



Autobiography of His Eminence Choyang Duldzin Kuten Lama

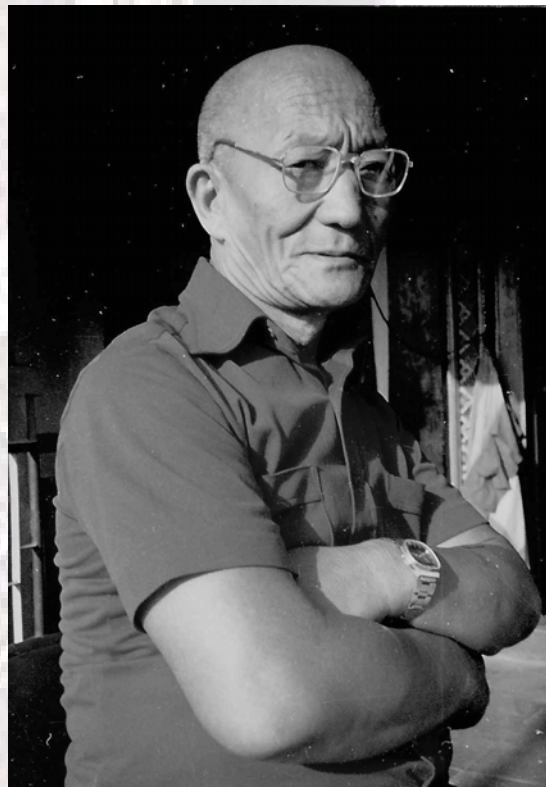
Choyang Duldzin Kuten Lama His Eminence Choyang Kuten Lama. Enlargement This is a story how a common nomad boy became an Oracle Lama, a high position in the Tibetan hierarchy, and how he served his countrymen in difficult times in Tibet and in refugee camps in India. His Eminence's presentation is a unique contribution to the documentation of Tibetan modern history.

Foreword by Choyang Kuten (1917-2002)

The following account is a response to repeated questions asked of me and it is my sincere wish that what I have said will be truly understood.

Apart from that, at present in this wide world, there are many biographies said to be mine, told independently for whatever reasons great or small, among which are several which are discordant with the real story. Thus keep this account at the heart of your memory.

- Choyang Kuten 1988



Region of birth and childhood

First of all I shall explain in a few words about my native country, Tibet. Tibet is divided into four major provinces. I was born in U-Tsang province, in Toepa region which is in the western part of Tibet. My birthplace is Khele, a village whose name means 'corner of the mountain'. It is near a larger town called Yenchoetenkar. My mother's name was Lhagpa. In Tibet there was no tradition to record the date of birth except for aristocratic families or high lamas. I was born in Earth-Sheep year 1917, 15 Rapchung, according to Tibetan system. I was born on Tuesday (Sa Migmar), so I was called Migmar Tsering, my original name.

At seven I was admitted to a large monastery called Ngamring. There were three main monasteries in my native region; Lhatse, Ngamring and Phuntsog-ling. All were part of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. I studied there until I was thirteen, going through all the basic training and rituals of that monastery. At thirteen I went to see my parents during the vacation. My parents were nomadic farmers so they travelled like merchants. I joined them on a merchant journey to Phagri.

Phagri Monastery

Phagri is a very strategic area, only an hour's journey from Bhutan. It is also close to India. In that area was a monastery which was a branch of Shartse Collage that had been established by Geshe Palden Tendar. He was a great scholar and practitioner who came second in his final examination above thousands of other monks. After his arrival in Phagri





he established the monastery, and engaged tantric retreats. On arrival in Phagri I left my relatives to join this monastery.

It was the custom of a monastery of another tradition in that area to receive geshe from upper Tantric College every three years, and so Geshe Palden Tendar came to Phagri. At the end of his three years Geshe Palden Tendar did not leave, but stayed in the area to benefit all beings there. He established a monastery and built a retreat hermitage in the mountains, engaging in Yamantaka retreats many times. It is through his activities and those of Dromo Geshe Rinpoche that the Gelugpa tradition was established in this remote part of Tibet. The dharmapala of both **Dromo Geshe Rinpoche** and Geshe Palden Tendar was Gyalchen Dorje Shugden, the Vajra Mighty One.

[NOTE: Dromo Geshe Rinpoche is an extremely eminent lama. You can read more about him in the famous book 'The Way of the White Clouds' by Lama Anagarika Govinda]

The influence of these two great lamas reached India, to Darjeeling and Kalimpong, for example. Dromo Geshe Rinpoche left messages placing all responsibility for his monastery with Trijang Dorje Chang (1901-1981), who later became tutor to the present Dalai Lama, and also with His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. He also gave instructions for how his body should be treated and how the stupa containing his relics should be built. Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang came to Phagri to fulfil these instructions and from that time many lamas came to the area to teach.



Therefore the flourishing of the Gelugpa tradition in these areas is due to the kindness of Dromo Geshe Rinpoche, Geshe Palden Tendar and Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang.

Generally, all monks studying in the two tantric colleges belong to one of the 'Three Great Seats'. Geshe Palden Tendar belonged to Garden Shartse College. Due to the requests of local people he engaged in intensive retreats in the Phagri area and then built a monastery with a large Maitreya statue. He also obtained copies of the Tibetan Canon. On the advice of His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, he gave this monastery's administration to Shartse College. They sent a geshe every three years to run the monastery as an abbot.

Geshe Palden Tendar was held in high esteem in that province. He was constantly consulted by lay people and by the monks of the monastery. He personally gave me instructions to look after my body and health carefully, and left instructions to elder monks to care for me because I could prove to be of benefit to beings in the future. I remained in that monastery from the age of thirteen to





seventeen. Sometimes I moved to Dromo Geshe Rinpoche's monastery for climatic reasons.

The incident at Bodh Gaya and its consequences

At the age of seventeen I went on a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya in India with my two friends. There were about three hundred monks in Bodh Gaya at this time because it was winter in Tibet yet warm in India. We all made an elaborate offering in front of the main stupa in Bodh Gaya. During this offering I lost consciousness and when I regained consciousness I found that it was deserted around me. There was a commotion and I saw some blood on the ground. I asked someone what had happened. They did not know, and suggested that it had been an epileptic fit or possession. There had been a violent movement of the body which had caused me to hit my nose on the ground.

After that experience I returned to Tibet but whenever I had some leisure time spontaneously I had this terrible experience of a fit of unconsciousness – at Kalimpong for example. When I returned to Phagri everyone expected the cause to be the Dharmapala Dorje Shugden. I was afraid that it was a harmful spirit, even the Dharmapala announced himself many times. Another reason why it was thought to be the Dharmapala is that this region has two major divisions – the upper part is Gelugpa, the lower part is Kagyupa. But Phagri itself has many traditions and **Dharmapala Dorje Shugden is protector to all families there, irrespective of their traditions.** [*That doesn't sound very sectarian...if he wasn't a protector, would he help everyone?*]

Because this experience was so disturbing to myself and others, it made me feel alienated from the monastic community. It was really a difficult situation. So in order to determine whether it was the Dharmapala or a harmful spirit or an illness, the monastery wrote to Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang. He advised me to go to Lhasa. So I left Phagri to walk to Lhasa with two monks and one horse for the matter to be decided at Ganden Shartse.

Since Phagri Monastery belonged to Shartse College, Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang did observations and requested other lamas such as Purbuchok Rinpoche and Kyabje Ling Rinpoche (1905-1983), who later became the tutor to the present Dalai Lama, to do such observations also, in order to determine whether it was the presence of the Dharmapala. I was placed in the care of Kyabje Song Rinpoche at Ganden. I had to engage in many purification practices including recitation of 100 000 name mantras of Lama Tsongkapa. Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang said if all these preparations were done then some signs could show. There were





many other oracles of the Dharmapala in Tibet at that time. Observations were also made with the most famous of these at that time, Puti Khangsar Kuten.

The requests for the observations were made by Shartse College headed by Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang. At one time I was taken to the oracle at Phuti Khangsar. A small throne was set up there for me. When the Dharmapala manifested he offered me a silk scarf and his own tea. He stated that I was an oracle for a manifestation of the Dharmapala and said that if I fulfilled all the requirements then **I could prove very beneficial to beings in the future**. However there was some doubt expressed as to the suitability of the place. At that time I thought that this referred to Phagri but now I believe it referred to Tibet itself.

Afterwards further observations were made privately by Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang and Kyabje Song Rinpoche at Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang's house in Lhasa. I was made to go into a trance and the questions were answered in a way that impressed these high lamas. They felt that if I kept well I could be of great benefit to beings in the future.

I was also taken possession of by the dharmapala of Shartse Monastery, called Setrap (the wrathful form of Buddha Amitayus). Both Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang and Kyabje Song Rinpoche decided that a final observation should be done by the high lamas to determine my authenticity. The high lamas included the Radeng Regent, Phuchog Jamgong Rinpoche, Kyabje Tadak Rinpoche, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche and Trukhang Puti Khangsar Dharmapala. The final examination was made in front of all the monks of Shartse College (the year was 1939). The total number of monks at Shartse College at this time was over two thousand. Prior to this ceremony there were seven days of intensive purification practice. As part of the ceremony slips of paper were rolled into pills, one saying that the possessing being was Gyalchen Dorje Shugden, another saying that it was a being who could not gain rebirth from bardo (intermediate) state. There were another three slips of paper rolled into pills for the Dharmapala Setrap. When I went into trance I was offered the first set of pills. I immediately took and ate the one referring to the Dharmapala Dorje Shugden. The same test was made of the Dharmapala Setrap. At that time I threw the other two pills away and pointed to the one left – the one referring to Dharmapala Setrap. Up to that point I had still not been convinced, but this was the final and conclusive test. I was then approved of as an oracle of the two dharmapalas, Gyalchen Dorje Shugden and Setrap.

So, the authenticity of the oracle was tested by rigorous means. I had had to suffer many uncertain years from the age of seventeen to twenty-one, from my first moment of spontaneous possession in front of the stupa at Bodh Gaya. I passed through all my tests, being cared for by Trijang Dorje Chang. I had to perform many purification practices, some in front of the stupa of Je Tsongkhapa. Finally my authenticity was proved in front of thousands of monks and scholars. **Such rigorous testing had never happened before to any other oracle of Tibet.** [*Why? Worth investigating*] Amongst the most important incarnate lamas involved in these investigations were Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche and Kyabje Song Rinpoche. Of the many high lamas and scholars who were involved only





Lati Rinpoche and Kyabje Zimey Rinpoche remain although of course, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche has since reincarnated and been recognised again.

I felt the final test to be a turning point in my life. When first entering the hall I had doubts about the authenticity, and so did many other monks, because once in trance whatever happens is without any control on my part. I have no knowledge of the possessing spirit. I was afraid of what would be my fate if I was disproved. Also there was the presence of so many scholars from that great university that worried me.

Kuten Lama, The New Oracle

When the authenticity was proved there were the recognition ceremonies to be done. Offerings were made to me, including tea and scarves by the officials of the monastery. I was offered a secretary and an assistant – altogether seven people to attend my needs. From now on I was to hold the status of oracle, a high position in Tibetan society.

I then returned to Phagri monastery. When I left Phagri it was with two others and one horse. Returning to Phagri I had many attendants, horses and provisions. In Phagri I was received by high officials of the monastery and the lay administration. There was such a celebration, people could not see me for weeks.

Up to the point of my final approval as the Oracle of the Dharmapala I was called by my earlier name Yonden Phunsog. I was then called Kuten Lama, the Tibetan name of the medium of the Dharmapala.

Up to 1950 I remained in Phagri as the well-known oracle of the monastery there. I also served as the oracle of the Dharmapala for laity who sought assistance. In addition, I travelled to Lhasa on the invitation of high lamas and Tibetan aristocratic families. I also had contact with other Tibetans living outside Tibet, in Kalimpong and so on. So that is how I had contact with more and more people who then had a connection with the Dharmapala Dorje Shugden.

The difficult 1950'ties





In 1950 Tibet lost Chamdo to the Chinese, and there were border conflicts. His Holiness the Dalai Lama left Lhasa to go to India but stopped near the frontier, thinking that a negotiated settlement with the Chinese was possible. At that time I was near Lhasa meeting with the famous Geshe Samdrup Rinpoche, who was my root guru. Tibetan officials then asked me to remain in Lhasa. Due to the uncertainty of times, instructions from the Dharmapala and from high high lamas were much needed.

I considered that the only purpose of the Dharmapala is to benefit sentient beings and to help their lives, so I felt that if I remained in Lhasa I might be able to contribute something to Tibet as a nation and to the Tibetan people. I was given a choice of two monasteries to stay in. One was really isolated, the other more accessible, so I chose the latter monastery, Chokor-Yangse. That is how I got the name Choyang Duldzin Kuten. Choyang is the short form of Chokor-Yangtse Monastery, and Duldzin is the peaceful form of the Dharmapala. High lamas at this difficult time sought clearer answers to their questions, so they requested more invocations of the peaceful aspect rather than the wrathful form of the Dharmapala. Up until then I was only taken in trance by the wrathful aspect, especially during the New Year ceremonies. So from that time I was known as the 'peaceful' (Duldzin) Kuten Lama. 'Kuten' means the body that holds the Dharmapala.



After 1950 I remained in Lhasa although the situation was tense. There were many restriction on oracles but I continued as the oracle because I could prove beneficial to many people in this way, fulfilling, the wishes of Tibetans seeking assistance. I was able to contribute to many people fleeing successfully to India during this time.

The Escape to India

In 1959 the situation became so bad that Tibet was threatened as a nation. His Holiness the Dalai Lama then left for India and we followed him into exile. I managed to escape along with Zimey Rinpoche, who also has a special relationship with the Dharmapala. Kyabje Zimey Rinpoche served as a guide and teacher to many Tibetan officials and he himself worked in the government administration education programmes. Due to this activity he was wanted by the Chinese very badly. We fled along with a family who had a close relationship with the Dharmapala and Kyabje Zimey Rinpoche. Their name was Chushur Samkar. They had great wealth in Tibet, both land and livestock, but upon the instructions of the Dharmapala and Kyabje Zimey Rinpoche they left everything behind.





There were twelve members of the family together with Kyabje Zimey Rinpoche and his three attendants in addition to myself. We all escaped together.

Although our escape should have been very difficult due to the size of the family, with the children and elders slowing our party down, the opposite was the case. We constantly consulted Kyabje Zimey Rinpoche for advice. Also, whenever we sensed danger, although we might be travelling, we invoked the Dharmapala asking for directions. In this way our journey was very smooth.

The Buxa community

North India

Finally we reached Buxa in northern India. There we met a Tibetan official called Phala Dronyer Chenmo. At his home he requested Kyabje Zimey Rinpoche to join the Tantric College re-established in Dalhousie. The Chushur Samkhar family was also sent to



Dalhousie to a home for displaced people. I was left behind because I was not counted as a lama or an old person. So I stayed in Buxa with about 1500 monks from all traditions, not only Gelugpa.

I stayed at Buxa for ten years at the request of the officials of His Holiness and served as an oracle. **Whenever there was a major decision to be made I was consulted, irrespective of any tradition posing the questions.** I also served as a representative at many conferences in New Delhi and Dharamsala during this time.

When we first moved to Buxa I did not have many friends but the provisions provided by the Indian Government were abundant and sufficient for

livelihood. Gradually I developed friendships with many people. I received many invitations from friends to live with them, because they thought that I had problems with my health at Buxa. However I decided that it would not be fair to leave Buxa community when rations were decreasing. It was getting very hot and the situation was deteriorating there. I thought it would not be appropriate to stay when it was fine but leave when it got difficult, so I carried on with my friends, the other monks, until we all left for a Tibetan Rehabilitation Centre in South India.





South India

When the Buxa community moved to South India, I moved with them despite invitations from my relatives to live with them in Mussoorie and Dharamsala in the north of India. They told me that the life in South India would be hard with field work in the heat. But I decided to stay with the Buxa community. It would not have been fair to leave with them. So since that time I have lived here in South India, serving the community as an oracle.

But I did not remain only as an oracle. I served as a sort of secretary of the monks' society of about 600 monks who came south. There are monks from the four traditions included in this society. I was appointed by election not just because the monks thought I was well educated or efficient but also because, as I am an oracle for the Dharmapala, many people believed in my honesty and my good motivations to help other people. Also, because I am an old Tibetan, people believed in my honesty. This is how I was appointed Secretary of the Co-operative Society.

At that time the structure of the Co-operative Society was such that it depended on the assistance of the Indian government. The settlement itself was poor so every decision had to be made with the Indian administrator responsible. I took my responsibilities for these decisions as my most important activity, and left my duties as the oracle as a sort of side activity. Because of my honesty and contribution to the community I was acknowledged both by the monks and by the Indian official himself. He also offered me a certificate saying that my contribution to the community was very valuable. He offered me a site (which is now the Rest House for Shartse College) and a house for me there. He also wanted to provide me with a livelihood by giving me a well-bred cow. This was given in a special ceremony in front of the other monks of the community here. This official was Katarbe. He acted as the officer for the Indian government for eight years after establishing the community in the Mundgod area.

During my tenure as Secretary **I worked very hard for obtaining the funds for the monks' quarters, not only for Ganden but also for Drepung, and the Nyingma and Sakya monks as well** [*that doesn't sound very sectarian*]. About sixteen quarters have been built, housing twenty monks in each building. Also two good committee halls have been built. In addition many cattle and two tractors were provided. All of these were provided by my appeals to the Indian government for help for funds and for special projects that were recommended strongly by the resident Indian officer here at the time.

In August 1973 I resigned as Secretary of the Co-operative Society but my service was not only confined to the monastic community here alone. I was also appointed to head the regional subcommittee of the Tibetan Freedom Movement, and I was their Vice-President in the Mundgod area.

During my tenure as Vice-President of the R.S.T.M., I took the heavy responsibility of announcing to the Tibetan public in Mundgod the various speeches given by his holiness the Dalai Lama and other official announcements. The Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies has given me a certificate for my work.





In short, I have been engaged in this active public life, not just living as an oracle. I have tried to contribute as much as possible in many different ways because the situation of the Tibetan Community is very weak. All the responsibility has fallen on His Holiness alone, so I thought it was very important for each individual to make as much contribution as they could.

My companions who escaped to India with me have also contributed greatly to the cause of the Tibetan community. Kyabje Zimey Rinpoche has made great contributions to Tibetan education. When Tibetans first settled in India there was a need for schools, for textbooks, and for teachers adapted to the modern way of learning. All these activities were guided and performed by Kyabje Zimey Rinpoche. Also the Chushur Samkhar family have contributed much. They have only one child born in



India. Their other six children have all grown up and are actively working in the service of the Tibetan government, fulfilling the wishes of His Holiness. **So it is my personal experience of the evidence of the power of the Dharmapala that if you have a special relationship to the Dharmapala, a close connection with your spiritual guide and you keep commitments purely, then your life is very different from that of an ordinary person.**

The re-establishment of the monastic education system outside Tibet (in addition to the lay education system) has come about. It is both sad and unfortunate that such high lamas as Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche and Kyabje Song Rinpoche have passed away. It is, however, a matter of great consolation that the reincarnations of some of these outstanding high lamas ("H. H. Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche") have already come. This is certainly a source of tremendous hope for the future.

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