

December 31, 2014

Dear Dharma friends:

As we reached the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of our most compassionate and holy Lama, Khen Rinpoche Lobsang Tharchin, it was a great honor for me to share some photographs from the recent *Chö Shuk* (“entering the dharma”) ritual and celebration ceremonies of 6-year old Tenzin Jikme Namdrol Rinpoche at Sera Mey Monastic University in South India on September 8 & 10, 2014.

There were a total of 3 ceremonial events that took place to commemorate Khentrul Rinpoche’s entrance into the monastery. The first started at an early-dawn morning ritual at Sera Monastery’s Latchi Temple primarily for the monastic community. This initial ceremony included prayers and offerings to the seat of His Holiness the Dalai Lama with extensive offerings to the monks in attendance.

The second ceremony at the Sera Mey Main Temple later that afternoon was a larger gathering consisting of monks, Tibetan laypeople, community members and Indian ministers and politicians. After a series of rituals and prayers, Rinpoche was seated on the dharma throne for the audience to present offerings and receive blessings in a more intimate manner. The Tibetan community consisted of young children and the elderly who formed long lines to greet Rinpoche.

The third and final ceremony occurred 2 days later in the assembly hall of Gyalrong House, the *khamtsen* of the illustrious Pabongka Rinpoche Dechen Nyingpo and our Lama Khen Rinpoche Lobsang Tharchin. At the end of the ceremony it was here that I took photographs of Rinpoche together with the reincarnation of Ribur Rinpoche. I’ll always remember this vision as Lama Heruka and Vajrayogini leaving the Gyalrong House temple arm in arm. Additional photographs were taken at the Sermey Thoesam school, Ari Khensur Rinpoche’s *labrang*, the monastery grounds and during a day trip visiting the other major Tibetan lineage temples around Bylakuppe.

For all of us who made the trip to India, the way to Sera Mey monastery is an adventurous journey. Most of us landed at Bangalore International Airport around midnight and were picked up by Venerable Jampa Lungrik or one of his designates. Seeing Jampa anywhere brings great comfort, and even 10 years removed from the days in Howell, Jampa continues to keep everyone comfortable and happy. In preparation for the events and being close to Khentrul Rinpoche during this auspicious occasion, Jampa was especially happy and glowing.

From the airport, the 7-hour, 200 kilometer ride to the monastery is the kind of drive you want to sleep through. The mix of potholes, exhaust fumes and cool night-time air blowing against your face only keeps you half awake as you doze in and out of sleep. At times I found myself reflecting about the past and everything that led to

this moment in the back of the bumpy car. I didn't know what was more surreal, the dreamlike haze navigating through misty Indian towns in the dead of night, or finally going to meet Khen Rinpoche's reincarnation for the first time after waiting 10 years.

Most of us perceived Khen Rinpoche as a serious scholar always steeped in dharma with a text in front of him, exuding the majestic and deep presence of a king. It wasn't always a light-hearted feeling being in front of him. When I used to visit him in his room on the second floor of Rashi Gempil Ling it was an intimidating experience full of awe. I felt transported in time as if sitting before the Buddha himself. His candor and alluring presence evoked a certain kind of spiritual honesty within myself, and afterwards I was always inspired to take refuge more strongly in the Triple Jewels. It was this special feeling that helped me eventually understand the significance and meaning of an authentic spiritual Guru.

I was born in 1972, the same year that Khen Rinpoche came to the United States under the direction of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Upon arriving to America it was Art Engle, Rinpoche's first American student, who met him on the day that he arrived in New Jersey where he would continue teaching until his passing in early December 2004. Rinpoche was the first generation of Tibetan Lamas who came to the United States, and one of the remaining Hlarampa Geshes who completed the rigorous monastic studies and examinations in Lhasa before the invasion of Tibet. Perhaps this is why Rinpoche always seemed so timeless to me. The Sutra and Tantra teachings that Rinpoche transmitted were isolated for over a thousand years in the Himalayan mountains before reaching the West. It astonished me that between 1959 and 1972 the Tibetan dharma teachings were only 13 years removed from its source, and it amazed me that the first generation of American students drank from this pure stream and became the scholars and translators that bridged the dharma to us now.

When you visit Sera Mey, the importance of this American connection with Khen Rinpoche is deeply ingrained in the history of Sera Mey monastery. While Rinpoche was teaching American students in the 1970-80s, the exiled monks were working hard to reestablish the monasteries in the refugee camps in south India. As more and more refugee monks entered the monasteries it became increasingly difficult to support their growth, education and basic living requirements. As the crisis became untenable and the monastery approached bankruptcy, Khen Rinpoche returned to India to meet with his Root Lama, Kyabje Trijang Dorjechang, who advised him to support Sera Mey Monastery with the help of his American students.

Upon returning to New Jersey, Khen Rinpoche began dedicating his efforts toward Sera Mey and providing basic necessities through the development of the Sera Mey Food Fund. Without knowing this history and background it would be hard to appreciate the amount of respect and gratitude Sera Mey has to our holy and incomparable Lama, Khen Rinpoche. This is especially evident among the ex-abbots and senior monks who experienced that tumultuous and uncertain time. At the

monastery Khen Rinpoche is known as “Ari” Khensur Rinpoche or the “American” Rinpoche, not only for his relocation there, but also because of his American students who contributed so immensely to supporting Sera Mey during one of its most challenging periods.

Perhaps this is why Tenzin Jikme Namdrol Rinpoche, the recognized reincarnation of Khen Rinpoche, seems to feel so natural in his new role at the monastery. During the *Chö Shuk* ceremonies one got the sense that there was an important connection between him and the monastery’s past. Hundreds of people including local community leaders, abbots, monks, friends, family, students and laypeople all gathered to make offerings and receive blessings. Many of the pictures capture the extraordinary happiness, confidence and optimism the young Rinpoche displayed. Despite the exhausting ceremonies Rinpoche remained tireless and alert, completely in synch with the environment and people around him. The atmosphere was full of jubilation and love and he fulfilled everything that could have been expected of him.

On a personal note, going to the ceremonies and spending time at Khen Rinpoche’s *labrang* was an amazing experience that will forever be cherished. Coming together with dharma brothers, sisters and esteemed teachers for this extraordinary occasion gave me a profound sense of family. Although Khentrul Rinpoche’s parents are prominent members of the Tibetan community with sufficient means to care for Rinpoche, it’s difficult to comprehend the level of sacrifice required for a mother and father to dedicate their son to monastic life. It’s truly a tremendous act of faith and love. Rinpoche is further blessed to have a young companion and best friend in six-year-old Tri-Ang, an intelligent and sharp member of Khen Rinpoche’s *labrang*. Together the two seem inseparable. In addition to Geshe Lothar, the *labrang* consists of several other young monks, attendants, cooks, and up-and-comers preparing to become future Geshes and Um-dzes. From this perspective we can all rest assured that Rinpoche has a strong support structure and an excellent team of people surrounding him. Together with the dedication of the American students, this family atmosphere will serve as a strong foundation for Rinpoche’s future.

In one way or another every one of us at the ceremonies was touched by Rinpoche. I was very apprehensive at first when I met Rinpoche the morning I arrived. I offered him a special tea I brought from the high mountains of Taiwan. But instead of receiving a happy reaction based on his affinity for tea in his previous life, he responded in a low voice, “I don’t like tea, I like water,” which didn’t seem like an auspicious start. Later that evening when I entered the *labrang* though, he immediately jumped into my arms and stayed there until my muscles could no longer bear his weight. My heart was overjoyed, just what I needed. Whether we are practicing and teaching pure dharma, caring for Khen Rinpoche’s *labrang*, Rashi Gempil Ling, MSTC, teaching English to the school children, or supporting the Sera Mey Food Fund, there are numerous ways to maintain our connection and the legacy of Khen Rinpoche. As an American student it feels as if he dedicated his merits for our benefit so that we may always be connected to the Sera Mey family.

The monastery continues to expand a little every year and each time I return there are newer and larger *khamtsen* buildings, prayer halls and debate grounds popping up. As the monks at the *labrang* grow taller and wiser, there is a sense of deep rejoicing that Khentrul Rinpoche has finally arrived. All of us who shared the *Chö Shuk* ceremonies with Rinpoche pray for his long life, swift learning and quick return to America to bring us even closer to the dharma. It's with great happiness that I'm able to share some of these moments, and I hope you enjoy rejoicing in this special and auspicious occasion.

With best wishes,

Rob Hou  
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