

Foreword to *Lord of the Dance* by Chagdud Tulku

Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche arrived in America on October 24, 1979. He has resided here ever since. But from the time of his birth in Eastern Tibet, in 1930, to his arrival in the States, there unfolded a story as amazing and remarkable as any I have heard. This book is that story.

The purpose of this Introduction is to set that story in some sort of context, for there are many things that Rinpoche simply will not tell you, even though this is his autobiography.

He will not speak of his seemingly boundless compassion, a compassion that to us, his students, seems to define his very being. He will not talk of his profound awareness of the primordial nature of the mind, an awareness he seems to be living and transmitting twenty four hours a day. He will not tell you of the thousands and thousands of people to whom he has served as teacher, doctor, master, or friend. He will give little hint that he is a renowned scholar, artist, poet, and physician. Or that, after the Chinese invasion of Tibet, he established a refugee camp in Orissa, India, which the Indian government considered a model of economic self-sufficiency. Of all of his remarkable accomplishments over the last six decades--virtually none of that will he tell you, and none of that will you find in this autobiography.

When Rinpoche's family, students, and friends began pestering him to write down the stories that make up this volume--for they are indeed magical stories, unbelievable stories, true stories--Rinpoche demurred. He saw no reason to record his life. But everybody obnoxiously persisted. When Rinpoche finally relented and began this book (the actual process of which is described in the Afterword), he took a decidedly "human" approach. He spoke, not of the

accomplishments that have so defined his life, but mostly of his human foibles, his mistakes, what he saw as his own faults, using these stories to make his teaching points at his expense, so to speak.

Anybody who knows Rinpoche knows that he would do it no other way. Never mind that he is one of the greatest Dzogchen Masters now living. Never mind that he is one of the first Tibetan Masters to take Westerners fully into his confidence and trust, and give freely and totally the teachings of the Great Perfection, Buddhism's highest path. Never mind that he is virtually alone in fully transmitting women in the Dharma. Never mind that his organization has no hierarchy, that all of his students have full and complete access to him virtually twenty four hours a day, if they are sincere. None of this will make its way into the following pages.

When Rinpoche landed in Los Angeles on that day in October, 1979, he and his wife, Jane Tromge, went first to San Francisco.

As I mentioned, besides being a highly trained lama, meditation master, poet, and artist, Rinpoche is a Tibetan physician. In 1980 [?] he was asked to visit Eugene, Oregon, in order to teach Tibetan medicine to a group of American doctors. At the request of His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, he remained in the area and founded Dechhen Ling, in Cottage Grove, Oregon, which would soon become the first center of the Chagdud Gonpa Foundation in the West. The original Chagdud Gonpa Monastery was established in Tibet in 1131, and is one of the few monasteries in Eastern Tibet to survive the Chinese invasion. Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche is the eleventh [?] tulku or incarnation of the original founder of Chagdud Gonpa Monastery (about which you will hear in the following pages).

In 1983, at the request of his students, Rinpoche formally founded the Chagdud Gonpa Foundation, at River House in Cottage Grove, to provide instruction in the methods and wisdom of

Tibetan Buddhism, including the arts, philosophy, and meditation practices of the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition.

But already, in 1981, Rinpoche had begun public teaching, using a style that evolved in a very "organic" fashion. At this time Rinpoche spoke little English and had no Tibetan translator. As he began learning a somewhat halting and broken English, a few of his students learned to paraphrase his "English" in a more comprehensible style. Tsering Everest, in particular, became his almost constant "translator"--not translating Tibetan into English, for Tsering spoke little Tibetan, but rather translating Rinpoche's "English" into "real" English.

Rinpoche, with Tsering "translating," gave teachings at Ojai, California, and then at an international Sufi Convention in Eugene--and his "public teaching" had begun. At River House he would see dozens of students and patients during the day, and teach Dharma each evening, often late into the night. He began traveling and teaching constantly, at Esalen and other centers, and the reception accorded him was immediate and enthusiastic. Largely, I think, this was (and is) because of his great humor and his unmistakable sincerity.

Rinpoche constantly drove home one central point: In one's spiritual practice, and in life itself, one's motivation is absolutely crucial.

The key to it all is pure-heartedness, one's own selfless aspirations, one's pure motivation. Your actions and those of another may not be so different; the difference is in the heart, in the motivation for what you do. And that's what makes all the difference in the outcome of your actions in the world. You must have the purity of your own heart, the purity of your own stance and your intentions towards others and the world around you. That is the seed cause of all inner peace.

At about this same time, Rinpoche created Rigdzin Gyatsal, a retreat center in Oregon where, every year for the last ten years, he has conducted two-month-long winter retreats devoted to all facets of the Dzogchen or Great Perfection teachings.

Tibetan Buddhism generally divides the Buddha's teachings into three large categories. The first, or Hinayana, stresses the basic meditation practices of concentration and insight, or calmness and awareness. The second, or Mahayana, stresses the path of compassion and selfless motivation. The third, or Vajrayana, is the specifically Tantric path, and it is divided into three major classes: the path of body or form (mahayoga), the path of speech or energy (anuyoga), and the path of mind or primordial nature (atiyoga). Although all of these teachings are profound and transformative, it is the latter--Atiyoga or Dzogchen (the "Great Perfection")--that is generally regarded as the pinnacle, the very summit, of the Buddha's many teachings. And although Rinpoche makes all of these teachings available to his students, it is the Great Perfection that is at the heart of Rinpoche's transmission.

When Rinpoche was only 4 years old, and had not yet had any formal meditation training, he had a vision in which a yogi appeared before him and recited this short verse, which is in effect a consummate summary of the Great Perfection:

Dualistic thought is the net that traps

The holder of the kingdom is spontaneous awareness

Display is from unmoving, unceasing awareness

Like a child's play, nothing to abandon, nothing to grasp

Rinpoche began his formal training, and eventually mastered all of the paths and stages leading up to the Great Perfection, including mahayoga, anuyoga, and mahamudra. But he wasn't satisfied.

Everything seemed to be going well. Outwardly my activity alternated between reciting prayers and performing ceremonies for others, and learning and practicing meditation for my own development. Inwardly I attained new levels of understanding, greater mastery of my thoughts and emotions and a wider, more open perspective through my meditation. Secretly I was working with profound aspects of energy, the potential to realize the inseparability of absolute nature and ultimate bliss [anuyoga]. I was self-directed and confident and at the same time the beneficiary of superb guidance.

Yet things were not perfect. Through my practice of mahamudra [the culmination of anuyoga] I recognized the fallacy of the concept of "I," the fallacy of the ego as a reference point for reality. Mahamudra meditation brought maturity to my understanding, yet I did not experience what I had previously experienced as a child through my visions and dreams, an absolute nakedness of being. I felt like a deaf-mute who had once tasted sugar and could not find a method to re-create that experience. I did not brood on it, but I could not be satisfied with less.

In the following pages you will see how Rinpoche, through the kindness of his own teachers of the Great Perfection, rediscovered or recognized his own true nature--"an absolute nakedness of being"--a beginningless wisdom that Rinpoche had tasted even as a child. And it is the precious, precious teachings of the Great Perfection that, among so many other treasures, Rinpoche is bringing to the West.

In 1983, through a generous gift of land by a student, Rinpoche created Ati Ling. Located on a high bluff overlooking vineyards in the wine country of the Napa Valley, this land now provides solitude for teachings and meditation in close proximity to San Francisco. Meditation groups meet regularly in the Napa Valley and the Bay Area and Rinpoche conducts teaching retreats and seminars several times a year. And meditation centers would eventually be established in Los Angeles, Canada, Europe, Brazil....

But Rinpoche was still looking for a principle residence and central headquarters for Chagdud Gonpa Foundation. In September of 1988 he and his students acquired 286 acres in Northern California's Trinity Mountains, and Rigdzin Ling was born. The heart of the development at Rigdzin Ling is a traditional Tibetan Buddhist temple. The Lha Khang (Abode of the Deities) is being created by Rinpoche and his students and will include an extensive display of Vajrayana sculpture and decorative arts. In addition, a School of Nyingma Studies will offer continuing instruction in Vajrayana arts, Tibetan language, and Vajrayana philosophy and meditation.

Other projects located at Rigdzin Ling include the Mahakaruna Foundation, which provides support for poor and infirm Tibetans in the refugee communities of India and Nepal; the Tibetan Library, which is striving to purchase and preserve rare and irreplaceable Tibetan texts; and Padma Publishing, to make the works of the Nyingma tradition available in English, as well as translating and editing Rinpoche's own teachings.

Doing spiritual practice, we live our life constantly looking and remembering that this is like a dream, a mirage, a rainbow, or like a bubble in the water. At the same time, we practice compassion for all those beings who cling to the truth of their relative experience, and in so doing, suffer.

This effortful path of the accumulation of merit functions to reduce the causes of suffering. But applying these methods, we could become attached to them as if they were the final answer, whereas this type of merit is just creating positive dreams. No matter how good the medicine, if we take too much of it, it's going to make us sick.

So we relax into the nature of absolute truth. As the Buddha taught, in absolute truth, nothing really comes, and nothing really goes. Nothing is born, nothing ceases. Neither something nor nothing, experience is neither one nor many. Absolute truth is beyond all of these ordinary concepts. Words can't name it. This absolute truth is wisdom....

Although Rinpoche stresses the importance of meditation retreats, central to his teaching is the absolute necessity of incorporating the spiritual path into one's daily life, or rather, making daily life the spiritual path itself.

The practice of recognizing absolute nature is expressed through view, meditation, and action. View is the understanding of the absolute nature of mind. Meditation is the effortless, faultless resting in the true absolute nature of mind. Action is applying relative virtue and absolute wisdom in all that we do.

All it requires, though it sounds simple, is that on the one hand, one nurtures pure-heartedness or selfless motivation and corrects and eradicates less-than-pure motivation. And, on the other hand, one allows the mind to rest in its own truth, its own fundamental nature or pure presence. And so, moment to moment in daily life, there is constant attention to both pure-heartedness and resting in the mind's pure nature. This is how one can incorporate the spiritual path in one's daily life.

As I said, Rinpoche's door is open virtually 24 hours a day. He still practices with his students. He asks nobody to do anything that he won't do with them. I still remember vividly one winter retreat. In addition to the Great Perfection, Rinpoche was teaching another group of students the advanced anuyoga practice of the "inner heat." This is a very difficult yoga, and Rinpoche was teaching it in the traditional Tibetan fashion, which meant that the retreatants, among other things, had to practice outside, in the dead of snowy winter, in not much more than a loincloth. The conditions were grueling. And there was Rinpoche, every morning at the crack of dawn, sitting in the snowy conditions with his students, helping them on. He never missed a day.

He seems to meet his students exactly where they are, and give them exactly what they need, without fail. When I first read portions of this autobiography, I, being a typically skeptical Westerner, had trouble with portions of the "magical" stories--knives getting pulled out of rocks, objects materializing, objects dematerializing.... I finally asked him, "Did these things actually happen? Or are they just teaching lessons? Are they really true?"

He told me probably the only thing I could have heard at the time. "You have to understand that it's all a dream. When you see that it is all a dream, you relax your grasping, you relax hope and fear, and you spontaneously rest in the absolute nature of mind--and that is the only thing that can be called truth."

Perhaps one of his students put it best:

Sometimes he flashes forth with words that have absolutely stunning impact, like a lightning bolt. Irresistible. Then, after the shock, there is a freshness, like the clean air that follows a thunderstorm. The whole environment of one's being feels purified. As for Rinpoche, he is

immovable. His love is still there. His kindness is still there. The incomprehensible vastness of his mind that holds all the phenomena of our own is still there.

And so Rinpoche continues--his mind's awareness never moves, his body and speech never cease.

I am still gathering my students. Perhaps some of the dharma seeds I plant now will ripen in future lifetimes, just as I know some now ripening were planted in previous lifetimes. Sometimes I see someone who looks familiar in my teachings and I ask when we met before. They say we haven't met, and I wonder if we did not meet in more distant times. Sometimes people have a similar recognition when they see me. Vajrayana bonds are very strong and are not dissolved by the illusory displays of death and birth. We meet and meet again until ultimately we recognize that we are inseparable in enlightened Buddhature.