

For Khenchen Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

A remembrance meant to be a call

He who permeated many hearts everywhere in wisdom and could enchant with the gentle power of love and humor, leaving them encouraged to walk their own path to freedom.

We speak of him, of one of the first great Tibetan masters in the Buddha's tradition who began to share their knowledge and, above all, their experience intensively and systematically across cultures with people all over the world - of the one who, on behalf of the 16th Karmapa, was to open access to the Karma Kagyu tradition especially to Western students as one of the first teachers; the first teacher at the Kamalashila Institute, once in Wachendorf, and also the first teacher at the same place, which is now a retreat center in Halscheid; he was also the first teacher in many other places of this world; - of the one who had remained as one of the few grand masters of the old school. We speak of the one who, after almost 90 years of tireless activity, left us on June 22nd: Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, Dechen Rangdrol, or by whatever other names he may be known.

[Link to the news](#)

It is timely now to reflect on his most extraordinary life. And with all its wealth of diversity, when one merely steps through the gate of remembrance, one soon does not know where to begin when speaking about it.

Astonishing how, despite his fame far beyond Tibetan circles throughout the world, he nevertheless remained throughout his life one of those last representatives who used to teach exclusively in Tibetan.

Not because he was unwilling or unable to learn other languages. Instead, he made an early decision to lead people from other cultures to an unobstructed encounter with the sources precisely through his focus on the Tibetan language for good.

He always taught with translators, which at first does not surprise. But there were not just one or two specially hired for this purpose, it was an entire cohort of translators - all of them trained and encouraged by him.

He possessed the almost magical ability to enable many students in his circle to learn and speak the Tibetan language. Even without any initial knowledge, as if absorbing the language from one's own mother and learning here the first speech and first understanding of the world.

Thus, all who wanted to learn from him touched the deep questions of life through him, absorbed words, deep meaning and the art of clear thinking, like bees drinking nectar from every blossom and collecting pollen to share later.

Soon it became palpable, for those who could encounter him, how much he embodied authentic experience of a different, free and unburdened way to meet this world and at the same time allowed participation in its depth of insight.

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And even more from the available breadth of the stream of transmission, he could provide words and insights of the Buddha and, in his wake, of the Indian and Tibetan sages and siddhas — words that help to unlock such deep experiences and then be able to share them.

Thus, he let those who were allowed to learn from him taste from the sea of Dharma in word and experience, nourishing them with the confidence of how to awaken that ability in them as well - not as blind hope, but as well-founded assurance. With such warm-hearted, cheerful urgency, as if it were a matter of enchanting the hearts of all fellow inhabitants of this difficult world. With wisdom. With that gift of wisdom that is available to all of us, if only we would use it.

Thus, for those who wanted to be close to him, he was everything in one: the free cheerfulness of an unbound wandering yogi, a concentrate of wide and deep knowledge, a wise, humorously warm-hearted teacher who combined the necessary strictness and clarity with unreservedly, freely flowing confidence.

His warm-hearted, deeply disarming laughter was like a mighty thunder quake that pulled the ground away and yet let one float.

Like so many other great teachers, Khenpo Rinpoche was born in eastern Tibet, in the Kham region. As a child, his mother took him on long, months-long foot marches to the most important pilgrimage sites in Tibet. And also at a very young age, he found a great siddha-yogi, an accomplished teacher, living in simple hermitage at high altitude as his first teacher. He received further training in the famous Dilyak Monastery, then to roam through the mountain world of Tibet as a wandering yogi and *Chöd* practitioner practicing in charnel grounds.

This path also led him to the famous charnel ground in the Tsurphu Valley and to the encounter with the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa, an encounter of deeply transformative nature, it is reported.

In the nearby area of Nyemo in Tsang district, home of great yogis and translators, he retreated for several years of strict solitary retreat. Young in years though, the local people felt such high regard that they saw him as their teacher.

So it came to pass that when, after the Chinese invasion, news of the flight of the Dalai Lama and also of the 16th Karmapa spread and he too decided to follow them to India, the villagers asked him to lead many of their daughters, as young nuns, on the journey to India and continue to teach them there. With over twenty of them under his guidance, they mastered the long, dangerous foot march to the Indian lowlands.

Years followed in a Tibetan refugee camp, where many greats of all the known teaching lineages began to learn from each other in coexistence, exchanging their traditions and mutually enriching each other. It was during this time that, touched by the necessity of sharing this knowledge with the modern world, he decided to undergo intensive training in logic and debate, a training that he completed with the highest degree of scholarship, that of a *Geshe Lharampa*, so his nuns report.

Following an invitation from the king there, the 16th Karmapa took him on a journey to Bhutan, where he was offered a place to stay near a mountain village for himself and the nuns. Today this place is a thriving training and retreat center, one of the still rare teaching centers

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for nuns. As he was indeed one of the few teachers within Tibetan culture who opened the entire educational path to nuns as well.

In 1977, on his second journey to the West, the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, also came to Europe. Apart from a group of experienced monks for conducting rituals and ceremonies, he had only two Dharma teachers in his entourage: The 3rd Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso. At the stations of his longer stay, in Copenhagen, Denmark, Dordogne, France and Samye Ling in Scotland, he had these two teach Dharma in his stead.

And it was also at the Karmapa's request that Khenpo Rinpoche, as his students soon called him, began to instruct a group of interested people in the fundamental teaching work of the Dagpo Kagyü transmission. The "*Jewel Ornament of Liberation*", authored by Dagpo Rinpoche or Gampopa, who, as the main disciple of Tibet's great yogi, Milarepa, became the namesake and founder of this tradition.

Karmapa entrusted Khenpo Rinpoche with the task of remaining in the West, teaching here, beginning with a six-month course in the south of France.

About thirty interested people from many countries followed this call and enjoyed this foretaste of a thorough education - and what it means to not only read these foundational texts in the original exclusively in Tibetan language, but also to appreciate them in practice and explanation as deeply practical wisdom.

For almost a decade, Khenpo Rinpoche taught in Europe, mostly in summer courses lasting several months and then also in many countries, only interrupted by stays in Bhutan and India. There, appointed by the Gyalwang Karmapa, he was the main teacher for the newly established *Shedra*, the Buddhist teaching center in Rumtek at the seat of the Karmapa. It became his task, following the example of the earlier Karmapas, to revive the special teaching and learning tradition of the Karma Kagyu transmission. Many of the great teachers and tulkus of this tradition were in that historic first class of the university, which he personally instructed.

Early in the course of these first years, he brought together his students from East and West. He took the latter in particular on trips to India, for many months of learning and practice in the foothills of the Himalaya.

During this increasingly intensive teaching activity in Europe, Khenpo Rinpoche rejected every attempt to give him a place and buildings for himself and his students as a permanent residence. It would be much more helpful, he said, to travel to the already existing centers to offer courses there upon invitation. Possessions and property only lead to attachment and strife.

Without notable possessions of his own, he used to travel the world and gave away whatever was given to him to projects and others to support learning and practice.

The later years of his work drew the radius wider and shifted the focus of his teaching travels to North America. He followed invitations for many longer courses with hundreds of participants in the centers of the Shambhala tradition and dozens of other centers, in large and

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smallest centers there, but also in other parts of the world, to name only Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan.

This time also includes what is most present to many today as striking, or pleasing to the ear: His encouragement to translate the deep message of Milarepa's spontaneous teaching songs into Western languages as singable guidance - these melodies and texts continue to resonate in many hearts distributed across this world. And similarly, *Lüjong*, that art of contemplative physical exercises, which he created specifically as a modern access for students.

Then came, long announced by himself, the time not to tell everything anew. The time for a sign that knowledge without practicing experience is like starving at a set table. The time of predominantly silent presence, finally in the nunnery in Kathmandu, tangible presence, without word and sign. But also time to miss his sparkling teaching activity and to become familiar with self-responsibility.

Following the example of Dzogchen Paltrul Rinpoche, the number of students was never important to him, only the quality and depth of learning.

Impeccable in simple living, keeping the spirit of the wandering yogi fresh, he was a free, independent thinker without shyness and prejudice, a caring, highly humorous teacher with the necessary measure of cordial strictness and clarity. Awakened awareness in human body. Role model and accessible to all who feel connected and long for it.

Where his body left us, his breath of cheerful wisdom remains in us - timeless, as a challenge and incentive to penetrate the deception of everyday life, to awaken the innate ability for freedom, to make it shareable with all. And for that, to use our time.

His going shows the pain of urgency.

This tribute to Khenchen Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche was first written and offered in German language by a close student on June 28, 2024 for announcement on the official website of Kamalashila Institute, Langenfeld, Germany.