical manuals for meditation and the Buddhist way of life. A number of these books have already been translated into ten languages. Geshe-la has also translated all the sadhanas (chanted prayers) of the New Kadampa Tradition and encouraged the preparation of their chanting in English and other languages.

### **Humility**

Recognizing that Dharma can best flourish only if Dharma centres are harmonious, well organized and financially secure, he has constantly advised centres in every aspect of centre life and administration, encouraging and giving confidence to people who often have no experience of these matters. His presence continues to inspire his students as an immaculate example of someone who has found inner happiness practising Buddha's teachings. Despite repeated offers from Manjushri Centre to prepare more spacious accommodation, Geshe-la continues to live there simply in the one small room that he moved into in 1979, never displaying the slightest discontent.

### **Generosity**

One of his students once offered Geshe-la a car for his use in travelling to various centres and branches. At the time of the famine in Ethiopia he sold it and donated the money towards 'Live Aid'. He was also offered a small house by one of his disciples to use as his private retreat house, but he sold it and bought a larger house in Scotland so that other people could also use it for retreat. When this house was sold, Geshe Kelsang donated the entire proceeds to the New Centres Development Fund. From the point of view of his teachings, practice and Dharma activities, Geshe Kelsang has shown himself to be a perfect holder of the lineage of the scripture and realization passed down from Buddha and supremely qualified to pass these to his faithful disciples.

### **Retreat**

In January 1987, Geshe Kelsang entered a three-year retreat at Tharpaland in southern Scotland. Although Geshe-la gave no formal teachings during this time, in-between his meditation sessions he continued to write a number of books, and it was during his stay at Tharpaland that he completed Joyful Path of Good Fortune, Universal Compassion, and wrote The Meditation Handbook, Introduction to Buddhism and Guide to Dharma Land.

### **Spiritual programmes**

It was also during this period that he designed the three spiritual programmes that form the core of the New Kadampa Tradition:

1. The General Programme
2. The Foundation Programme
3. The Teacher Training Programme

These programmes provide the means for a systematic study and practice of Buddhism especially suited to the modern view and temperament. They correspond to the three Kadam lineages with respect to their scientific study.

### **Centres**

These programmes were introduced in the late '80s to the small number of centres mostly in the north of Scotland who followed Geshe Kelsang's spiritual direction. The first centre established by Geshe Kelsang was Madhyamaka Centre in 1979, followed by Vajravarahi Centre in Preston and Instituto Dharma in Menorca, Spain, (1981), Tara Centre (1983), Amitayus Centre (1984), Losang Dragpa Centre and Khedrupje Centre (1985), and Gyaltsabje Centre (1986). Branches of these centres began developing, and by 1990 there were fifteen. After Geshe Kelsang returned from retreat the number of centres rapidly increased, and after his return to North America in 1990, centres started in California, Toronto, and Mexico. By 1992 the number of centres had increased to forty five.

### **New Kadampa Tradition**

Although Geshe Kelsang has always insisted on the legal and financial independence of all his centres,

they were under the same spiritual direction and engaged in the same spiritual programs, it was natural they began to co-operate in spiritual matters on a more formal basis. On May 31st 1991, Geshe Kelsang together with representatives from a number of these centres to discuss the setting up of a 'common organ for the development of Dharma spiritual education' as Geshe-la expressed it. It was during this meeting Geshe Kelsang first introduced the title 'New Kadampa Tradition' to give the centres under his spiritual direction a distinct identity within the wider Buddhist world. Although the Gelugpas were sometimes referred to as Kadampas, the name New Kadampa Tradition had never been used previously in a formal sense. Nevertheless by using this title Geshe Kelsang is making it clear that practitioners of this tradition are principally followers of the teachings and example of Je Tsongkhapa. The word 'New' is used not to imply that it is newly created, but a fresh presentation of Buddhist Dharma in a form and manner that is appropriate to the needs and conditions of the modern world. Furthermore, by using the title 'Kadampa', Geshe Kelsang encourages his disciples to take as the perfect example of simplicity and purity of practice shown by the Kadampa Geshes.

Geshe-la has likened the Kadampa practitioners of old to eagles soaring in the sky, and although New Kadampa Tradition practitioners are as yet little birds trying to emulate these eagles, through their effort and devotion there is no reason why they should not become exactly like them:

*'All lay people can become like Geshe Dromtönpa and all ordained people can become like Geshe Potala'*

During the same meeting, Geshe Kelsang also set out the purpose of the common organization of the New Kadampa Tradition:

1. To provide general spiritual assistance to the centres of the New Kadampa Tradition
2. To ensure the purity and authenticity of their spiritual programs
3. To oversee the setting of examinations for both the Foundation and Teacher Training Programs at each centre
4. To assist in the development of new Dharma centres

Geshe Kelsang has often spoken of the importance of Dharma centres. Without them there can be no study or meditation programs, and thus no possibility of practitioners gaining realizations, becoming Teachers and continuing the lineages of scriptural transmission and realization. Without Dharma centres, people cannot make contact with the Dharma, and without Dharma there can be no Sangha and thus no Buddha. As Mahayana Buddhist centres, all New Kadampa Tradition centres have been established with the intention of benefiting all beings without exception.

### **New Centres Development Fund**

Since ultimate benefit is derived from entering, making progress in, and completing the paths to liberation and enlightenment presented by Buddha, and since this depends upon Dharma centres, all centres should have as their goal the establishing of new centres in order to help the people in that locality in accordance with their needs and interest. Because it is difficult for individual centres to do this, Geshe Kelsang encouraged the setting up of the 'NKT-New Centres Development Fund' as the means whereby centres could collectively help to establish new centres. This Fund began with Geshe-la's own generous donation made from the sale of Tharpaland Retreat Center. By coincidence the person who bought Tharpaland became a disciple of Geshe-la and Tharpaland is still being used as a retreat centre!

### **Structure of NKT**

Although the New Kadampa Tradition is primarily a religious association of centres that follow the same spiritual direction, the New Kadampa Tradition became a charitable (non-profit making) company registered in the UK to facilitate the raising of funds and their distribution to help new centres. Its members are the Spiritual Director, Geshe Kelsang, and the Administrative Directors and Education Program Coordinators of all NKT centres. It is these members in general meeting who have authority over the affairs of the New Kadampa Tradition, and they elect, in annual general meeting, the four directors who legally administer the New Kadampa Tradition. In his desire to ensure that the New Kadampa Tradition remains essentially a spiritual organization Geshe-la has guarded against any tendency to centralize authority. Although an 'NKT Office' has been set up at the Manjushri Centre, it has only three unpaid part-time workers, including Company Secretary and Treasurer appointed by the directors. As Geshe Kelsang once remarked, "The NKT Office shouldn't tell centres what to do, centres should tell the NKT Office what to do."

Since 1992 the number of centres has continued to increase. As of spring 2001 there are over 180 centres and groups under Geshe Kelsang's spiritual direction within the UK. Although the New Kadampa Tradition is largely an association of UK Buddhist centres, there are now more New Kadampa Tradition centres and practitioners outside the UK. In 1992 there were only eight centres outside the UK, but as of spring 2001 there are over 200 centres and groups, in twenty-eight countries.

## Festivals

One of the ways that such an international association of fellow Buddhists can keep in contact with each other is through the annual NKT Summer and Spring Festivals both established by Geshe Kelsang. The NKT Summer Festival started in 1992 with 300 people receiving Vajrayogini Empowerment. By 1996 the numbers at had increased to over 1,200. 1998 saw the seventh NKT Summer Festival held within the newly constructed Temple at Manjushri Centre. Manjushri Centre also hosts the annual NKT Spring Festival, and NKT Festivals are also held annually in other countries, including the United States and Spain.

The members of the New Kadampa Tradition are all the Buddhist Centres following Geshe Kelsang's spiritual guidance. Spiritually they all follow the same direction and together they constitute the New Kadampa family, which essentially is an association of independent Buddhist centres united by a common spiritual path, which is the heart of Je Tsongkhapa's doctrine and the essence of Buddhadharma, summarized by Geshe Kelsang in a quotation from Mahasiddha Menkhangpa:

*'The unmistakable Dharma is Lamrim, Lojong and Mahamudra.'*

Through the kind efforts and pure wishes of our Venerable Teacher, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, the sun of Tsongkhapa's Kadam Dharma, having risen from behind the Eastern Snow Mountains, now radiates to countries throughout the world. Through the pure thoughts and actions of Kadampa Buddhists, now and in the future, may the teachings, example and blessings of the Buddha and Je Tsongkhapa continue to remain and flourish for the greater good and happiness of all beings.

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*James Belither has been a student of Manjushri Centre since 1975, and a disciple of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. He is studying on the Teacher Training Programme, and has taught the Foundation Programme at Manjushri Centre. He is currently Secretary of the NKT.*

# tara buddhist centre

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#### Buddha Shakyamuni

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#### Lineage

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also for being spiritual practitioners of immense purity and sincerity.

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### **Je Tsongkhapa**

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### **Retreat**

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California, Toronto, and Mexico. By 1992 the number of centres had increased to forty five.

### **New Kadampa Tradition**

Although Geshe Kelsang has always insisted on the legal and financial independence of all his centres, since they were under the same spiritual direction and engaged in the same spiritual programs, it was natural that they began to co-operate in spiritual matters on a more formal basis. On May 31st 1991, Geshe Kelsang called together representatives from a number of these centres to discuss the setting up of a 'common organization for the development of Dharma spiritual education' as Geshe-la expressed it. It was during this meeting that Geshe Kelsang first introduced the title 'New Kadampa Tradition' to give the centres under his spiritual direction a distinct identity within the wider Buddhist world. Although the Gelugpas were sometimes referred to as new Kadampas, the name New Kadampa Tradition had never been used previously in a formal sense. Nevertheless, by using this title Geshe Kelsang is making it clear that practitioners of this tradition are principally following the teachings and example of Je Tsongkhapa. The word 'New' is used not to imply that it is newly created, but is a fresh presentation of Buddhadharma in a form and manner that is appropriate to the needs and conditions of the modern world. Furthermore, by using the title 'Kadampa', Geshe Kelsang encourages his disciples to follow the perfect example of simplicity and purity of practice shown by the Kadampa Geshe.

Geshe-la has likened the Kadampa practitioners of old to eagles soaring in the sky, and although New Kadampa Tradition practitioners are as yet little birds trying to emulate these eagles, through their effort and dedication there is no reason why they should not become exactly like them:

*'All lay people can become like Geshe Dromtönpa and all ordained people can become like Geshe Potowa.'*

During the same meeting, Geshe Kelsang also set out the purpose of the common organization of the New Kadampa Tradition:

1. To provide general spiritual assistance to the centres of the New Kadampa Tradition
2. To ensure the purity and authenticity of their spiritual programs
3. To oversee the setting of examinations for both the Foundation and Teacher Training Programs at each centre
4. To assist in the development of new Dharma centres

Geshe Kelsang has often spoken of the importance of Dharma centres. Without them there can be no sustained study or meditation programs, and thus no possibility of practitioners gaining realizations, becoming Teachers and continuing the lineages of scriptural transmission and realization. Without Dharma centres, people cannot make contact with the Dharma, and without Dharma there can be no Sangha and thus no Buddha. As Mahayana Buddhist centres, all New Kadampa Tradition centres have been established with the intention of benefiting all beings without exception.

### **New Centres Development Fund**

Since ultimate benefit is derived from entering, making progress in, and completing the paths to liberation and enlightenment presented by Buddha, and since this depends upon Dharma centres, all centres should have as their goal the establishing of new centres in order to help the people in that locality in accordance with their needs and interest. Because it is difficult for individual centres to do this, Geshe Kelsang encouraged the setting up of the 'NKT-New Centres Development Fund' as the means whereby centres could collectively help to establish new centres. This Fund began with Geshe-la's own generous donation made from the sale of Tharpaland Retreat Center. By coincidence the person who bought Tharpaland became a disciple of Geshe-la and Tharpaland is still being used as a retreat centre!

### **Structure of NKT**

Although the New Kadampa Tradition is primarily a religious association of centres that follow the same direction, the New Kadampa Tradition became a charitable (non-profit making) company registered in England to facilitate the raising of funds and their distribution to help new centres. Its members are the Spiritual Director, Geshe Kelsang, and the Administrative Directors and Education Program Coordinators of all NKT centres. It is these members in general meeting who have authority over the affairs of the New Kadampa Tradition, and they elect, in annual general meeting, the four directors who legally administer the New Kadampa Tradition. In his desire to ensure that the New Kadampa Tradition remains essentially a spiritual organization, Geshe-la has guarded against any tendency to centralize authority. Although an 'NKT Office' has been set up at Manjushri Centre, it has only three unpaid part-time workers, including Company Secretary and Treasurer appointed by the directors. As Geshe Kelsang once remarked, "The NKT Office shouldn't tell centres what to do; centres should tell the NKT Office what to do."

Since 1992 the number of centres has continued to increase. As of spring 2001 there are over 180 centres and groups under Geshe Kelsang's spiritual direction within the UK. Although the New Kadampa Tradition began largely

as an association of UK Buddhist centres, there are now more New Kadampa Tradition centres and practitioners outside the UK. In 1992 there were only eight centres outside the UK, but as of spring 2001 there are over 200 centres and groups, in twenty-eight countries.

### **Festivals**

One of the ways that such an international association of fellow Buddhists can keep in contact with each other is through the annual NKT Summer and Spring Festivals both established by Geshe Kelsang. The NKT Summer Festival started in 1992 with 300 people receiving Vajrayogini Empowerment. By 1996 the numbers attending had increased to over 1,200. 1998 saw the seventh NKT Summer Festival held within the newly constructed Temple at Manjushri Centre. Manjushri Centre also hosts the annual NKT Spring Festival, and NKT Festivals are also held annually in other countries, including the United States and Spain.

The members of the New Kadampa Tradition are all the Buddhist Centres following Geshe Kelsang's spiritual guidance. Spiritually they all follow the same direction and together they constitute the New Kadampa Tradition family, which essentially is an association of independent Buddhist centres united by a common spiritual path. This spiritual path, which is the heart of Je Tsongkhapa's doctrine and the essence of Buddhadharma, has been summarized by Geshe Kelsang in a quotation from Mahasiddha Menkhangpa:

*'The unmistakable Dharma is Lamrim, Lojong and Mahamudra.'*

Through the kind efforts and pure wishes of our Venerable Teacher, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, the sun of Je Tsongkhapa's Kadam Dharma, having risen from behind the Eastern Snow Mountains, now radiates to many countries throughout the world. Through the pure thoughts and actions of Kadampa Buddhists, now and in the future, may the teachings, example and blessings of the Buddha and Je Tsongkhapa continue to remain and flourish for the greater good and happiness of all beings.

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