

# Saraha

*Saraha Nyingma Buddhist Institute*

## **Commencement Speech for Exhibit of Maitreya Heart Shrine Relics at Saraha Nyingma Buddhist Temple**

*From July 26-28, the world-traveling collection of sacred Buddhist relics known as the "Maitreya Heart Shrine Relic Tour" visited and exhibited at Saraha Nyingma Buddhist Institute in Eugene, Oregon. This joyous event, which was attended by approximately 2,000 people over three days, was preceded very closely with the passing, or Parinirvana, of the Ven. :Lama Tharchin Rinpoche, the senior founding director of the Institute, on July 22. The following is the written draft of the speech presented by the temple at the opening ceremony of the exhibition on the evening of July 26...*

Hello. Welcome to the opening ceremony of the Maitreya Heart Shrine Relic Tour in Eugene, Oregon. The tour is a vast collection of hundreds of sacred relics of Buddha Shakyamuni, as well as many other Enlightened Buddhist masters. We would like to welcome the tour to Eugene and to Saraha Nyingma Buddhist Temple. The tour itself, founded by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, is represented this weekend by its managers, Amanda Russell and the Buddhist nun Venerable Norbu. We would also like to welcome the invited guests, including Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy, Tulku Ngaglo Rinpoche, Lama Tsangtsing, Lama Thrinley and Lama Dorje, and representatives from several Buddhist and other religious congregations in Eugene. We thank the community of Eugene for its help and support in making preparations for this event.

This is an historic event. It is a gift of history and time. If one only imagines all the situations and the places, the days and nights, the people, voices, dress and gestures, all the flowing streams of positive occurrence stretching back over hundreds and thousands of years that are converging today to bring these relics to this room, it simply boggles the mind.

This visit is historic not just because this is the first time that the relics have visited Eugene, or because the idea of relics evokes the idea of history, but because the relics carry with them blessings of awakening and pure intention, an incredible timeless history of living wisdom lineage.

The relics themselves derive from Buddha Kasyapa, Buddha Shakyamuni, his students, and many other Buddhist masters from many traditions. There are thousands of relics derived from hundreds of enlightened Buddhist masters in this exhibit. A few of these come as gifts conferred by living masters upon their

Saraha Nyingma Buddhist Institute 477 E. 40th Ave., Eugene, OR 97405 USA  
+1-541-359-3588 saraha.org info@saraha.org Facebook: Saraha Nyingma

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students, such as articles of hair and clothing. Some of the relics are "self-arisen," emerging spontaneously in environments where special circumstances such as pure faith and devotion prevail. But most are from masters who have passed away, having performed, in the parlance of Buddhism, the final act of "Parinirvana" or complete enlightenment, as their lives departed. What they leave behind are these relics, beautiful unusual substances varying in appearance and quantity, as both physical reminders of themselves and as enduring symbols of their enlightened state.

Each relic embodies a story of a onetime "normal" human being who in his or her life, "this life," just like the "this life" which each of us has, transcended suffering and attained enlightenment, replete with sublime qualities of wisdom and compassion, and accompanied by the ability to accomplish vast activities for the benefit of others. As Buddhist practitioners, those onetime normal human beings are the representative of ourselves. As the relics of enlightened teachers, they are the representatives of our own teachers. From this point of view the relics are always joyful reminders of our wisdom teachers.

The Parinirvana, or passing, of the Buddha, as well as other great Buddhist masters, is celebrated and commemorated throughout the Buddhist world. But think about what it must have been like to be there, to have been a loving student staying beside those sublime teachers at the time of their passing, or just hearing that news. Would this have been a joyful time?

I do not ask this question with a perverse intention to cast a shadow on this shining event. I ask it because this question, this point, has hit home here at Saraha in a very explicit way this very week. Less than four full days ago our own precious teacher, the Ven. Lama Tharchin Rinpoche, who is the senior founding director of this Institute, passed away suddenly and unexpectedly from heart attack while traveling in California.

Lama Tharchin Rinpoche, that is his picture on the wall. That is the throne on which he sat and taught. Lama Tharchin Rinpoche, who presided over the inauguration of this very temple on July 28, 2012, almost exactly one year ago. Who last exited this building only two months ago, having visited to celebrate the Buddhist holiday of Saga Dawa, which commemorates at once the birth and Enlightenment as well as the passing, or Parinirvana, of Buddha Shakyamuni.

Now we at Saraha find ourselves right in the middle of the reality of such a passing. We cannot convey how much shock and sadness this brings. Rising upon the flood of blessings and happiness carried in by the arrival of these relics

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this week, another flood of thoughts and memories of Rinpoche has arisen. For some so many years of memories. So much love and kindness, unique admiration, so many precious teachings. So many wisdom stories, faces, moments, with the teacher who created and connect them all so suddenly gone from view.

For those of us who knew, loved and studied Buddha Dharma with Lama Tharchin Rinpoche, this week and now the opening of this mandala, this opening ceremony of the Maitreya Heart Shrine Relic Tour, revealing these holy relics in our humble temple, is like an excruciating key to the origin and meaning of relics. At once it is suffused with the immeasurable blessings of enlightened passed masters, suddenly joined before our eyes by our precious teacher Lama Tharchin Rinpoche. It offers supreme comfort and simultaneously confronts us with a heartbroken realization that we have to take recourse, we have to come to embody the teachings ourselves. We have to grow up now. That is how we can face Rinpoche, whom we miss so much, again.

The relics are a reminder that this is possible. They are special bridge between the ever evaporating nature of the physical world, always passing away before our eyes, and the deathless world of wisdom transcending birth and death. We can be really happy about that. We are blessed even by the thought of that. Hopefully this will encourage us all to engage and accomplish the traditions of wisdom and compassion. We dedicate the offering of this sacred presentation to the long life of wisdom teachers, and to the unobstructed flourishing of wisdom lineage everywhere.

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