

HIS HOLINESS KYABJE ZONG DORJE CHANG



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Zongtrul Jetsun Losang Tsondu Thupten Gyaltzen, or Venerable Kyabje Zong Rinpoche, as popularly known to his innumerable ordained and lay disciples, was born in 1904 in Mangsang in the Kham province of Tibet. He entered Ganden Shartse Monastery at the age of twelve.

The late HH Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, who was then fourteen years old, helped the new incarnate lama by going with him through his first lesson in elementary dialectics. He studied effortlessly and became renowned as a powerful and irrefutable debater. A learned geshe at that time said that 'even if Shri Dharmakirti had been present, he would not have been able to debate better than that.'

At twenty five Zong Rinpoche entered the geshe examinations of the famous Lhasa Monlam ceremonies. He was extremely successful. The Great 13th Dalai Lama, who had been present during one of these examinations, remarked, "Zong Lama has studied excellently. He deserves the first or second rank Geshe Lharampa of this year." This would be followed by an equally successful examination at Gyuto Tantric College. After these crowning achievements, which marked the completion of his studies, Kyabje Zong Rinpoche's name as an accomplished scholar became firmly established.

Some months following his studies, Zong Rinpoche was appointed abbot of Ganden Shartse Monastery, the seat of which he held for nine years. His abbotship is still remembered for many remarkable achievements, among others, Ganden Shartse gained new heights of exemplary monastic discipline (which he held closest to his heart) and scholarship. Also noteworthy was the definite improvement in the administrative structure of the monastery. Stung early by the difficulties the poorest members faced, he successfully introduced reforms that went a long way to improve their lot.

After resigning from the seat of Abbot after serving the monastery for more than nine years, Rinpoche went on a long pilgrimage to Tsari, one of the places where Tsongkhapa went for penance. Intermittently, from these times onwards, reports could be heard of how he removed difficulties from the the lives of innumerable people through low key demonstrations of tantric power. The well known Geshe Rinpoche Tenzin Choephel, whose defects in eyes deprived him of his movement, invited him in the hopes of possible cure; after several ablutions by Rinpoche, it became possible for him to dispense with his cane and work unaided.

At Gaden and its adjacent lower lands, Dechen, Maldo, Chheka, Zibuk – in all these places and many other areas of Tibet he quietly and successfully converted many powerful local spirits haunting livestock and human inhabitant. His power to bring and stop rain and hailstorms came to be recognized by everyone. At one time he made a frog model out of clay and filled with mantra scrolls and blessed it from his tantric power. When the hailstorms came, this

clay-made frog model moved (as it had a life) and directed its face towards hailstorms thus stopping its destruction.

Rinpoche was known as a strong, detached and wrathful lama. He had impeccable knowledge of all rituals, art and science, and he never hesitated to give reasons to others why this action or that painting was wrong. He was renowned for his 'many actions of powerful magic, as a result of which the most marvelous, indescribable signs occurred.'

Rinpoche spent the years after 1946 and until his exile in 1959 traveling to many monasteries, 'removing hindrances, doing rituals, and giving many initiations, transmissions and commentaries, and instruction in the profound and extensive Dharma.'

There were many incidents where he showed different levels of spiritual powers (which cannot be include in this short profile) thus showing us that the world is not just confined to materialism.

In the aftermath of the suppression of his land in 1959, complying with repeated requests from his disciples, Zong Rinpoche left Tibet and sought asylum in India along with numerous survivors of the Chinese invasion. There, amidst many hardships, he gave his disciples a countless number of teachings, thus rekindling the flame of the Buddhist doctrine outside his country. Upon request from the newly established Government in exile, Zong Rinpoche thereafter became the principal of the newly formed Tibetan Teachers Training Program. After his retirement from public life, as the years passed, his fame spread to many countries outside India. Invitations poured in requesting him to come to the West.

Upon repeated invitations from many Western Dharma centers, he visited them on three occasions. These trips included visits to Britain, Switzerland West Germany, Italy, France, Spain, the U.S., Canada. Max Comfort, Greta's husband, said that Song Rinpoche 'had tremendous presence and always command and respect. In the West he was always fascinated with procedure, how things were made and how they worked. And he was so incredibly skillful with his hands, he knew how to do things.'

On a visit to the Tower of London, Max remembers, 'he captivated a crowd of tourists with his detailed and accurate explanation of the workings of an ancient blunderbuss.

Zong Rinpoche's ripe wisdom and penetrating insights on everything he taught touched his listeners to the core of their very being. Apart from all these facts, Kyabje Zong Rinpoche should be remembered primarily as the first Tibetan master to seriously bring his Western listeners face to face with the most profound aspects of Tibetan Buddhism.

Owing to his vast knowledge (he was sometimes called a moving dictionary of Buddhism) on Sutra and Tantra his disciple includes most of the abbot and ex-abbots of Gelugpa monasteries, adepts and tulkus. Some of his foremost disciples in our monastery are Kyabje Zemey Rinpoche, Kyabje Lati Rinpoche, Ven. Khensur Jampa Yeshe, late Sharpa Choeje Lobsang Nyima, present Sharpa Choeje Lungrig Namgyel, Ven Khensur Achok Rinpoche are few to mention here.

To the profound grief of his Tibetan and Western students, Venerable Zong Rinpoche passed away on November 15th, 1984, without manifesting any signs of illness. The most interesting thing is that Rinpoche had marked the date of his death and the date of cremation in his personal diary prior to his death. But this became noticeable to his disciples only later on when they consult astrology for the cremation date confirmation. On the morning of the 24th, members of Zong Labrang headed by ven. Kyabje Zemey Rinpoche opened the cremation hearth.

Among his ashes they found his skull, unburned and completely intact. This was only the beginning however; between the two hollow pans placed upon the other back to the back in the lower side of the hearth (the outer rim of the upper pan cemented to the inner walls of the hearth while the lower pan was upturned to cover the sand mandala beneath) they found a large quantity of relic pills. Finally, when the lower pan was removed, everyone present, including some of Kyabje Rinpoche's Western disciples, saw in the sand mandala two unmistakable thumb-size foot prints complete with the toes and heels. The discovery of these extraordinary signs made everyone sigh with relief; they reaffirmed their faith in Kyabje Zong Rinpoche and assured them of his swift return.





True to the above signs, his new incarnation was born in the Kullu valley (place in Northern India), later on duly recognized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and enthroned at Gaden Shartse monastery in India. Like his previous incarnation he also shows many heart moving signs confirming that he is the real Zong Rinpoche and has only changed his physical outlook. It is remarkable that one of the things the previous Zong Rinpoche did during his last visit to the United States was to buy a bag of children's toys. The present Zong Rinpoche is 15 years old. He is currently fully engaged in the study of Sutra and Tantra at Gaden Shartse Monastic University under the care of Khensur Lati Rinpoche.

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