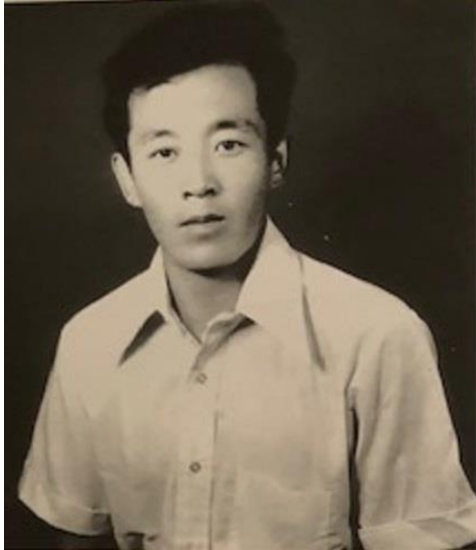


## Part 15 – Noble Character

After the long, hot, smelly train ride across northern India to Pathankot, near the border with Pakistan, Chetsang Rinpoche and the long-haired man, whose name Rinpoche still didn't know, finally got off the train and took a bus to Dharamsala. This is where the Tibetan government-in-exile and the Dalai Lama were, and Rinpoche hoped to see his older brother Jigme there too.



When they got off the bus, Rinpoche felt better at the cooler, higher elevation there in the foothills of the Himalaya mountains, although it wasn't as high as Tibet. He was going to stay in the Tibetan Children's Village, where all newcomers stay, in a small house. But when the Dalai Lama's mother and sister, called Jetsun Pema, heard that Rinpoche had arrived, they sent a message inviting him to lunch and to spend his first night in their home. Rinpoche remembered that the honorable title of "Jetsun," which is given to advanced, great teachers of the Dharma, was the title of an elderly nun that he knew from his childhood. So, he expected the Dalai Lama's mother and sister to be elderly nuns with shaved heads.



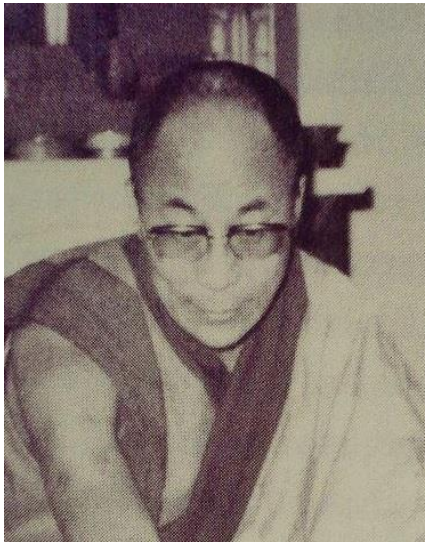
When he knocked on their door, a pretty, elegant lady greeted him and introduced herself as Jetsun Pema (photo). Rinpoche was surprised and amused at the tricks the human mind can play – we have an expectation of what something looks like based only on our own experience, and we are shocked when it turns out looking very different. Another dignified lady appeared behind him, wearing glasses. "Don't you recognize me?" she asked. He didn't. She was the Dalai Lama's mother. She looked carefully at Rinpoche's mysterious companion, the long-haired man, and said, "His face doesn't look Tibetan. Who is your friend?" The man quickly excused himself and left without revealing his identity.

There were many delicious dishes to enjoy at lunch. Rinpoche, who hadn't eaten well in many years, was very happy to be served Indian mutton, lentil and potato curries. And he enjoyed the first taste of mango in his life. It was even sweeter and richer in flavor than a peach.

After Rinpoche had spent a few nights in a guest room of the Dalai Lama's mother's house, his older brother Jigme came to visit him. They had not seen each other in eighteen years, since they were children! They were like strangers to each other when they embraced for the first time. Even when they were young, they had been seldom together because Rinpoche was often at the monastery.

Jigme told Rinpoche what had happened with their parents in the past years. After leaving Tibet, their parents had first lived in Kalimpong, where Rinpoche had been as a child. Their father worked for the Dalai Lama's government-in-exile, where he was in charge of an iron and steel factory. But the job was very stressful because he was a gentle and kind man, and didn't have the tough character that was needed to deal with the hard-dealing Indian businessmen. The factory didn't have enough money, and he struggled just to pay the factory workers while he went without any pay for years. The family lived on the money from their mother selling her jewelry. In addition to raising their own children, the Tsarongs paid for the education of two Tibetan orphans. Mr. Tsarong's work-related stress caused severe stomach problems, so he had to retire from his job. When he went to the doctors in India, none of them could cure his stomach pain. He went to Switzerland, where his daughter Namgyal Lhamo and her husband were living, and met with doctors there for treatment, but it didn't help him. In 1970, on the advice of some doctors, Rinpoche's parents moved to the United States for further medical treatment. They lived in New York with their younger daughter Norzin and her husband. Jigme had moved to the U.S., graduated from University of Indiana, worked at a bank in New York, then moved to Dharamsala with his wife, and was now director of the Tibetan Medical School.

In the United States, their parents heard that Rinpoche had escaped Tibet. They couldn't believe it and suspected it was just a rumor. Only when Jigme sent them a telegram did they know it was true. Mr. Tsarong immediately booked a flight for him and Norzin to fly to India.



Meanwhile, His Holiness the Dalai Lama wished to see Chetsang Rinpoche, and they talked for a long time. The Dalai Lama asked, "What was life like under the Chinese?" "What did you experience there?" and "What was the work like that they forced you to do?" He asked Rinpoche to show his hands, which were very rough from the hard labor. He also asked, "Can you write in Chinese?"

He asked many questions so he could consider what the best options were for Rinpoche – where he should live and what he should do, now that he has lived many years in a terrible environment among the Communists, when he couldn't have the disciplined lifestyle of a monk. The Dalai Lama had an open mind to many options. Rinpoche could get married and live a family life, or he could be a valuable employee for the Tibetan government-in-exile, like his father, or he could do what he had been expected to do as the tulku, the Seventh Chetsang Rinpoche – be the master of Dharma in the Drikung Kagyu lineage.

The Dalai Lama advised him first to go to the United States and spend time with his family. If he stayed in Dharamsala, there were many people there with needs and expectations that might pressure him into making decisions. Being away from all that would give him a chance to carefully consider decisions about his future. The Dalai Lama noticed Rinpoche's alertness,

intelligence, and the way he answered questions promptly and thoughtfully. As Rinpoche was about to leave, the Dalai Lama recommended,

“You should take on your responsibilities as the throne holder of the Drikung lineage. But you can take your time first.”

The Dalai Lama could see that Rinpoche was still very strong in the Dharma despite the extreme circumstances of living under the Chinese Communists. He gave Rinpoche some gifts – a statue of Milarepa and a famous book by Gampopa.

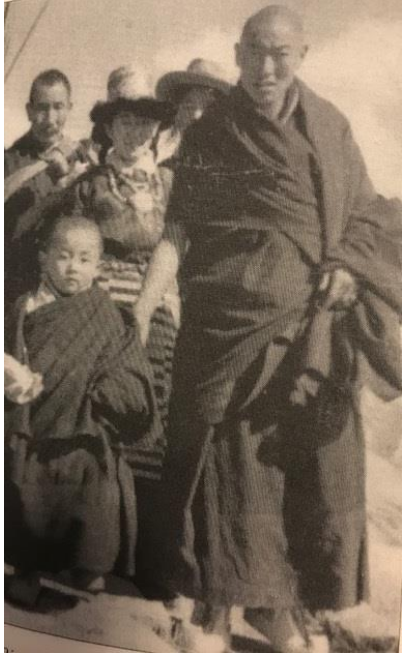
Rinpoche didn't want to make any decisions about his future right away, because he had gone through too many radical changes recently. He had just escaped Communists in Tibet and evaded spies in Nepal. He needed to think and consider his options. The one thing he knew for sure was that he wanted to travel to the U.S. to see his family. Everything else could wait.

Some Drikung lamas had begun a religious life in India, and had started building small monasteries. But they weren't organized; many of them lived scattered in different places in India. In Ladakh, which is the northwestern part of India that borders Tibet, near Pakistan, there were Drikung Kagyu monasteries that existed for hundreds of years. Perhaps this was a place where Rinpoche could stay. But the monasteries didn't have much money, they had some disagreements with each other, and only a few monks and tulkus there knew about the tradition and its rituals, ceremonies, lama dances, studies and meditation practices. Also, Tibetans living in Dharamsala didn't know what was going on in Ladakh. There was very little communication with the people there, and it was difficult to travel or get permission from the Indian government to visit Ladakh.

In all the world, there weren't many knowledgeable monks practicing in the Drikung Kagyu lineage anymore, there were hardly any Drikung monasteries and there were no Drikung study centers. After all the destruction in Tibet, the Drikung Kagyu tradition was in danger. Many tulkus and lamas were leaving it and turning to other Tibetan Buddhist lineages, such as the Karma Kagyu and Nyingma, where there was more support. But there were still devoted monks, students, and other people who were extremely excited about the news that their Chetsang Rinpoche had arrived in the free world.

Two monks, Chösjor, who was Rinpoche's personal assistant from when he was a young child and Konchog Samten, who searched for the little tulku all over Tibet before he was found – both of whom also had been very close to his previous incarnation as the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche - had escaped and were now in India. They were so excited to hear the news that Rinpoche also had escaped! They had been sure that the Chinese Communists must have killed Chetsang Rinpoche and Chungtsang Rinpoche. There had even been serious discussions about starting to search for their reincarnations.

Samten and Chösjor went to visit Chetsang Rinpoche immediately in Delhi.



(Photo of Chösjor with Chetsang Rinpoche as a child)

They went to the Delhi Tibet house, and there they saw Chetsang Rinpoche standing with his father, who had just arrived from the United States. Chösjor was speechless and Samten wept uncontrollably, stammering over and over again, “Yishin Norbu, Yishin Norbu!” which means Wish-Fulfilling Jewel, and prostrated, bowing on the floor. Rinpoche helped the trembling Konchog Samten up and guided him to a chair. He was profoundly happy to see his faithful companions alive and well after such a long time.

Samten asked Rinpoche to tell him all about his studies at the school in Lhasa, and what had happened in his life during the 15 years since he left the monastery. Samten asked many questions, as he wanted to know whether Rinpoche had behaved himself, and whether he was still a virtuous person

when he was away from the monastery and in such a terrible environment living with the Communists, who hated religion and spirituality so much. Had he become hateful, angry, or brainwashed, Samten wondered? Rinpoche answered each question patiently, thoroughly, and honestly. Seeing so much compassion in Rinpoche’s heart made Samten realize what an extraordinary being he was, because neither his personality nor his virtues were lost under the rule of the Communists. He saw Rinpoche as a noble being, and was filled with renewed hope.

When the Drikung lamas heard about Rinpoche’s plans to go to the United States with his father, they were upset. Many of them assumed that of course Chetsang Rinpoche would stay in India and be the great master of the Drikung Kagyu lineage. They didn’t think about how he must feel after all the difficult times he had just come from. Right away they wanted to perform a ceremony to have him on the throne again, so he would be “back in business” as a monk, a lama, and the Drikung Kagyu leader. They were worried that if he goes to the United States after all the years of hard times in Tibet, he would enjoy the freedom and luxury there so much that he would be distracted from his responsibilities as the great master of the Drikung lineage and his mission as a tulku to teach the Dharma.

But there were some monks who were not so anxious for him to resume his position as the Drikung leader. Some of them had risen up in rank and didn’t want to lose their status as leaders if Chetsang Rinpoche takes over. They didn’t openly say anything, but there was some political tug-of-war going on behind the scenes. Chetsang Rinpoche had had enough of politics and would be happy to leave that stuff behind.

A group of Drikung lamas and dignitaries urged the Dalai Lama to give Chetsang Rinpoche his monk’s vows again, so he would live again as a monk. The Dalai Lama responded, “I don’t want to pressure him.” It was a very important decision, especially because it involved such an important high-ranking tulku. Rinpoche had heard almost nothing about the Dharma since he

was fourteen years old. He had been under constant pressure from the Communists, who condemned religion as a poison and a way for monks to abuse others, and who regarded monks and lamas as the main enemy of Communist beliefs. He had continually been exposed to bad advice and brainwashing.

A clear and deep understanding of the meaning of the Dharma was needed in order to get rid of those views. It wouldn't be good for Chetsang Rinpoche to become a monk again just because of these desperate monks and rinpoches. Also, since he was going to the United States, there was no guarantee he would continue living as a monk while he was there.

The Dalai Lama made his decision, saying, "In Tibet, I cut his hair when he was a small boy, but he didn't take the monk's vows from me at that time. Anyway, he has kept his virtues all this time. That is an excellent sign, and there will be no problem for him to take the monk's vows when he returns from the United States."

So that was it. Chetsang Rinpoche was not going to be taking on the role of a monk again until he returns from the United States.

The Drikung lamas were suffering, because just when they got their precious tulku back, he was snatched away from them again, and maybe gone forever overseas. They felt cheated that they couldn't give him an official enthronement ceremony, where he would take his place on the throne as their leader. The Dalai Lama sympathized with them, and agreed that they could do a more simple ceremony, to show that the throne holder was present with them and would return.

The lamas requested that Chetsang Rinpoche shave his head as a sign that he intended to remain as a monk.



His father felt a little annoyed at the pressure they were putting on his son, but Rinpoche calmly allowed a lama to shave his head.

Then he returned to Dharamsala, along with his father and sister Norzin.

(Chetsang Rinpoche for the first time in many years with shaved head and robes)





On the day of the ceremony, many Drikung lamas and devotees gathered together in Dharamsala to see their precious tulku. They were overjoyed to see him again after so many years, and although he looked older now, he had the same character as before – he radiated the same harmony and peace he had shown as a small child. A procession (like a parade) of Drikung dignitaries led him to a huge hall where the Dalai Lama was seated. Rinpoche took his seat on the throne facing the Dalai Lama, and they performed a ceremony praying for his long life.

The next day, there was a ceremony with mandala offering for the Dalai Lama, attended by lamas from all four branches of Tibetan Buddhism: Nyingma, Gelug, Sakya, and Kagyu. Then a mandala was offered to Chetsang Rinpoche.



And the Drikung lamas symbolically gave the Drikung throne to Chetsang Rinpoche. It was a glorious day for the Drikung Kagyu lineage, from almost having died to the beginning of a new life, and new era.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Chetsang Rinpoche's father need to go overseas? (for medical treatment for his stomach problems)
2. What did the Dalai Lama think Chetsang Rinpoche should do first? (visit his family in the United States?)

3. What did the Dalai Lama think he should do when he returns from the United States?  
(take responsibility as leader of the Drikung lineage)
4. How long had the Drikung Kagyu monasteries existed in Ladakh, in north India? (for hundreds of years)
5. Did the Dalai Lama want Chetsang Rinpoche to be ordained as a monk again right away?  
(no)

#### DHARMA DISCUSSION – Noble Character:

After having gone through the stresses of losing his family, teachers, lamas and friends, being surrounded by the hate and violence of the Red Guards, battling the Nyamdre in Lhasa, and working hard labor on the commune farms, Chetsang Rinpoche's personality didn't change. He didn't become angry, bitter, or hateful. Instead, he had the same peaceful, kind, compassionate personality as when he was young.

The Dalai Lama and Konchog Samten noticed that he answered questions promptly, thoroughly and thoughtfully, and was honest when he was asked about what had happened in Tibet. He didn't try to hide anything, he wasn't arrogant, and wasn't pretending to be innocent. And he didn't speak with hate about people who had been abusive and violent. His kind personality didn't change even when others had been extremely angry and hostile to him, and had forced him to listen to propaganda and anti-religious brainwashing. He knew that no matter how terribly people behave, it is because their minds are deluded and full of ignorance, but that they, like everyone, have the Buddha Nature as their true essence.

So the Dalai Lama decided he should take on the responsibility as Dharma master and leader of the Drikung lineage, rather than have a job in the government or get married and have a family. He saw that Chetsang Rinpoche had noble character, worthy of this great responsibility.

Chetsang Rinpoche's father also had a noble character – he had a kind and gentle personality, and was generous, going without pay while ensuring that his employees and the Tibetan orphans were cared for.

We have heard the word "noble" before.

We heard about the "noble upper-class families" in Tibet – those who were educated, with good jobs, and had virtuous qualities.?

Where else have you heard the word "noble"?

We heard about the Four Noble Truths: that life is full of suffering, that our desires are the cause of suffering, that enlightenment is the end of suffering, and that the Buddha taught the path to the end of suffering.

Where else have you heard the word "noble"? You might think of noble kings, princes and princesses, or someone with a high rank; someone who is admired, who people look up to.

Noble metals, such as gold, platinum and silver, are those that don't rust or corrode when exposed to water or contaminating chemicals.

So what does "noble character" mean?

Having virtues such as kindness, loyalty, honesty, generosity, understanding, and patience, and avoiding non-virtues such as jealousy, arrogance, hatred, and selfishness.

And importantly, it means maintaining that good character even when it is very difficult, such as when others might influence you in a negative way, or make you angry.

Like a noble metal doesn't rust or corrode, a noble person's character doesn't corrode when he is exposed to people with contaminated minds.

When you are in very stressful situations, try to remember how Chetsang Rinpoche maintained his noble character through all the terrible experiences he had to go through.