

## Part 2 – Altruism

The Tsarong family's house was the most wonderful house in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. It was not only very large and beautiful, but it was different from most other houses in Tibet at that time, because it had glass windows rather than paper and wood windows, bathrooms inside rather than in a separate building, and it had soap, toothbrushes, and white sheets on the beds. Even other wealthy families in Tibet didn't have these modern things.



Going back in time from the last chapter, several months before little Tseten Gyurme was born, his mother was awakened in the night by a movement at the foot of her bed. She was shocked when she saw a life-sized Green Tara standing there! She immediately got up and prostrated three times, bowing to the deity, who then vanished.

A few nights later, she realized she was going to have her fourth baby. The appearance of Tara seemed to be a lucky sign for her baby.



The baby boy was born in 1946, and was named Tseten Gyurme. He was very curious about everything around him. He wanted to see and learn about everything. He kept the servants in the house very busy with his curiosity.

He played with his older brother Jigme and two older sisters, Norzin and Namlha, and they all spent a lot of time with their grandparents, because their parents were often busy. Their grandfather loved playing with the children, chasing them around the house while rolling his eyes, stamping his feet, and making scary noises. He wore a huge coat in the winter that he wrapped around the children while he told them bedtime stories. He often told them stories about a crazy character called "Uncle Tönpa."

The house that they grew up in was like a paradise, with 40 rooms and a beautiful garden with fruit trees, vegetables, and plants inside greenhouses. The attic was like a treasure chamber, with tiger skins and bear skins with head and claws, rhinoceros horns, elephant tusks, swords, guns, books, magazines from other countries, paintings, maps, photographs, and music boxes. The children had lots of fun playing happily among the many boxes and bundles of things.



They also loved to visit the kitchen, which was in a separate building. Actually, there were three kitchens – one for the everyday typical Tibetan family meals, one for fancy Chinese and Indian food that were prepared for special occasions, and the important tea kitchen, where tea was prepared from morning to night. In the middle of this kitchen a kettle with water for butter tea was constantly simmering on a big brick stove, and the servants were always busy carrying in firewood and dried animal dung to fuel the stove, and chatting while slurping from their cups of tea.

(photo of Tseten Gyurme, his father and older brother)

When Tseten Gyurme was three years old, his little brother Paljor was born. The five Tsarong children and their cousins played happily together as if they were in heaven. They had no idea that this carefree life of having everything, joy, and freedom would change.



One day, when Tseten Gyurme was almost four years old, some important officials from Drikung Thil Monastery arrived at the Tsarong house. They presented his grandfather with a report that Tseten Gyurme had been formally recognized as the incarnation of His Holiness Chetsang Rinpoche. The officials requested his grandfather to give his grandson for the monks to take care of him.

(photo of Tseten Gyurme's grandparents in front, and his parents in back)

His grandfather respected religious tradition and generously supported the monasteries, but he was not deeply religious. He did not want to simply agree to give up his grandson. He told the officials that the decision would be made by the child's parents.

The grandfather then called for his son and his son's wife, Tseten Gyurme's parents, and told them about the request. The parents were shocked and didn't want to give up their son to the monks. They knew that life in a monastery was harsh, even for a special tulku, with so much discipline, ceremonies, study and training all day, and no freedom to play. They wondered whether the selection of their child might be just a way for the monks to have a connection with a wealthy and well-respected family. Also, the child was only three – almost four - years old, much too young to leave the family. The grandfather also didn't want the child to go to a monastery, but he didn't want to just say "no."

The information in the report was surprisingly convincing that the child indeed was the tulku of Chetsang Rinpoche. And they knew that if they prevent a child from being recognized as a tulku, that might bring bad luck to the family and the child. The grandfather advised his son, Tseten Gyurme's father, not to make a quick decision but to think it through carefully. But they didn't have a lot of time. The officials said that this was a lucky time for recognizing him as a tulku and any delay might be unlucky.

Tseten Gyurme's mother, Yangchen Dolkar, asked her parents what to do. They were very religious and familiar with the tulku system. Her parents urged her to give up her little son to the monks. They told her that a lama who has reincarnated and who isn't allowed to do his religious work would die very young. Tseten Gyurme's parents certainly did not want to take the risk that their son might die when he is young.

They also thought about the unusual events that happened at his birth. His body had been yellow and he didn't move at first, so they feared he might be dead, until the doctor turned him upside down and struck his back, and then the baby cried. And his mother had the vision of Green Tara before he was born. Clearly he was a special child. Also, she had many dreams while she was pregnant, about a monastery and a stupa, which is a round building containing very special holy objects.

The family also remembered that the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche had given Tseten Gyurme's grandmother a necklace and told her that if she wore it then she would see him again soon. At the time, they thought he was just giving a nice gift and might visit again soon. Could it be that he meant that he would see her in his next life, as her grandson?

With heavy hearts, Tseten Gyurme's parents agreed to let their son be raised and educated in the monastery and take on the responsibilities of the leader of the Drikung Kagyu lineage.

On the day of the ceremony to formally recognize him as the tulku of Chetsang Rinpoche, little Tseten Gyurme's head was shaved, with only a small lock of hair left on the crown of his head. He was dressed in dark red monk's robes, just tiny enough to fit him.



(photos: wearing robes and big boots, and grandfather offering mandala to Chetsang Rinpoche)

But the monks couldn't find small enough yellow boots that he was required to wear for the ceremony. The only small ones they had still were much too large. Little Tseten Gyurme was a little unhappy that the boots were so big. But the monks were delighted seeing the little boy in the huge boots. Maybe they thought it was cute or that it was good luck, that he would be following in the big footsteps of the previous Chetsang Rinpoches.

The ceremony took place in the Tsarong family's temple, called the "room of the Dharma kings," in which were almost life-sized golden statues of the three Dharma Kings of Tibet, with gems on them. In the room there were also holy books, fancy offering cakes, colorful lion statues, rare expensive vases, 108 water bowls, pearls, and a golden butter lamp. There were beautiful thangka paintings of deities and buddhas on the walls.

There was a Dharma throne in the room that now was for little Tseten Gyurme to sit on. He sat on the throne as if it was his usual place to sit. He didn't seem to think it was strange at all. His grandfather, a national hero who had saved the previous Dalai Lama's life and had a top job in the government, bowed down humbly to his little grandson. He made an offering of a mandala, which represents the whole universe, to the young boy, who responded with a loving blessing, as if he had done it thousands of times.

The senior monks also made offerings of a mandala to the young tulku and chanted prayers for him to have a long life. Family members and a few close friends of the family came up to offer him Khatags, silk scarves, which he nicely placed around their necks.

Now he was the Seventh Chetsang Rinpoche, a Precious One. Because he was still so young, he was allowed to stay with his family a little longer, so his life didn't change right away. He was dressed in monks' robes and cared for by two monks, but he was still allowed to play like normal.



(photo of Chetsang Rinpoche (on right), and his mother, brothers and sisters)

His parents, grandparents, older brother and sisters thought about the fact that soon he won't be with them anymore, and that the time together with him is so precious. But little Rinpoche seemed not to be disturbed by the changes to come.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Who did Tseten Gyurme's mother see during the night at the foot of her bed just before she found out that she was going to have a baby? (Green Tara)
2. When the officials from the monastery came to the Tsarong house, they requested the grandfather to allow which people to take care of Tseten Gyurme? (monks)
3. Did the grandfather and parents want Tseten Gyurme to go to the monastery? (no)
4. What did the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche give to Tseten Gyurme's grandmother when he said he would visit her again soon if she wore it? (a necklace)
5. Did Tseten Gyurme think it was strange to sit on the throne in their family's shrine room? (no)
6. Why was he allowed to stay with his family, cared for by two monks, rather than go to live at the monastery? (because he was so young)

## DHARMA DISCUSSION – Altruism:

When the Tsarong family gave up their child to the monks, they gave up, or sacrificed, what they wanted to do, to raise their own child and enjoy him growing up in their home.

They made that sacrifice because they trusted that it would be better for their son – so he could do the spiritual work he was supposed to do as a tulku, and so he wouldn't die when still young.

This was a great act of altruism.

What is altruism?

It's a type of lovingkindness and compassion, caring about others; opposite of self-centered.

It means being unselfish and being concerned about the well-being of others,

Instead of thinking about ourselves and what we want, we think about what others need.

Giving up what we want to do so someone else feels happier or suffers less,

Giving up something we like in order to help others, or

Trying to relieve the stress, burdens or discomfort of others.

Can you think of some examples of when you are altruistic?

Think about ways that you help at home, at school, or at a temple:

For example, do you help clean up or put things away?

Do you offer to help carry things for others?

When you're thirsty, do you only get a drink for yourself, or do you offer something to drink for others around you?

Do you offer to let others take a turn, or do you usually want to go first?

Do you wait for your mother to bring you something, or do you offer to help bring it?

Sometimes we aren't altruistic because we are lazy.

We are more interested in our own comfort and pleasure, things we like to do.

We like to relax and enjoy, not take care of someone else.

But if you avoid helping others, or you don't care what they think, do you really feel better?

It may be that we don't help or don't care what others think because we're feeling unhappy,

Or we may be feeling tired or irritable.

But if we help someone, often we will feel better and more energized, because it distracts us from thinking about ourselves and our discomfort.

Also, the other person's appreciation of our help might boost our mood.

And remember, we are earning merit by helping – by karma, the law of cause and effect – when we do good for others, good things will happen to us.

We often miss opportunities to help because we're focused on what we want, what we like to do.

For example, we focus on one friend or our smartphone and don't notice others around us.

Instead, to be more altruistic, we should try to be more mindful of what is going on around us so we see how we might be able to help others.

We can start at home = be aware of what we can do to help a parent.

Think about tasks that you can do at home to help your parents, like setting or clearing the table, cleaning dishes, wiping the table, and putting clean dishes and clean laundry away.