

FULL BIOGRAPHY OF TRUNGRAM GYALTRUL RINPOCHE PHD

Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche is a prominent incarnate lama of Tibetan Buddhism, regarded to be an emanation of the great yogi Milarepa. Known throughout the world as a scholar, teacher and meditation master, Rinpoche is also the first incarnate lama to earn a PhD in the West, having completed his doctoral program in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism at Harvard University.

Rinpoche began his monastic training at the age of four, including direct tutelage from the heads and senior teachers of all the major traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. He studied Buddhist philosophy and literature at Nalanda Institute and received Acarya the Master's degree from Sanskrit University, Benares, India.

Rinpoche represents a remarkable source of direct contact with the original Buddhist teachings, as a scholar of both Sanskrit and Tibetan. Coupled with his proficiency of English through living in the US and his seven years of studies at Harvard, Rinpoche understands how to translate the ancient wisdom of Buddha's teachings to make them easily accessible to westerners.

The core of Rinpoche's teaching system, the Trungram tradition, lies in learning the Skills of Awareness, a path combining profound meditation techniques with essential points of study that enable practitioners from all walks of life to experience the genuine Dharma. Rinpoche founded Dharmakaya in New York as a non-profit organization to promote these precious teachings.

The pinnacle of the Trungram tradition is the nyenjud (oral lineage), which due to the Cultural Revolution in Tibet is on the brink of extinction. As there is an urgent need to save this lineage for all humanity, and to provide a place for those who are interested in serious study and practice, Rinpoche is establishing the Mahamudra Hermitage building project in upstate New York. Rinpoche is committed to import and make these centuries old wisdom teachings available for us and for generations to come.

The Present Incarnation of H.E. Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche

Rinpoche was born on July 12, 1968 in India to a Sherpa family from Nepal. His father is a devoted Vajrayana practitioner. While in his mother's womb, his parent had dreams that pointed to a child of highly unusual qualities. His birthplace reinforced these portents. The baby was born below a cave of Guru Padmasambhava, one of the great Buddhist masters, on the sacred mountain of Tsari. At the age of 18 months, his parents took him to Nepal to seek out His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, who recognized the child at once:

"You must relinquish this child to me.", Karmapa told the parents. "He does not have any health problems, and he will be of great benefit to all sentient beings and the Dharma. He is the reincarnation of a great Kagyu master. This master is like Milarepa, showing great accomplishment. Your child is the reincarnation of Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche."

Later at Dalsang, Rinpoche's temple in Boudhanath, Karmapa cut some of Rinpoche's hair, gave him a monk's robe and the Dharma name Gyaltrul Karma Tenpai Gyaltzen Trinley Kunkhyab Pal Zangpo. The Karmapa also composed a long life prayer for Rinpoche.

It is in the oral tradition that the previous Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche stated he would adopt vegetarianism in the next life. From birth, Rinpoche has been a vegetarian.

Rinpoche was enthroned at the age of four in Sikkim where Karmapa resided. He thus took on the role of a reincarnate master with great responsibilities in this lifetime. Rinpoche's education subsequently began at Rumtek Monastery.

Education

Rumtek

Rinpoche received a six-year traditional monastic education at Rumtek monastery, the main seat of Karmapa, from 1973 until 1979. There he learned monastic practices and traditions, Tantric scriptures, sadhanas and so on. This was followed by two years of study of treatises (shastras) and literature at Jamyang Khang, Rumtek.

Nalanda

In 1981, Rinpoche entered the Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist Studies, where he studied for nine years - four years secondary, two years shastri (academically equivalent to B.A.), and three years acharya (academically equivalent to M.A.), and graduated with First Class Honors in 1990.

His education at Nalanda included the five major domains of studies: literature, painting and drawing, medicine, epistemology, philosophy. Philosophy of non-Buddhist tenets, history, arts, astrology and languages were also included in his course work, with special emphasis on Buddhist epistemology, ethics and the philosophy of three main Buddhist schools, Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana.

During this time, Rinpoche received initiations, transmissions, and instructions on Mahamudra and meditation training from many accomplished and renowned masters such as H.H. the 16th Karmapa, H.H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Lama Gendun Rinpoche and his own tutor Lama Drupon Trinley Paljor (Khenchen Rinpoche).

Languages and Programs

In order to help people of various backgrounds, Rinpoche also became fluent in Tibetan, English, Nepali, Sherpa, Chinese, Sanskrit, Hindi and French.

Besides traditional Buddhist education, Rinpoche also studied liberal arts in Iowa, did research at the University of Michigan Buddhist Research Center, and was involved in teaching exchange programs and sutra translation there in 1992.

In 1994, Rinpoche studied Chinese for six months in Taiwan at the Language Learning Center of National Taiwan Normal University.

Harvard PhD

In 1997 Rinpoche entered Harvard in the School of Arts and Sciences as a doctoral student in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism with focus on comparative studies. He was awarded a PhD in 2004.

Through such studies in the modern academic system, Rinpoche has become one of the few Tibetan masters with the ability to accurately translate the full subtlety and effectiveness of Buddhist practices for the western student. His dissertation on Gampopa—the most prominent disciple of Milarepa—analyzes in-depth the life and works of this important figure in Buddhist history and more particularly in the development of the Kagyu School in its unique form in Tibet.

Activities

Clearly seeing his future responsibilities, a non-traditional plan to benefit beings began to appear in the mind of the ten-year-old Rinpoche in 1978. Even then, Rinpoche knew very well that the great benefits of Buddhism would be limited if only the traditional forms of monastic and cave-dwelling yogic life were to be adopted by practitioners.

Teaching

Rinpoche began teaching at the age of eleven when still studying in Rumtek Monastery. Upon the request of some eighty visitors from European countries, he taught the essence of Naropa's Mahamudra and the practice of Avalokiteshvara. When he was twelve, Rinpoche gave a teaching on the Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas to the monks of Rumtek and won high praises from all the khenpos and rinpoches present, including the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa himself.

Rinpoche performed his first initiation at the age of thirteen, transmitting the essence of the Kagyupa Long Life Buddha practice. Since then, he has given teachings to Tibetan Buddhist teachers and sanghas from time to time.

In 1987, Rinpoche embarked on his first overseas trip to teach the Dharma. Since then, Rinpoche has given Dharma teachings and initiations and helped form groups and centers for Buddhist studies in the following countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bhutan, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Poland, Singapore, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand and the United States.

Preserving Teaching Traditions

In the early summer of 1991, Rinpoche visited the Trungram Monastery and the cave in Tibet where his previous incarnation practiced and met with thousands of disciples. During this short visit, he took measures to preserve the Whispering Lineage (Nyengyu) tradition, a special oral lineage of Trungram Monastery that was near extinction at that time.

Upon Rinpoche's return to Nepal, he founded the United Trungram Buddhist Foundation, first in Nepal in 1992, then in several other countries. Later the United Trungram Buddhist Fellowship was founded by Rinpoche. Finally, in 2004, Rinpoche founded

Dharmakaya, a US based not-profit devoted to Rinpoche's efforts in the US to share the Dharma.

Education

Putting great emphasis on education, Rinpoche often says, "Do you think Dharma is only for monks? No, it is for all who are in need. The right education can bring about nonviolence and peace." Rinpoche's view on education is, "To foster a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood and tolerance towards all human beings, motivating one and all to dedicate themselves toward the creation of a peaceful, just, happy and meaningful life on earth."

Rinpoche's main plan for solving the problems of poverty and lack of education in Nepal is to establish the Trungram University there. Due to current situations in Nepal, the project is on hold. However, as preparation for full-fledged educational institutions, the Trungram International Academy is in operation.

Stewardship

Throughout all these projects and activities, Rinpoche's main task remains in spreading the age-old wisdom of the Buddha. The Buddhadharma alleviates suffering and brings joy in a deep and transformational way.

From 1996 to 1999, Rinpoche served as president of Dharmodaya Sabbha - the National Buddhist Association of Nepal. Thereafter, he acted as the Chair of its Advising Committee for three years. In 1998, Rinpoche represented Nepal in the International Buddhist Conference held in Australia.

Besides overseeing the work of the Foundation projects, existing monasteries, Fellowship centers and retreat centers, Rinpoche is currently establishing a new meditation and retreat center in New York State in the U.S.