

Part 5 – Love of Nature

Chetsang Rinpoche's grandfather loved his garden. Every morning, as soon as the sun rose, he started working in his vegetable garden. His favorite gardening activity was planting fruit trees. He gave each of his grandchildren a fruit tree of their own to care for. When Chetsang Rinpoche was seven years old, his grandfather gave him a baby peach tree which was as tall as Rinpoche was at that time. The grandfather taught him how to plant it, and little Rinpoche planted the tree all by himself, although it took him a few hours to do it! When it was all finished being planted, he and his grandfather just stood there, admiring the little tree.



Whenever Rinpoche came home from the monastery to visit in the summer, he first ran to see how the peach tree was doing. Everyone was surprised to see that it had five or six large peaches on it the very first year after it was planted!

Because of his grandfather's interest in plants, Rinpoche also loved gardening even until this day. Now he likes to collect seeds of interesting trees, bushes and flowers when he travels, and plant them in his garden in front of his house in India. In recent years, he started a big project of planting thousands of trees in Ladakh, in northern India, to help against effects of climate change.



Another activity Rinpoche enjoyed as a child was driving. His father bought a car - a big Land Rover - in India. But there were no roads that went all the way over the huge Himalayan mountains to drive it to their home in Lhasa. So the car was taken apart and its pieces were taken by porters with pack animals over the mountains all the way to Lhasa. After they arrived, Rinpoche's father assembled all the pieces of the car and then drove it.

As they drove back to the monastery, Rinpoche sat on his father's lap with his hands on the steering wheel, as if he was driving all by himself. He loved helping his father drive!

He also loved riding horses. When he had free time from his strict routine in the monastery, he went out to the fields near the river where the monastery's horses often grazed. He liked to catch one and ride it bareback (without a saddle), racing over the hills. He loved riding so much that he would even try to ride a bull or a big goat.



He loved all animals, both farm animals and wildlife. At home at his family's house, he loved to play with his pet white rabbits. When he was at the monastery, he often saw pheasants, beautiful birds with bright orange feet, a white feather collar, and feathers over the body that were iridescent, reflecting rainbow-colored light, although you can't really see it in this photo below. Another type of bird, called a partridge, sang at about 3:00 every morning.



He was thrilled to see the gazelles that came down from the mountains in the evenings to drink from the river. Suddenly, all together at the same instant, they would jump and run as if hearing a silent command. They were very shy because they always had to look out for predators. The white fur on their rumps are in the shape of a heart when you see them from behind.

He also loved to watch the graceful horses or the big, calm, dignified yaks with their long strands of wool hanging down from their bellies as they grazed and played in the fields.

One night, a snow leopard jumped through a ventilation hole next to the kitchen and drank from a big pot of water. Rinpoche could see into the ventilation hole from his room, and he watched the snow leopard gracefully jump out after he had his drink. It is so rare to see a snow leopard – they are very shy of humans and usually stay far away from them. Another time, while he was on his way to the bathroom in an outhouse - a separate building (because there were no flush toilets) - he came face-to face with a snow leopard.



Rinpoche stood perfectly still and wasn't afraid. For a moment he gazed, fascinated, into the leopard's bright shining eyes, until it silently crept away.

Sometimes he heard a villager's goat cry out in terror when a leopard had attacked it, and then Rinpoche rushed out with his binoculars to watch the leopard drag the victim into the bushes.

As Chetsang Rinpoche matured, he and Chungtsang Rinpoche grew closer and began to have many adventures together. Although Chungtsang Rinpoche seemed so serious and quiet, he actually was daring and could be a bit wild at times. He liked to shake people up. Like Chetsang Rinpoche, he loved animals, riding horses and picnics. He also loved swords, rifles, pistols, and knives. He sometimes would sneak into the shrine room of the protector deities just to see the big terrifying looking weapons – swords, knives, clubs, daggers and spears - hanging on the walls. He was fascinated by them, but he never actually tried to use them.

Chetsang Rinpoche was the one who started most of their adventures. One time, he persuaded Chungtsang Rinpoche to go with him to pick peaches growing on the mountain behind one of the four monasteries they lived in. Chungtsang Rinpoche stepped carefully as he walked on the dangerously steep mountain slope. Chetsang Rinpoche went ahead and quickly scampered up one of the peach trees. He saw some perfectly ripe big peaches high up in the tree. He slowly climbed along a branch to be able to reach those perfect fruits.

But suddenly the branch snapped under his weight and he began to fall! He fell onto smaller branches, but then he landed on the steep ground underneath, and started to slide toward the edge of a cliff! Chungtsang Rinpoche, holding onto a tree trunk for balance nearby, felt helpless – he was too far away to grab and save his little friend. He was terrified his friend was going to slide all the way over the steep cliff. But just before Chetsang Rinpoche got to the edge of the cliff, he crashed into a small thorn bush growing at the edge of the cliff. He was lucky the thorn bush was there. Otherwise, if he had gone over the cliff, he would have fallen to his death!

The two tulkus got into some other mischief, too, that was less dangerous. They found a way to get into a hidden space underneath their thrones in a rarely used shrine room in one of their monasteries. They took a couple of butter lamps from the altar table to light up their hiding place, and sometimes they brought dried meat and enjoyed a picnic under there.

Although Chetsang Rinpoche was still a playful boy, at age seven, lamas from far away had big expectations of him as a very special tulku. One time when a great well-known lama came to visit their big monastery at Drikung Thil, a lama who accompanied him, and who was deaf in one ear announced,

“I took my vows from Shiwe Lodrö (the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche), and received many initiations from him that are hard to obtain. If the son of the Tsarong family is the undisputable incarnation of Shiwe Lodrö, he will heal me if he blows in my right ear.”

The lama was putting little Chetsang Rinpoche to the test! Would he be able to heal the old lama just by blowing in his ear? Chetsang Rinpoche looked at him calmly, took the man’s head in both hands, and blew in his ear. And it worked! From then on, the lama could hear from both ears! Tears came from his eyes as he realized his old teacher had come back in the form of this young boy, with the blessing power of the Drikung Kagyu lineage that could heal him.

This was a blessing power that came automatically to Chetsang Rinpoche, having been passed from Jigten Sumgön to his student, and then on to that student’s student, from teacher to student several times until the First Chetsang Rinpoche received it, who then was born again on Earth after passing away, six times, until now, the seventh incarnation.

There was a power that Rinpoche liked to watch others demonstrate. Some yogi monks came to Drikung Thil after spending years in a meditation retreat. The courtyard of the monastery was set up with a tent, and only yogis and rinpoches – advanced monks or tulkus – could watch; ordinary monks were not allowed in. The yogis sat on small rugs, wearing only short pants, and began their yoga exercises. The most dramatic move was an amazing leap into the air from lotus position on the rug, and while in mid-air, the yogi crossed his legs again in full lotus posture and then landed back on the ground. The best yogis seemed to fly up and pause at the highest point to cross their legs and then land gently sitting in lotus position on their rugs. The famous Drikung yogi named Pachung Rinpoche sat in the front and could leap the highest and most elegantly of all.



In 1954, when Chetsang was eight years old, the Dalai Lama was invited to take a tour of China, along with Tibetan government officials and some lamas. The big caravan of the Dalai Lama and his entourage passed through the Drikung area and camped overnight in tents. Although it was a rather long journey over some mountains from the monastery, Chetsang Rinpoche, Chungtsang Rinpoche and others from the monastery went to meet them, riding on yaks which was the most suitable way to travel over the steep mountains. On their journey, they saw some Chinese soldiers camping nearby. Rinpoche could see them hunting rabbits. It was the first time he had ever seen men hunt animals. He watched with curiosity, but was horrified when he saw them skin the animals and roast them over a fire. They were eating the same kind of animal he had as a pet at home!

The two tulku and other monks from the monastery, along with a huge crowd of other people, including nomads, were there to greet the Dalai Lama. As his caravan approached, there was a big cloud of dust kicked up by all the horses and mules as they walked over the dry, dusty landscape. The Dalai Lama's security officer, however, was not riding an animal. He was riding a motorcycle. The nomads had never seen a motorcycle before. It made a loud clattering noise that they couldn't understand. They thought he was riding some kind of goat, holding onto its horns. Their shocked reaction amused Chetsang Rinpoche, whose father had ridden a motorcycle as long as he could remember. The Dalai Lama was riding in a car, but it had gotten stuck in the mud. Twenty strong men had to dig it out of the mud and carry the car part of the way. When the Dalai Lama finally arrived, Chetsang Rinpoche and Chungtsang Rinpoche offered him a white scarf, a Katag, to be blessed, and went with him to his tent, where they were all served tea and sweet rice as they watched the nomads perform dances.

Always a fan of animals, Rinpoche especially noticed the beautiful mules in the Dalai Lama's caravan. They were large, strong animals that looked like horses with long ears and donkey's tails, in matched pairs - two black ones with white spots, two gray ones, and two bright brown ones. At the stables at the Dalai Lama's palace, the mules were always fed in nice neat troughs. But on the camping trip, the mules' food was just placed on the ground, so the delicate animals had to figure out how to get the food up into their mouths. Rather than stretching their heads to the ground, they kneeled down with their front legs to reach it. The nomads thought that was hilarious – the spoiled mules from the palace didn't know how to eat like animals in nature!

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of tree did Chetsang Rinpoche plant when he was a young boy? (peach tree)
2. What did he like to look at outside the monastery? (animals – horses, yaks, gazelles, pheasants, snow lions)
3. How did Chetsang Rinpoche almost fall over a cliff? (picking peaches, a branch broke under his weight and he fell)
4. What happened when a lama challenged Chetsang Rinpoche to blow in his ear? (he was healed from his deafness in that ear)
5. What did Chinese soldiers do that horrified Chetsang Rinpoche? (hunted and ate rabbits)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Love of Nature:

When Chetsang Rinpoche planted the peach tree, how might it be of benefit to other beings?
Peaches are food for people, and also for birds, squirrels, insects, and other animals.
Leaves produce oxygen, for people and animals to breathe, and shade, to protect from the sun.

Trees also provide homes and places to perch for birds, insects and bats.
Their roots hold the earth so it doesn't wash away in heavy rain.
So, tree roots can prevent erosion and mudslides.
Their leaves shade the earth to make it cool and protect it from drying out from the hot sun.
Their flowers provide pollen for bees.
Bees bring pollen from one flower to another so fruits can grow from the plant.
Birds and animals carry seeds to other areas to spread plants around, and eat seeds as food.

So we see that humans, animals, birds, insects and trees are interdependent.

We depend upon each other.

We need trees so we can breathe oxygen to stay alive.

When we realize we are part of nature, we can help keep ecosystems in balance

There is always a balance in nature – not too much or too little of one type of animal or plant.

Even though animals kill other animals to eat, like the snow leopard that eats the farmer's goats, there is a balance. Predators like leopards, foxes, owls and wolves eat other animals so there aren't too many of that type of animal.

But humans sometimes cause nature to get out of balance – we cut down so many forests and other animal habitat to build, we pollute so much that some animals, birds and other creatures can't survive, and we hunt too many of certain animals, so many animals become extinct.

We contribute to the pollution too – using electricity, throwing away trash, driving in cars.

What are some ways we can reduce the pollution we cause?

Each of us can reduce pollution in small ways.

Not wasting food is an important way to help the environment. When many people waste food, farmers must produce more food, so more forest is cut down for farming, more pesticides are used, more packaging is used, and more trucks using petroleum fuel have to ship it to stores.

So don't buy or serve yourself more food than you will really eat.

Also, don't buy extra things like clothes or toys you don't really need and will soon throw away.

When you go to the store, use reusable bags, or reuse plastic bags they give you as trash bags.

Don't waste paper when you are printing, drawing or writing.

Don't waste hot water with long showers, because it wastes electricity or gas to heat water.

Walk or ride a bike, when it's safe, rather than having parents drive you.

Remember everything you need to buy at the store so you don't have to drive back to the store to buy what you forgot.

Just being mindful of how important it is to protect nature, and doing small things to help the environment gives us good habits like this will make us think of other ways we can help the environment wherever we are.

When many people make small changes, together we can make an enormous difference!