

Part 1 – Tulku

One day in the late 1940s, a monk named Konchog Samten along with some other monks went on a journey from their monastery (monks' residence) in central Tibet to search for what was most precious in the world to them. They had to keep the purpose of their trip a secret, so they were in disguise - dressed not as monks, but as traditional Tibetan men who travel around with mules or horses trading goods. They went in groups of two or three to visit villages and nomads' camps, and were invited into houses or into nomads' tents made of dark yak hair to drink butter tea and listen to stories of the lives of the local families, hoping to get information.

They were searching for a very special child, the dearest child in the world to them. They had never seen the child, and didn't know what he looked like, who his parents were, or where he lived. But they knew that the great and famous Lama called His Holiness Tenzin Shiwe Lodrö, the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche, who had died a few years before, would have taken another birth on Earth by now. He had been their spiritual teacher, or guru (also called lama), and Konchog Samten had been especially close to him, staying with him all the time as his attendant.



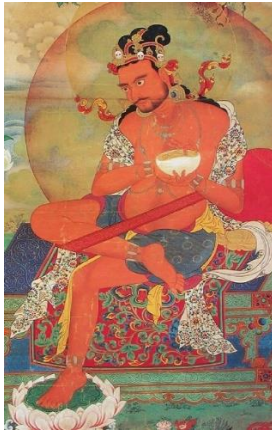
The Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche (in photo) was the leader of the Drikung Kagyu branch of Tibetan Buddhism. He was responsible for all Drikung Buddhist teachings, monasteries and monks. He lived at the Drikung Thil Monastery in Tibet, and he is called the "throne holder" because he sat on a special throne there to give Dharma teachings. He had that honor and responsibility because he received a very special blessing that the great Buddhist master Jigten Sumgön had given only to one student, a nephew, and the blessing was passed from teacher to student over hundreds of years and then was passed to the First Chetsang Rinpoche.



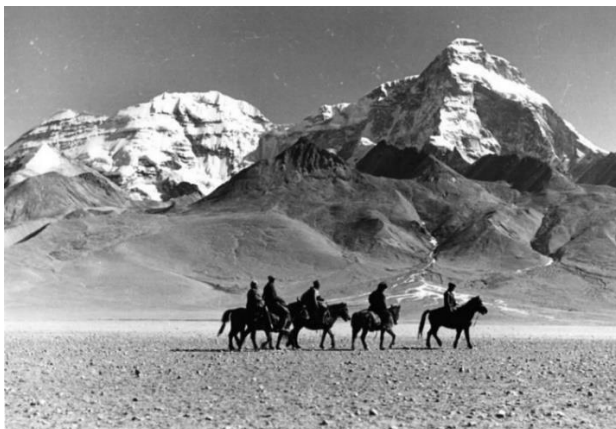
Jigten Sumgön (in photo) lived about 800 years ago, and built the Drikung Thil Monastery. He received the special blessing and Buddhist teachings from his guru, who was the monk Phagmodrupa, who received them from his guru, a doctor monk named Gampopa, who received them from Milarepa, the famous yogi (which means meditation master).

Milarepa received them from his guru, Marpa, who brought the teachings to Tibet and translated them into Tibetan after receiving them in India from Naropa, the great scholar yogi.

Naropa received the blessing and teachings a great Indian yogi named Tilopa, who received them from Vajradhara, the original Buddha, who appears in visions as blue.



After Jigten Sumgön had given the special blessing and Drikung teachings to his nephew, and the nephew passed them on to his student, and they were passed from teacher to student over hundreds of years, they were given in the early 1600s to two students who were brothers, called the First Chetsang Rinpoche and First Chungtsang Rinpoche. After the brothers died, they could have stayed in a Pure Land heaven-world but instead, because of their extreme compassion, they chose to be born on Earth again to help others learn the Drikung teachings and become enlightened. After death they reincarnated again and again, so there was a Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche and Chungtsang Rinpoche. The series of gurus from Tilopa to the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche who passed on the special blessing and teachings is called the Drikung lineage. After the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche died, the monks at Drikung Thil hoped to find his reincarnation – called a tulku - a little boy, somewhere in Tibet.



Where should the monks begin their search? There were little boys all over Tibet. Some lamas would leave a letter telling what area they will be reborn after they die so it will be easier to find them. But the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche didn't leave any such letter. So, the monks traveled around the country for several months, investigating anything unusual that might indicate that a child is a tulku.

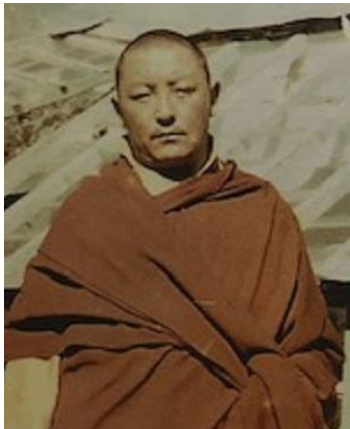
They were doing just as other groups of monks did centuries ago to find a reincarnated lama – they traveled in disguise, incognito, in areas of Tibet that were suggested to them by visions and dreams, or messages given in mysterious ways.

When they received suggestions of places to look, they visited families there who had a little boy that would have been born soon after their lama passed away. Without letting the family know the purpose of their visit, they observed very closely the little boy's behavior and that of his parents. They played with the child and showed him objects that belonged to the lama who died, and noted if the child specially responded to those objects. If he did, then it may be that he remembered the objects from his previous life as the lama.

They had to keep their mission a secret because many parents would love to have the admiration and special status that comes from having a son who is a tulku – a reincarnated lama. Some parents might try to exaggerate their little son's good behavior or even make up stories of miracles that happened when the child was born and later on, hoping that the monks would accept their child as a tulku.

They consulted with yogis and grownup tulkus, who might have some information from their psychic powers. When they had a list of children who might possibly be the tulku of Chetsang Rinpoche, they used some traditional techniques to select the children who are most likely to be the tulku. The monks chanted prayers for hours in front of a statue of Jigten Sumgön. Then, two balls of dough were placed in a large silver bowl and a senior lama slowly shook the bowl. One of the doughballs contained a slip of paper that said "yes" and the other, "no." The name of a child was read from the list, and the first doughball to roll out from the bowl was opened. If the paper said "no," then that child was taken off the list; if it said "yes" then the name stayed on the list. After they did this, six names remained on the list.

The next step was to go to a sacred lake to see if they could get a message that might help them find the tulku, because they knew that others who meditated there had visions with important messages. A group from the monastery traveled over mountains and valleys to the lake where they camped, praying and chanting for several days.



Among this group was Tritsab Gyabra Rinpoche, the temporary leader of the Drikung lineage after the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche until the time when his next incarnation is old enough to take over. Tritsab Gyabra went down to the lake to meditate alone and pray for a vision. The lake looked smooth, like a mirror, reflecting the surrounding mountains. Soon he saw a fog spreading over the surface of the lake. He saw shapes and shadows in the fog. They became images that at first were unclear, but then became clearer. He saw a big two-story house with long steps in front, the main entrance facing east, a magnificent garden enclosed by a wall around the house, and a garden with eucalyptus trees, which was unusual for a Tibetan home. On the roof was a victory banner, which is one of the eight

auspicious (lucky) Tibetan symbols. He prayed for more information about the house, and he felt that it was in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. Then the vision disappeared, and the lake was like a mirror again, reflecting the mountains around it.

Later, back at the monastery, there was a monk who was a master of seeing visions in mirrors. He prepared a mirror by placing it in a container of grain, sprinkling a special yellow powder on it, with a crystal in front of the mirror and an arrow behind it. He recited a mantra, and when he looked in the mirror, he saw a house that looked the same as the house that Tritsab Gyaba had seen at the lake.

So, following up on this information, Konchog Samten went with some companions to Lhasa to search for the little tulku. While he was there, a deity directed him to a family that was very poor, and had a three-year-old son, although this boy was not on the list. When Konchog Samten entered their humble home and sat down, the young boy immediately jumped onto his lap. The parents told the monk about several wondrous events that happened when the boy was born. They also had some letters written by lamas that told about his excellent qualities. After talking with them, when the monk got up to leave, the child tried to hold him back and stop him from leaving.

At the same time, there were two monks from Drikung who were in Lhasa to resolve some tax matters. They went for advice to an elderly well-known politician and successful businessman named Dasang Damdul Tsarong, who had known the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche very well and was closely connected with the Drikung Kagyu monasteries.

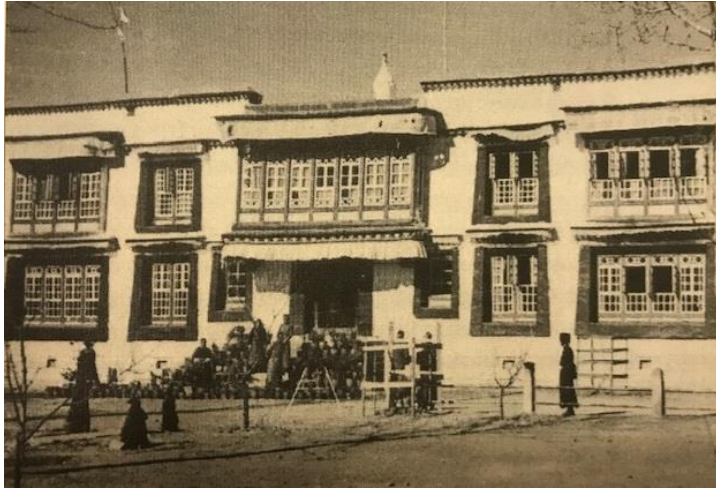


As soon as the monks entered the front gate of the big, beautiful house of the Tsarong family, the grandson of Mr. Tsarong, a little boy named Tseten Gyurme, went up to them and started to cry and cling to one of them. It was a bit embarrassing, because the little boy wouldn't let go of the monk and wouldn't stop crying. His nanny had to pull the weeping little boy away from the monks so they could have their conference with his grandfather.

After they finished the conference and walked out of the house, the little boy ran up to them and followed them to the gate. One of the monks bent down and asked little Tseten Gyurme where he wished to go, and the young boy stretched out his arm toward the east. And then he wouldn't let the monks go.

The way he was behaving - how attached he was to the monks - convinced them that this boy must be the reincarnation of the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche. But, the monks had to keep secret their interest in trying to find the tulku of Chetsang Rinpoche. Their visit hadn't been for the

purpose of trying to find him. So they had to leave the little Tseten Gyurme, and finally, although they didn't want to, they had to frighten him to make him let go of them.



Then they noticed the appearance of the Tsarong house. It was just like the vision Tritsab Gyabra had at the lake! There was a big beautiful garden with eucalyptus trees enclosed by a wall around the big two-story house, the entrance faced east, and there was a victory banner on the roof.

The two monks were sent back to the Tsarong house to investigate further.

They went there on several visits without telling the little boy's parents, so they wouldn't ask why the monks were there. The child's nannies didn't suspect the purpose of the monks' visits, and were just happy to let the monks play with little Tseten Gyurme, who obviously enjoyed their visits.



One day, the monks brought some religious objects with them – a vajra, bell, some malas (prayer beads), hand drum and dagger used for rituals. Some of those items had belonged to the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche. The monks watched closely to see which objects Tseten Gyurme preferred. The boy immediately reached for a simple mala, even though the monks laid out beautiful malas with colorful precious stones and shiny silver beads right next to it. With total confidence, the little boy played only with the objects that had belonged to the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche.

The monks then added to their list the names of Tseten Gyurme and the little boy from the poor family, so now there were eight names on the list. The monks consulted with an oracle of a monastery. An oracle is a person, usually a monk, who goes into a trance and is able to tell messages from a powerful unseen being who knows many things that ordinary humans don't know. The oracle announced that there were three incarnations of the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche, and that one had died, and the other two were the boy from the poor family, and the grandson of Mr. Tsarong, little Tseten Gyurme, whose mind was more closely connected with the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche. The monks consulted with the two most famous oracles in Tibet, with the teachers of the young Dalai Lama, and with other senior lamas. They all confirmed that Tseten Gyurme was the tulku, the reincarnation, of the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche.

Finally, to be absolutely sure, there was a big prayer ceremony for seven days, and another procedure with doughballs. First, two doughballs, one with a “yes” inside and one with a “no,” were placed in the bowl, and the question was asked, “Was the reincarnation of the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche definitely among the eight names on the list?” The bowl was rocked and the doughball that rolled out had the answer “yes” inside. Next, eight doughballs were prepared, and each had inside it one of the names on the list. The senior monk rocked the bowl with the eight doughballs in it, and the first doughball to bounce out of the bowl was the one with Tseten Gyurme’s name in it. Now they were sure who the tulku was.

The people of Drikung were overjoyed to have found their precious Chetsang Rinpoche again, the “throne holder,” the one who had the very special blessing to be the leader of the Drikung monks and have the teachings of the ancient Drikung lineage of Jigten Sumgön. The little boy’s parents didn’t know this was happening, so a group of important monks and officials from Drikung Thil went to Lhasa to inform the family and ask that they accept the selection of their little son as the tulku of Chetsang Rinpoche. They knew that the Tsarong family might not accept the selection, because they might possibly suspect that their son was chosen because men in their family had good jobs in the government. It was known that some monasteries seemed to prefer selecting children from wealthy high-class families, who might then share their wealth and other advantages with the monastery.

Soon they hoped to bring the little boy to the Drikung Thil Monastery for a big ceremony giving him monk’s robes to wear, and officially recognizing him as the Seventh Chetsang Rinpoche. The title of Rinpoche means “Precious One.” The monks and people of Drikung were so excited to see the Precious One who, because of his deep compassion, for the seventh time had chosen not to stay in a totally blissful Pure Land heaven-world, but instead to be born on Earth again to help all beings be free of suffering.

QUESTIONS (answers in parentheses):

1. Who was the throne holder of the Drikung lineage who had recently died? (the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche)
2. Who were the monks looking for? (the tulku of Chetsang Rinpoche)
3. What Tritsab Gyabra see in his vision at the lake? (house of the Tsarong family in Lhasa)
4. What did Tseten Gyurme do when the monks first visited the Tsarong house, that made them think that he was the tulku of Chetsang Rinpoche? (he cried and hung onto them, and wouldn’t let them leave)
5. What happened when the monks showed Tseten Gyurme some religious objects? (he chose to play with the mala and things that belonged to the Sixth Chetsang Rinpoche)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Vocabulary words:

There were many Tibetan words mentioned in the story, and some beliefs and rituals that are different from modern western cultures.

Do you have any questions about anything mentioned the story?

We heard the words “yogi,” “lama,” “guru” and “monk.”

A yogi is a person who is a great meditator, who focuses his life on meditation.

“Lama” is the Tibetan word for spiritual teacher, someone who is trained to teach Dharma and meditation.

“Guru” is another word for spiritual teacher.

A monk is a man who wears robes and lives in a monastery or temple, and has no wife or children, but devotes his life to the Dharma.

One of the most important words in the story is the word “tulku.”

It means the reincarnation of a lama – a lama who has died and then reincarnates - is born again - as a baby.

A tulku has purified his karmas enough that he doesn't have to be reborn on Earth again.

He could stay in a heavenly Pure Land after he dies, where he would experience the most extreme happiness forever!

But because he has so much compassion for all the beings who are still suffering, he chooses to be born as a human again to help other beings become happy and not have to experience any more suffering.

We also heard the word “Rinpoche,” which is a title, or how we address a person who is a monk who has had very advanced spiritual training, or a person who is a tulku.

When we use the word “teachings,” it means spiritual knowledge or Dharma that was taught by Shakyamuni Buddha or other Buddhist spiritual teachers.

A Tibetan Buddhist “lineage” is the series of spiritual teachers who each received and then passed on a set of special Buddhist teachings and blessings to their advanced students, from teacher to student, on and on over hundreds of years.

“Throne holder” doesn't mean someone who holds a throne in his hands. It means a person who holds the position of the lineage leader and has a throne from which he teaches Dharma.

Another word we heard was “oracle.” This is a very rare person who has a connection with a powerful unseen being who wants to help the monks by giving them information.



And we heard about things called “mala” and “vajra.”

A mala is a bead necklace that is used for prayer and counting how many times a mantra is repeated.

A vajra (in photo) is also called a “dorje,” in Tibetan. It is an object that is used in Tibetan ceremonies and rituals.