

Part 17 – Balance

During the time he was working at McDonald's, Chetsang Rinpoche was able to learn English quickly, and observe the many differences between Asian countries and America. He noticed how important education is in the United States, and that many Americans study to have specialized knowledge so they become experts in science and developers of advanced technology. Though they have great progress in business, science and technology, the extreme focus on material objects - having nice things - is dangerously unbalanced, he thought.

The Tibetans, on the other hand, were far more advanced in spirituality - they had more religious knowledge. They harnessed all their brainpower for spiritual progress. They even spent a lot of money on making Tibetan Buddhist texts written in gold ink on the most expensive paper available, bound in book covers that artists took many weeks to create. They had expensive statues, and magnificent temples and stupas. But they didn't have much progress in anything else compared to other countries. Rinpoche thought that it's best to have a balance – to develop both spirituality and technology together harmoniously.

Working at McDonald's had to come to an end, though, because Chetsang Rinpoche's parents moved away from the area. Rinpoche would have been glad to continue working there, and the McDonald's manager even tried to keep Rinpoche there by offering him a promotion.



But he had to move along with his parents to a new town – Arlington, Texas, so his father could live near Norbu Chen, the American man who had healed him. Rinpoche's father wanted to continue working for him and take care of him because he had become seriously ill.

(photo of Norbu Chen)

On the first day they drove to the new town, Rinpoche's parents drive off in their new car first, and Rinpoche followed in his father's old Toyota. Just before they got to Dallas, the highway divided where there were huge traffic signs. Suddenly Rinpoche's father noticed he had to exit. In the last moment he took the exit.

But there was too much traffic for Rinpoche to follow. He had to drive straight toward Dallas. His parents were terribly worried – it would be impossible for them to find Rinpoche or for Rinpoche to find them again in that confusion of traffic and unfamiliar roads and highways. It seemed hopeless. They had no cellphones in those days. Rinpoche's father drove back to the place they last saw him on the highway and searched for the old Toyota for a long time. Suddenly out of the corner of his eye Rinpoche's father saw the Toyota turning into a gas station! They raced into the gas station, relieved that by some miracle, they found their son. Rinpoche got out of the car with a smile, as if it were just another adventure. He had driven all

the way to Dallas and then drove back to turn off at the correct exit. And here they were in a massively crowded area in a tangle of highways, like two needles meeting in a haystack.



Later, Rinpoche got into the old Toyota and explored the United States on his own. Although his parents had lived in America for six years by then, they still had a hard time finding their way around and were hesitant to drive in unfamiliar areas. Rinpoche, however, simply got into his car and took his own tours without any particular destination, for days or even for weeks at a time. It was a whole new and interesting world to explore.

(photo of Rinpoche at the White House in Washington D.C.)

After they moved, Rinpoche went to the library at a nearby college every morning to study on his own to improve his English. He watched videos, and especially enjoyed videos about animals and their behavior.



He was particularly amused by information about the yeti, a huge apelike creature that some people claimed to have seen in the Himalaya mountains in Tibet and Nepal. There were many photographs of strange footprints, a few skin and hair samples and stories of some Nepalese people living in the Himalayas that led people to believe in it. Rinpoche believed that the yeti really was a very large bear that people may have seen standing on its hind legs, leading people to believe it was human-like.

(picture of very rare Tibetan blue bear, which may be extinct in the wild)

Occasionally, people had seen really huge bears in Tibet, even larger than yaks. Rinpoche himself had once seen a monstrously huge bearskin, short and shiny fur with a long white stripe, in a house in Tibet, spread across a bed and part of the floor. Only a few people in remote areas had ever seen one of these huge animals, and maybe that was what the yeti really was.

Rinpoche got a job in a restaurant - a steak and ale house - in Arlington, Texas. First, he worked as a dishwasher, and later as a kitchen helper, where he mostly had to fry potatoes and take care of the salad bar.

After living for two years in the United States, he started thinking about returning to India. He always knew he would return to take his position as the leader of the Drikung lineage. However, he hadn't responded to all the Drikung lamas' letters pleading for him to return because he didn't know exactly when he would return. But now he talked to his father about it. He told him that there had never really been any other option but to return and lead the Drikung lineage. Rinpoche had brought two sets of monks' robes to the United States, one of which had been given to him from the Dalai Lama, and he had given them to his mother to take good care of because he knew he would need them in the future.

One day, Rinpoche received a package from India - a copy of a very rare Tibetan text on the history of the Drikung lineage leaders, the "throne holders," written by the Fourth Chetsang Rinpoche, his own previous incarnation, who lived 200 years ago. Rinpoche was fascinated by the book and decided he wanted to study the history of Tibet, the Drikung lineage, and his own previous lives. He couldn't remember his past lives, so he had to learn about them in the book.

At the end of 1977, Rinpoche decided to move in with his sister Namlha in New Jersey. He packed his things in his car, started driving, and just showed up at his sister's house without telling them he was coming. Fortunately, it wasn't too much of a shock for Namlha's husband Lobsang, because he had grown up with rinpoches – one brother was the Dalai Lama and two other brothers were tulku lamas. When Chetsang Rinpoche arrived at his door, Lobsang said to his wife,

"That is certainly a rinpoche! He's a stranger in the United States, knows hardly any English, and just drives all the way from Texas to us on his own. And on top of everything, he arrives without letting us know beforehand!"

While he was living in New Jersey, Rinpoche took the bus every day to New York City to study Tibetan history at the public library. He was surprised that there were many books about Tibet. Studying these texts as well as the special book sent from India helped him understand the Drikung lineage and his previous incarnations which were involved in events recorded in Tibetan history – the heroes and villains, wars, corruption, weakness and power. Essentially, the Drikung lineage was an epic struggle through hundreds of years to create goodness in the world, to lead people to the purity of mind that would defeat all suffering.

Rinpoche contacted Konchog Samten in India, asking him if he knew anything about the past lives of Chetsang Rinpoche and Chetsang Rinpoche. Konchog Samten wrote back that he really didn't know much about them. So Rinpoche visited some Tibetan masters living in New Jersey, including the Mongolian Geshe Wangyal, who he met when he first arrived in the United States, to learn what he could from them.

In the early part of 1978, Lobsang invited Sakya Trizin, the leader of the Sakya lineage, and his wise old teacher to their home for lunch. The Sakya lineage is one of the four branches of Tibetan Buddhism, which are: Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug. Sakya Trizin was married and had long hair and earrings in the tradition of the Sakya lineage, in which the leadership passes from father to son. Chetsang Rinpoche volunteered to be the driver for Sakya Trizin and his teacher, hoping to learn more about Tibetan history as they drove around in his car. Sakya Trizin's teacher thought this was very strange, remarking,

"These days the world is really crazy, that's obvious. His Holiness the Drikung throne holder is my driver!"

Chetsang Rinpoche asked them many questions, and Sakya Trizin's teacher didn't mind at all. He said, "Only someone who asks lots of questions will come to understand things deeply."

The Dalai Lama's representative in the U.S. advised Rinpoche to come out of hiding and let people know who he really was. He had such an interesting background, and he had so much knowledge and experiences to share. The representative then organized interviews and lectures for him to speak to the public.



Rinpoche noticed that in America, advertising was really important. He thought, "Maybe the Drikung lineage needs a little advertising." It was so unknown in the world, and he thought that maybe a logo, a symbol that's easy to remember, would help. He thought about how the logo should look. He decided it should be a HUNG syllable in the center of a sun and moon disk. The Tibetan sound of HUNG - as in "Om Mani Padme Hung" and "Om Ah Hung" - is the most important sound in many mantras. He got a Tibetan graphic designer to help finalize the design.

Now, after three years in the United States, Chetsang Rinpoche was ready to go back to India. He didn't want to lose any more time. He had flights to India booked, with stops in Canada, London and Switzerland so he could give lectures there on his way back to India.

Rinpoche was well aware of what he was getting into. He was expected to take on the leadership of an organization that was in danger of disappearing and bring it back to life. Several other Kagyu lineages had already disappeared. The Drikung Kagyu now only consisted of a couple of monks and a few dedication practitioners. In Ladakh, there were villages that had always been connected with the Drikung lineage, but the people were extremely poor and couldn't afford to repair the old decaying monasteries in Ladakh, let alone help build new monasteries elsewhere. One big problem was that there weren't enough qualified teachers. Another problem is that the lamas and devotees didn't have skills to develop an organization. Rinpoche knew that skills in business, how to communicate formally and how to negotiate and make agreements would be necessary to develop a religious organization.

Also, Rinpoche needed to catch up with the Buddhist studies that he missed during the many years he lived under Communist rule. It was twenty years since he left the monastery! He would need to study Buddhist philosophy, receive empowerments and do intensive meditation practice alone in retreat. Somehow, Rinpoche would have to be a manager and a yogi, a teacher and a student, all at the same time!



(Photo of Chetsang Rinpoche (left) and people welcoming him (right) at the Ashoka hotel)

Rinpoche arrived in Delhi, India in 1978. The next day there was a formal welcoming ceremony in a big meeting room at the Ashoka Hotel. The lamas urged him to take the monk's vows and be a fully ordained monk. Rinpoche didn't want to disappoint them, but he had a lot of responsibilities as the lineage leader to build up and strengthen the lineage, so it wasn't time yet to focus on being a monk. The lamas anxiously begged him to at least take the beginner monk vows and be a novice monk. Rinpoche had always kept perfect moral discipline like a monk even though he hadn't taken the vows before he left India. To relieve the lamas' anxiety, he agreed to take the novice monk's vows.



(photo of receiving novice monks' vows from Dalai Lama, and a statue of Amitayus)

A few days later, he received the vows from the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. The Dalai Lama gave him a statue of Amitayus to wish Chetsang Rinpoche long life, a Buddha statue to represent discipline, a book of Milarepa's songs to represent speech, and a vajra and bell to support his mind in practice. The Dalai Lama gave him advice and encouragement on his new responsibility.

Some ideas began to form in Rinpoche's mind as to his new role as Drikung leader. He began having exciting plans for a Buddhist education center with a library. And at the same time, he kept the humble and tranquil attitude of a monk and looked forward to entering deeply into Buddhist study and practice.

QUESTIONS:

1. What type of knowledge did Chetsang Rinpoche notice that Americans were very advanced in? (science, technology and business)
2. What type of knowledge were Tibetans very advanced in? (spiritual knowledge)
3. What did Chetsang Rinpoche study at the library in New York? (Tibetan history)
4. What did Chetsang Rinpoche do for Sakya Trizin and his teacher? (he drove them around in his car)
5. What is the Tibetan syllable on the Drikung logo that Rinpoche created? (Hung)
6. Who gave Chetsang Rinpoche his novice monks' vows? (the Dalai Lama)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Balance:

Chetsang Rinpoche noticed that people's lives can get out of balance when they focus too much on one thing.

Americans seemed out of balance because they focus too much on material things that add convenience and comfort to our lives, without focusing enough on spirituality.

And Tibetans were the opposite.

He noticed that Tibetans could benefit from the Americans' knowledge of science, business and technology, and Americans could benefit from Tibetans' knowledge of spirituality.

So both cultures could become more balanced.

Chetsang Rinpoche also wanted to keep his own life in balance.

He spent time with his family, worked and learned English, but he also spent time studying and learning what he needed to know for his spiritual life.

He needed practical worldly knowledge and spiritual knowledge in order to be a capable religious leader.

He thought that focusing too much on having nice things is *dangerously* unbalanced. What happens when we focus on science and technology without focus on spirituality? People have modern things that give comforts and conveniences, but still aren't happy. They are often anxious about losing what they have, stressed from working hard, and depressed when they don't feel satisfied with what they have. This can be dangerous. Sometimes we hear "You need balance in your life." What does that mean for you? You need to exercise, eat healthy food, and get enough sleep – and not study too late, eat too much junk food, or spend too much time with television or videogames. And you shouldn't spend too much time with friends and neglect your homework. You need to balance your body's needs, social needs and educational needs. "Balance in your life" also means taking care of your mental and spiritual needs - your mind. That includes taking time to relax, talk with friends, and do something fun. But more importantly, it means taking time to make your mind strong and resilient, so you can cope well when difficulties arise.

The best way to do that is by spiritual practice.

What are some ways that you practice Dharma?

Do you remember to be compassionate to family members and others?

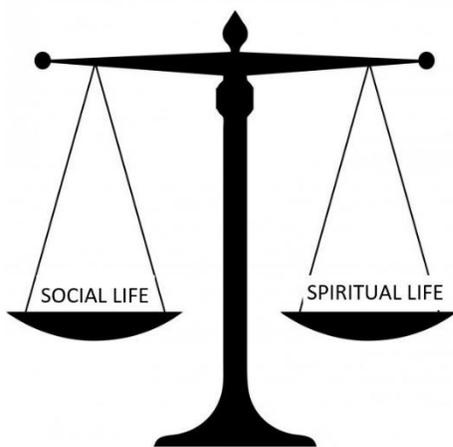
Do you look for ways you can help others, including your parents, wherever you are?

Do you remember to be patient and tolerant when someone is annoying you?

Do you remember not to make fun of others or say bad things about others?

Do you practice mindfulness?

Practicing mindfulness doesn't take any time at all – it just means remembering to be mindful while you are doing simple things in your everyday life like walking, eating or sitting,



being totally aware of what you feel, hear, smell or taste right now, moment by moment, without thinking about anything else. While sitting, do it with eyes closed.

Do you say a prayer or mantra in the morning or at night?

Saying prayers or a mantra or doing a little meditation can start your day with love, compassion, and good feelings toward others.

And it can calm your mind at night, so you wake up feeling happier and more refreshed.

Imagine the merit you create, the good results you will have, by taking a couple moments to do prayers!

And compare that to the time you spend talking about things that are not important, that won't benefit you.

Doing daily prayers and mantras and remembering to be mindful and compassionate are easy ways to keep a balance in your life!