



*Letter to My Teacher,  
the Lama of the Many Lifetimes*

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*An Introduction to  
Garchen Rinpoche's Biography*

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*Sue-Sue Luu  
February 2009*

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*Namo Guru pé...*

In the afternoon on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the month of February in 2003, I arrived at the Garchen Buddhist Institute in Chino Valley, Arizona, to begin my first series of interviews with you for your biography. Rinpoche, do you remember, that evening during our meal, when I shared with you and the lamas<sup>1</sup> the dream that I had less than a year ago?

I found myself in a very spacious teaching hall, as I recalled to you. There were many large stone steps leading to this room and I saw rows and rows of people sitting in the dark, silently moving like silken waves from one side to the other. The teaching session had just come to an end. The space was completely sealed with darkness outside, and inside, it was dimly lit only by a row of flickering butter lamps. Your throne chair was set

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<sup>1</sup> Traga Rinpoche, Lama Bu Nima, Gape Lama and Lama Tamphel (who later became known as Khenpo Tamphel).

to one side of the altar in the room, and I remember asking myself, “*Why is Rinpoche’s throne chair set to one side of the altar?*” I had never seen this place before.

Suddenly, as you began to walk out of the hall with Lama Bu Nima and another man by your side, I saw myself rushing toward you. As I stopped in front of you, I reached out my right hand and pressed my palm against your chest almost instantaneously, and said, “*Rinpoche, I know this is where your heart is... and I am touching it right now.*”

That was what I said to you. That was what I heard myself saying. My voice almost cracked, like a little child, so amazed by what she had just discovered!

I remember myself thinking, “*But this is the right-hand side! The right-hand side! Hearts usually don’t lie on the right-hand side!*” Even though, I still held my palm firmly on your chest, and it felt as if what I had just said a second ago spontaneously radiated out from my own heart again.

A moment flashed by.

There was total silence when you placed your right

hand on the back of my hand against your chest, with your face very close to mine; I began to sense the warmth radiating from your hand. You just looked at me in the eyes, and then simply said, “*You are right. This is where my heart is. And you are touching it.*”

Another moment flashed by.

Dawn was fast approaching, and a crisp, new day was being ushered in. I leapt out from that dream, feeling your presence in the palm of my hand!

There was nothing in this palm of mine yet I kept staring at it, feeling that *something* was there, actually there. Outside in the woods, the light was gently shining through, and a moment later, the morning sun quietly entered my room...

Still, it felt as if there was *something* so tiny and so precious wanting to jump out from the palm of my hand! I was almost certain that something *was* there, electrifying, palpating! This tiny and precious *something* was so vibrant and seemed to be carrying an indescribable, powerful, vast energy, an energy of compassion, that suddenly pervaded my

whole body and all of my senses. I had to use my left hand to rub the inside of my right palm, thinking that perhaps there would be something tangible that I could catch a hold of, feeling completely overwhelmed, yet completely blissful.

I called out to you, “Rinpoche *oi!*”<sup>2</sup>, and cried in silence...

That was in the spring of the year 2002.

A month later, you arrived at our house in Maryland for your annual visit and teaching tour on the East Coast. One day, Lee came and took Lama Bu Nima, Lama A Bo and our Tibetan translator, Tashi, out on an errand, and left us alone for lunch. The house was unusually quiet; there was no one else around, just the two of us having a meal together. I served you your *thukpa* as usual, and sat and ate with you in the sunlit dining room.

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<sup>2</sup> In the Vietnamese language, *oi* is an intimate expression of calling out to someone.

At one point, I looked at the cloth bag which you always carried with you around your chest – just like your prayer wheel, it was something that you rarely parted with! Since I don't speak Tibetan and you don't speak English, I pointed to the bag, making playful gestures and asking you what was in there. To my great surprise, you laid down your prayer wheel and began to search the bag, and then, slowly pulled out something that was wrapped in a piece of silk-like cloth that was old and worn out. I watched in awe as you took the time to unwrap the many layers of cloth, one by one, to reveal a tiny, miniature red notebook, about 1 x 2-1/2 inches in size. The veils of time were being slowly removed... The pages of a hidden treasure book began to open, and they whispered into my ears their little long lost secrets... An unfamiliar yet surprisingly intimate world began to dance in front of my eyes.

Without saying a word, you reached for my right hand, opened up my palm, and placed that miniature notebook in the middle of the palm.

The notebook was so... tiny, so very tiny!

I almost felt like crying the moment it touched my hand. Suddenly, I remembered your face in the



*Garchen Rinpoche holding his prayer wheel and miniature notebook. Photo credit: Katherine Lambert*

fleeting dream, the dark hall, the feeling of bliss, the indescribably vast energy of compassion, your heart, the blush of dawn... I stared at that tiny little red notebook, speechless, not knowing what to say to you.

Do you remember, Rinpoche, how you continued to repeat many Tibetan words to me, trying to explain what that tiny little notebook was all about? The language that you spoke, the Eastern Tibetan dialect that seemed both embracing and exotic - none of what you said was comprehensible to my ordinary ears. But somehow, through your facial expressions and hand gestures, I understood, and later, was able to verify the details with our Tibetan translator.

I understood that, while in Chinese prison, you secretly took these notes and hid this notebook with you. I heard you whisper the words Milarepa, Tara, Mahamudra, and then, the name Khenpo Munsel. Inside the book, there was a tiny black and white photo of your root teacher, Khenpo Munsel, your beloved heart Lama. All the scripts written in there were no bigger than the size of a leg of an ant!

Rinpoche, since then, I have learned that you had

spent the prime of your youth being imprisoned by the Chinese Communists for close to twenty years. You were then a young reincarnated lama, barely twenty years old, with the fierce temper of a warrior. It was in prison that you met your karmic teacher, Khenpo Munsel, and it was Khenpo Munsel who taught you what true love was all about.

There, in prison, you went on practicing under Khenpo Munsel's guidance, and there, you were able to purify your mindstream, dispel your hatred and aversion toward your enemies, and transform your mental afflictions into a mind of pristine, selfless love for all beings without exception! You have actualized the wisdom mind of your Lama, and forever since, have always dwelled in remembrance of your Lama.

When I finished examining each page of the notebook in amazement, do you remember, Rinpoche, the moment I looked up and exclaimed, "*Rinpoche oi, one day, I will write about this little red book of yours...*" ?

I am sure you did not understand my words, nor the strange language that I spoke, but in your heart, I have no doubt that you already knew.

The day after, during my private audience with you, I made the request, and you gracefully accepted to allow me to record your life stories in writing. You told me, “*Come to Arizona, and I will tell you all about my life, and then you can write about it.*”

So I left for Chino Valley, Arizona to spend time interviewing you for the book in the winter of 2003.

Rinpoche, that first evening in Arizona at the dining table, when I finished re-telling my dream to you and the lamas, Traga Rinpoche asked me if I knew about the story of Milarepa’s disciple, Rechungpa, and the auspicious dream in which he visited a dakini’s land? This dream was a premonition for him to later write about the life stories of his lama. Traga Rinpoche’s question took me by surprise, and at that moment, I could not recall all the details about the yogi Milarepa and his moon-like disciple, Rechungpa. I was very much a beginning student who just entered the gate of Tibetan Buddhism only a very short time ago, and even though I had read the stories of

Milarepa before, things were not very clear in my mind.

Thus, Traga Rinpoche began to tell me about the wonderful tale of Rechungpa in which he dreamed that he was invited by the celestial beings – the dakinis, to visit a pure land. There, he listened to Buddha Akshobya giving teachings about the life stories of many sublime masters, such as Tilopa, Naropa and Marpa. At the end of the teaching, the Buddha announced to everyone in the assembly that the next day, there would be yet an even more profound teaching about the life stories of another great master of unparalleled qualities, and that the stories of this master, Milarepa, would overshadow what everyone had just heard that day.

Rechungpa woke up and understood that the dream was a hint that he had to request his teacher to tell him about his extraordinary life. Following that, in a second dream, Rechungpa saw the dakinis again in their pure land, and they encouraged him to do so. The next morning, with a heart all set on the quest of recording Milarepa's stories for the benefit of future generations, Rechungpa went to see his teacher and made the request, again and again.

When I came back home to Maryland, after ten days of intense interviews with you, the first thing I did was to pull out from my bookshelves a copy of Milarepa's biography, Tibet's greatest yogi-saint and poet. I began to read it over and over. At the beginning of his life, Milarepa was just an ordinary person, just like we all are, and under the influence of his mother and her cry for vengeance, Milarepa had committed very negative deeds. However, due to his remorse, due to his conviction in the law of cause and effects, and due to his renunciation and unceasing efforts to free himself from cyclic existence, Milarepa went through unimaginable hardships to sincerely practice what his teacher had taught him. Under the most severe circumstances and trials, Milarepa purified himself of his delusions, the seed of all suffering. It is said that Milarepa attained enlightenment in one single lifetime.

Rinpoche, not long ago, I only saw Tara in you.

Now, in you, I could also see Milarepa.

After re-reading his biography, everything began to unfold so vividly and clearly in my mind, as if each and every word in Milarepa's life stories radiated out like golden rays of sunlight, chasing away layers of thick, dark clouds!

Soon after that, I came across the following verses by Francesca Fremantle in "*Luminous Emptiness: A Guide to the Tibetan Book of the Dead*:"<sup>3</sup>

*Understanding very little of my guru's teachings,  
Even that little not put into practice,  
How can I write as though it has entered my heart,  
Like a dewdrop dreaming that it can hold the sun?*

That was some time in September of 2003.

It was the beginning of autumn, where I lived. One day, early in the morning, I stood in "your" room upstairs - *Rinpoche's room*, as our family would have called it - gazing at the back of the woods through a large-sized window, and watched

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<sup>3</sup> Fremantle, Francesca. *Luminous Emptiness: A Guide to the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2003.

dewdrops after dewdrops starting to melt on the dark branches... The sun rays kissed them all – the leaves, the boughs, the stones, the stepped terrain, the forgotten bird nest – gently and sweetly, for autumn mornings are gentle and sweet, and I beheld the soft, cotton-like floating clouds... In the midst of this silent performance of mother nature, one dewdrop after another continued to vanish in the blink of an eye.

I left the room with Fremantle's verses lingering on... For many days and nights, I heard them inside me. My heart ached a little each and every time I thought of them...

Slowly and ever so slowly, as the years passed by, I have come to realize that the dewdrops have not melted by themselves, while the sun remained elsewhere, chasing after the billowing clouds... But that the sunlight had already dissolved into those dewdrops! They had become one, and together, they dissolved...

In each dewdrop, the presence of the sun!

*Namo Guru pé...*

Do you remember, Rinpoche, when I asked you what preparation or practice I would need to engage in, to successfully complete this writing project so that others could benefit from it? And your answer to my question?

*“Pray to Tara, but don’t pray in the sense of asking for her blessings or for help, but pray until you can feel Tara’s compassion enter your heart. When your heart becomes one with Tara’s, you will then understand, and can write about me from your heart...”*

That first night in Arizona, after listening to your humbling advice, I took a walk from the Lama house to the main temple. It was very cold outside, and I could hear the winds rushing across the empty valleys. Traga Rinpoche was doing prostrations alone in the temple, his body stretched out on the wooden floor so gracefully. Quietly, I sat down with my back against a small wall, facing the altar.

That was the first time that I ever sat down in that spacious hall at night. Then, all of a sudden, I began to recognize everything. There were many large steps leading to the main temple, looking out at the red-rock valleys in the far distance. Outside, it was completely dark, but if one looked up, one could see a sea of bright, bright stars in the desert sky! Inside, there was no other light, except for a row of small lotus lamps of different colors on the altar, with your throne chair set to one side. The lotus lamps casted verydimmed lights and soft shadows in the room and they reminded me of the flickering butter lamps in my dream.

I held my palms together and began to pray to Tara...

Rinpoche, I knew then that it was in that teaching hall that I had touched your heart in that passing dream...

The morning before I left Arizona after the first series of interviews, you told me not to worry about how long it was going to take to complete the work. You blessed my head and assured me

that “*the longer it takes, the better.*”

I have come back to Chino Valley many times since then to spend time doing follow-up interviews with you and the lamas, and to work on my writing. The leaves of time continued to change colors, along with the seasons of life, falling on the ground ceaselessly, one after another...

Throughout the years and the many obstacles that I have encountered along the way, it seemed that I had spent only a little bit of time writing your stories, but a lot of time searching for the right drops of meaning and transformation of truth in my own heart. Oftentimes, as I reflected on this whole development, on my myriad delusions against the sacred journey to my own spiritual maturity and to your heart – Tara’s heart, I could not help but become convinced that I would never be able to complete this quest in this lifetime!

I realized now how deeply kind you were to tell me to take my time...

It is meant for my own heart to mature...

And so I pray and pray, that through the pure intention and unfaltering efforts coming from the depth of *our* hearts, your stories will manifest, and that they will inspire and liberate many...

May the extraordinary life and biography of Kyabje Triptrul Garchen Rinpoche benefit all beings for all lives to come.

May the hearts of all those who come across this writing in the future, be touched by his suffering and transformation, so that tears will dwell in their eyes, and they too will aspire to follow in his footsteps and generate limitless Bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, like that of Tara.

May his life stories and blessings help grow the seed of Dharma, radiate a sun of wisdom, and never cease to fulfill an ocean of loving-kindness and compassion for all wayfaring beings without exception.

And may all of Garchen Rinpoche's disciples, throughout lifetimes, become a *tsa-tsa* of their guru, in body, speech and mind, with the kind of love as vast as his!



Rinpoche *oi*,  
with the indestructible drop  
of Bodhicitta  
in your living heart,  
please guide  
my hands...



On the 4<sup>th</sup> day  
of the month of February  
in the year of 2009  
in North Potomac, Maryland

# Chapter One

*For the first seven years of his life,*

*Konchog Gyaltsen never knew  
who his father was.*

*He did not even know that he had a father.*

*The thought never occurred to him!*

## **1. Birth and Childhood at Dong-go**

Konchog Gyaltzen was told that early one summer, some wild birds came to his village. These birds usually lived in the forest but they landed on the roof of the house where his mother lived, and stayed there for a few days. No one could chase them away and so the villagers thought of it as an unusual sign.

It was then that Konchog Gyaltzen was conceived.

Soon afterward, his mother had a dream in which she saw blazing sunlight coming from the east and

radiating toward her. All sunshine, bright, beautiful, golden sunshine. It pervaded her dream, her senses, her very being. It was as if she was being bathed in wonder. The light dissolved into her, and she woke up.

Konchog Gyaltzen's mother gave birth to him early in the morning on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the Second month of the Fire Ox year (1937) <sup>4</sup> in the house where the forest birds had landed. There were four other boys in the local Gar area who were born in that very same year, and it is said that some of them bore the exact same astrological sign: Tsering Phuntsok, Ngudrub Gyamtso, Dampa Yeshe, and another boy who, incidentally, was also given the same name as Konchog Gyaltzen.

When Dampa Yeshe's mother was carrying him in her womb, many unusual dreams came to her. One day, a cuckoo bird gently landed on her shoulder. It said cuckoo, cuckoo a few times, and then, as gently as it had landed, it unhurriedly glided away. That was unheard of for a cuckoo

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<sup>4</sup> According to Gape Lama, the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the Second Tibetan month was the day of death of the previous 7<sup>th</sup> Garchen Rinpoche, Thinley Yongkyab, exactly one year apart.

bird to land on a human shoulder and to declare its presence by calling out to her.

Extraordinary too was the dream that Ngudrub Gyamtso's father had of the previous 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche, Thinley Yongkyab <sup>5</sup> when Ngudrub Gyamtso was conceived. He saw this high lama come to his house and cut open the stomach of his pregnant wife with a *dri-gug*, a ritualistic curved knife that symbolizes transcendent wisdom to cut through delusions. The lama took out the infant from the mother's womb, cut open the infant and pulled out the infant's heart. Then, he cut open the heart in which he carefully inserted a small, sparkling piece of crystal. Having done that, the lama sealed the infant's heart, put the heart back inside the infant's body and put the baby back in its mother's womb.

Another benefactor had a dream in which he saw the previous 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche came to stay at his

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<sup>5</sup> The full title of the Garchen Rinpoche incarnations is Kyabje Garchen Triptül Rinpoche. Thinley Yongkyab is the name of the 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche incarnation. For short, people in Tibet are used to refer to him as "*Lama Garchen*" or "*Gar Rinpoche*." *Lama* is a Tibetan term equivalent to the Indian term "*Guru*" which means teacher or spiritual master. "*Gar Rinpoche*" is considered more affectionate but the more respectful way to address Rinpoche is actually "*Garchen Rinpoche*."

house. Then, another girl in the village also dreamed of him. She saw Gar Rinpoche appear and bringing with him a retinue of monks, horses and *dri* – female yaks – carrying all of his precious belongings. The retinue arrived at the house of Konchog Gyaltzen’s mother and took residence there.

This Lama, the 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche, a great *siddha* of crazy wisdom<sup>6</sup>, had passed away a few years earlier at his monastery called Gar Gön, about a day by horse from the village.

All five boys, the two Konchog Gyaltzens, Tsering Phuntsok, Ngudrub Gyamtso and Dampa Yeshe grew up to become great practitioners and followers of the Dharma. But under the force of their own individual *karma*, they led contrasting lives as different as the landscapes of summer and winter pasture land. These lands, lives after lives, have relented to the unswayable drama brought by the impermanence of seasons and conditions.

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<sup>6</sup> A *siddha* (lit. Sanskrit: accomplished one) is an enlightened master or guru, especially in the Tantric tradition. Crazy wisdom refers to the unconventional means employed by a master to serve the spiritual liberation of his disciples.

However, in ways that only the heart can fathom, Konchog Gyaltzen until this very day, considers that he and his four companions are no different than the rainbow colors of the prayer flags that he saw hanging everywhere in the monastery of his youth. He sees that they exist interdependently, like the five rainbow colors. In his heart and mind, he sees them not as five but as one.



The place where Konchog Gyaltzen was born is called Dong-go *drong*. It lies near the Dza-Chu river in the old Kingdom of Nangchen in the region Kham of Eastern Tibet. A *drong* is a small village, and in this remote village of Dong-go *drong*, there were no more than forty to fifty families.

From the house where little Konchog Gyaltzen was brought into this world, he could see Kango Gön, a small Drikung Kagyu monastery setting on top of a hill, not more than a dozen houses away. Kango Gön was where people in his village usually visited on special occasions to pray and make offerings to the Buddhas, pay respect to the monks, and

receive blessings and advice. Then, there is Lho Migyel Gön in close proximity, another Drikung Kagyu monastery about half-a-day by horse.



When Konchog Gyaltsen turned five, his mother brought him to a *tsam-kang* – a retreat house – to see Lama Konchog Tengye, a great yogi-monk whom she got to know from his early days at Kango Gön.<sup>7</sup> She had deep devotion toward this kind and wise lama, and wished for her son to take his refuge vows from him. *Lagin*<sup>8</sup> Konchog Tengye<sup>9</sup> was a disciple of the 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche of Gar Gön, and spent almost all his life in meditation.

The day Konchog Gyaltsen's mother brought him to see this old, respectable monk for his first hair-cutting and refuge ceremony, there happened to

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<sup>7</sup> The place where Lama Konchog Tengye used to meditate has been renovated into a retreat compound for a group of Drikung nuns (GL).

<sup>8</sup> *Lagin* is a respectful way to address an old lama.

<sup>9</sup> It was the great monk-yogi Lama Konchog Tenye who requested the 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche to write down the White Tara deity practice that arose through the master's visions and wisdom mind.

be many Tantric disciples gathering around him for a teaching.

Little Konchog Gyaltzen did not understand much of what was going on but on that day for once, he knew that he had to follow what the old teacher and his mother asked him to do. He heard his mother whisper to him in a soft, hazy voice, as if the morning wind had blown it far across the rolling hills and barren fields that surrounded his home...

In the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, from this day onward, you will take refuge... *Sang Gye Chö Dang Tsog Kyi Chog Nam La...* Now, do what *Lagin* says...

Some of the Tantric practitioners gazed at the wide-eye, mischievous five year-old boy and said to one another in amusement:

“Today, we found a new member for our *sangha*<sup>10</sup> who is going to sit below us at the end of the row!”

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<sup>10</sup> A community that follows and practices according to the teachings of the Buddha.

Little Konchog Gyaltzen did not like what he heard. He would rather *not* sit at all, any where, anyway! His mother smiled shyly at the practitioners but to her and everyone's surprise, the yogi-monk turned to his students and said:

“No, this child is not someone who is going to take a seat below us! We would be very fortunate if we could just take a seat below him!”

Then, the *Lagin* said nothing else.

When mother-and-child finally left the monastery, little Konchog Gyaltzen was happy, and whatever the lama declared a moment earlier did not make a single etch in the little boy's memory.

But his mother went on remembering the scene, as if it had been yesterday... the quiet retreat hut, the kind and wise old monk, the flickering butter lamps, the lingering smell of incense, her son's anxious-looking face and his dirt-covered fingers pulling hard at her *chuba*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A traditional Tibetan long outer robe for women and men. Married women wear an apron in front of their *chuba*.

*Amala*,<sup>12</sup> let's go home now, let's leave.



In Dong-go *drong*, all families were farmers. Their houses were built of bricks and mud of ochre color, with flat roofs that dubbed as terraces where people would climb up and make smoke-offerings<sup>13</sup> every morning. Other than the monastery, retreat houses or monk's quarters which are painted in white, the rest of the residences bear the same color of muddy ochre on the outside. Most of the houses were one-story high although some families with animals also built a living space for the animals below their living. Others built a separate stable away from the main house to keep their horses although unlike the nomads, all families in this village survived by cultivating their fields and had very few animals.

There was almost no tree in sight - well, almost none, except for the few that scattered around the

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<sup>12</sup> Mother

<sup>13</sup> It is a ritual where prayers are said while burning incense, juniper or other herbal ingredients. Traditional morning smoke-offering is done to purify and bring blessings to the house and family.

village looking water-deprived in the summer and sadly limp in the winter. This whole village of rugged terrain was surrounded by layers of rocky mountains in the far distant.

Its only striking landmark was actually the small Kango Gön monastery situated on an elevated hill. Next to it, a rising pole of colorful prayer flags stood proudly. These prayer flags, or wind-horses (*lung-ta*)<sup>14</sup> as the Tibetans called them, fluttered in the wind day and night like a flock of gigantic butterfly-wings being caught and strung together. Aside from that, the only other greatness of the village seemed to lay with the endlessly vast fields that stretch across from one end to another like an ocean of absolute stillness.

All families in Dong-go *drong* grew wheat, barley, turnips, potatoes and they had very little meat, butter or other kinds of vegetables. Their livelihood depended solely on their harvests, and the wheat and barley that they grew was of very good quality. They traded wheat, barley, flour and

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<sup>14</sup> Prayer flags with mantras and sacred images printed on them are believed to invoke compassion, wisdom, peace, strength, and to offer protection against evil and dangers.

*tsampa*<sup>15</sup> for butter and meat from the nomads according to the barter system.

In a nearby village about five kilometers away, there were other families who could produce salt. These families knew of a secret formula to make salt from the salty water that they collected from various areas. In Tibet, salt was very rare and people usually had to travel for months with their yaks to find salt, sometimes across treacherous mountain passes that could cost them their lives. These salt-producing families did not have to work in the fields; their main business was making, trading and selling salt! They would exchange their salt for wheat, barley, butter and meat.

Occasionally, the whole village gathered in one or the other family houses, and together, they recited *mantras*<sup>16</sup> and sang devotional songs of beautiful and sweeping melodies. Then they took turn serving *thukpa*, the Tibetan noodle soup. At New Year's time, they celebrated with songs and dances, and with various traditional, delicious food.

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<sup>15</sup> *Tsampa* is made of roasted, grounded barley, and is a staple food for Tibetans.

<sup>16</sup> A *mantra* is a sacred syllable or phrase that can be said repeatedly and carries spiritual significance.



As a simple village boy, Konchog Gyaltzen did not have much to do. He liked to pick fight with other young boys, and took pride in beating up and bossing all the other village children around! One time, he got so furious at one of his rivals that he even threw dirt at this poor boy's face!

In his village, there lived a nun by the name of Ani Yep-Zang.<sup>17</sup> She was a relative of little Konchog, and he was rather fond of her. He used to drop by her room to visit, and being a naughty boy, Konchog liked to put his head under her bed every time he came to see her. Ani Yep-Zang used to scold him:

“Don't! Don't put your head under my bed! It's very dirty! It's not good for you to put your head under someone's bed.”

But the more Ani Yep-Zang forbade him, the harder he would try to pester her by sticking his head under her bed. He could not remember why

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<sup>17</sup> Her full name is Yeshe Zangmo.

he loved to do it, but it was a mischievous game that he nevertheless enjoyed.

One time, little Konchog Gyaltzen went to visit Ani Yep-Zang with a small toy in his hand. He played around with it, and after a while, misplaced it somewhere inside the room. He called out to her:

“*Ani-la*, where is my toy?”

To which she replied, “I don’t know.”

He then inquired again, persistently:

“Where is my toy? Tell me where is my toy! You know where it is! Tell me where!”

“I don’t know!” she answered.

Konchog Gyaltzen glared at the nun. He quickly grew impatient and started to tug at her maroon robe; his tantrum suddenly flared up:

“But you do! You do! Just close your eyes and you will see it!”

Ani Yep-Zang hesitantly closed her eyes, and the moment darkness covered her sight, she clearly saw the toy underneath a rug made of fur laying beside her. She was astounded. What Ani Yep-Zang experienced was entrancing as if she had been given a special kind of power, for she had never encountered this before, and never would again.



Other than those stories, the painting of Konchog's early days at Dong-go *drong* had very simple strokes and few colors to it. The little fragments of recollection that he buried deep in his heart mostly revolved around his mother and the time he spent with her. Even though they lived in the same household with his maternal grandparents, his reflection of them was like passing clouds.

His mother's name was Dechei Yangzom but everyone in the village called her Dega, and she was known throughout the area for her kindness and compassion. People in the village said that Dega had no anger and no hatred in her heart,

and that no such trace could ever transpire under the power of her compassionate mind.

To her young son, she was *Amala*, the one and only person in the world whom he had the most love and affection for. She always called him by his baby name, Kon-Gyam, short for Konchog Gyaltzen, always spoke to him with kind words, and had never laid a hand on him no matter how naughty or brusque he unwittingly turned out to be. He remembered her long hair that he had pulled several times when he was throwing a terrible temper tantrum at her. He even remembered pushing her when he was mad while crying in exasperation. He remembered her coarse hands and the sweet cream that she put on her face that he loved to lick off!

In the winter, when it was bitterly cold, his mother would spread a thin layer of cream mixture made of honey and brown sugar on her cheeks, a sort of moisturizer, to help keep her skin healthy and smooth-looking. Later, she would wash it off, and that was how women in the village would do to batter off the northern winds that rushed across the mountains and brought much damage to their already sunburned skin.

In Tibet, at that time, sugar was even rarer than salt. Little Kon-Gyam was very fond of sweet but there was never any sweet around to indulge on. Being clever and devious, he often found ways to steal his mother's face cream, and savored it to the very last. How delicious such a tasty mixture was!



His mother came from an ordinary family that was neither rich, nor poor. Food was never scarce and they were blessed to always have enough to eat.

As Konchog Gyaltzen grew older, he also learned from his mother that her family had always been the benefactor of the former 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche, the great *siddha* of crazy wisdom. Again, he was told that this master had passed away a number of years ago at Gar Gön monastery, situated in the vastness of a forest green valley about a day by horse from where he lived. Konchog Gyaltzen did not remember visiting this place during the first seven years of his life.

Years ago, long before the 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche passed, when Konchog Gyaltzen's mother was still a small girl, one time, this great siddha of crazy wisdom asked for her and handed to her a letter which he personally wrote. He told her to keep it with her in a safe place but being very young and not paying close attention to the Lama's instructions, she somehow misplaced it. As an illiterate village girl, she could neither read nor write, and she never found out what was written inside. Years later, when she suddenly remembered the letter that the 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche had given her in her youth, she looked high and low for it but could not find it again.

As benefactors, his mother's family members occasionally made short trips to the monastery to bring wheat, barley, potatoes, flour, *tsampa* and what other little food they could gather to make offerings to the monastery. Not long before the passing of the 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche, Dega and her parents came to pay their respects; they brought with them a bag of *tsampa* to offer to the aged lama. To their surprise, the 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche refused to accept it this time, and told Dega and her parents to wait for the appearance of a great monk in their family home. It was to him that

they should offer this bag of *tsampa*! This great monk, they were told, would show up in their house one day. Konchog's mother went home and waited anxiously for the monk to appear, but he never came. He never came the way she envisioned it. Not on foot, nor on horse. He did not come dressed in a robe with a wooden staff in his hand. He never came the way Dega envisioned him.

A few years later, he entered her house, and was brought into this world, through a different gate of life.



Until he was seven years old, Konchog Gyaltzen did not remember that he ever wondered about his father. Somehow in his unpretentious mind, the world that he lived in was already full and complete. His mother, being a treasure-trove of affection, and a provider of all ordinary things that a child ever needed, appealed to him far beyond any other imaginable sphere of existence.

Until one day, a letter came from very far away...

It made its way through endless vistas, through abandoned terrain, through a monotony of land and sky, through the changing shades of olive, beige and ochre of the passing mountains to reach a monastery that for generations had quietly situated itself in the vast of a forest-green valley surrounded by cliffs and mountains. Here, in the winter time, pines and junipers rise high and surrender to the brutal winds and abrupt downpour of hail and snow, but in the spring time, the valley comes alive with boundless dancing wild poppies. The hillsides of yellow and violet-blue flowers embrace the whole of time and space, stretch far beyond what the eyes can see under the azure sky...

## Chapter Two

Letter to My Teacher, the Lama of the Many Lifetimes 42

## 2. Recognition

The letter that arrived unexpectedly at Gar Gön monastery was delivered by a messenger from the King of Nangchen's royal court. It was originally sent to the King from Drikung Thil, the main seat of the Drikung Kagyu lineage located in Central Tibet, about one hundred and fifty kilometers east of Lhasa.

The letter bore the signature and seal of a holy being, the 36<sup>th</sup> Drikung lineage holder, a highly revered reincarnated lama who was given the sacred name of Drikung Kyabgön, Tenzin Shiwai Lodrö. The letter clearly stated that at the request of the royal King of Nangchen, Sewang Dorje, and the supreme holder of the lineage, Drikung Kyabgön, a thorough search should be conducted in the nearby area for *the child who was born to a mother by the name of Dechei Yangzom and a father by the name of Masei Sangye.*

Upon passing various tests to prove his authenticity, *the son of this couple*, the letter further stated, *will be rightfully recognized as the reincarnation of the previous Garchen Rinpoche, Thinley Yongkyab* – the great mahasiddha who for many lifetimes had been the head of the Gar Gön monastery and a personal, tutelary teacher of the King of Nangchen.<sup>18</sup>

The Kingdom of Nangchen was first established in the eighth century A.D. The ancient summer capital – *Nangchen Gar* – of this vast, sprawling nomad kingdom with its fortress used as a summer residence of the kings of Nanchen, was not all that far from the Dong-go *drong* village, about a day by horse.

The Nangchen principality consisted of eighteen inner and twenty-five outer nomadic tribes, each with its own valleys in a well-defined territory divided into summer and winter pastures. This Kingdom was what the Tibetan Khampas called “*Nyi-shu Dza Nga*,” or the “Twenty-Five Districts.” In the fourteenth century, Nangchen accumulated

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<sup>18</sup> The King of Nangchen had four personal root gurus. Two of them were Garchen Rinpoche and Lhochan Rinpoche from the Drikung Kagyu lineage. The other two masters were Jhamei Rinpoche and Trulshik Rinpoche from the Drukpa Kagyu lineage.

great wealth due to the export of their local breeds of fine horses to the Ming emperors.

Traditionally, it was the King's duty to oversee the recognition of the reincarnations of his personal root gurus. The King of Nangchen had taken great interest in finding the incarnation of his previous teacher, the 7<sup>th</sup> Garchen Rinpoche. However, after meeting with a few young boys, the search came to a stall as nothing promising could be found among these potential candidates. The King of Nangchen then had to personally request for the Drikung Kyabgön to resolve this matter.



The Drikung Kagyu order of Tibetan Buddhism was one of the many sub-lineages derived from the Kagyu tradition. This tradition is also known as the Golden Rosary Lineage, alluding to the pure Dharma which became the thread that strung together the golden beads. These precious gems, the golden beads - the great masters and throneholders of the lineage - from generation to generation, had transmitted the authentic

teachings to their disciples by means of “whispering” from mouth to ear.

In 1179, the realized master Kyöbpa Jigten Sumgon, a heart-disciple of Phagmodrupa,<sup>19</sup> founded Drikung-Thil, the monastic seat of the Drikung Kagyu lineage in Central Tibet. He was said to have attained Buddhahood at the age of thirty five while in a seven-year meditation retreat in a cave in Echung. It has also been said that due to Jigten Sumgon’s vast wisdom and compassion, so many monks, as many as 180,000, assembled at Drikung-Thil to receive teachings from him – so many that “their Dharma robes reflected in the sky”! They not only came from Tibet but as far as India, China, Nepal and many other places.

From the Drikung-Thil monastery, resting on rock formations and rising 600 feet above the valley floor, one could see the rolling hills below stretch far into the cloudless sky. One after another, emerald and lush, these hills rose up as a backdrop

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<sup>19</sup> Phagmodrupa (1110-1170) was one of the successors of Gampopa (1079-1153), the sun-like disciple of Milarepa. From Phagmodrupa came the eight younger Kagyu schools.

for the winding river that passed through this remote and hidden plateau area.

“This meditation-rock will be inseparable from me throughout the three times.” Those were the words of the great master to his disciples when referring to the monastic seat that he founded in a place that was said to be the *mandala*<sup>20</sup> of Chakrasamvara.<sup>21</sup>



All these unfamiliar names and places would have been far beyond little Konchog Gyaltzen’s imagination. Far beyond the hypnotizing uniformity of barley fields in his hometown in this part of Nangchen. Far beyond any distant exhilarant site that he could ever visit as a humble village boy.

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<sup>20</sup> A concentric diagram having a spiritual or ritual significance. Also translates as a “circle-circumference” or “completion.” It represents the cosmos metaphysically or symbolically.

<sup>21</sup> Chakrasamvara is an enlightened being who manifested in a wrathful form and is the principal meditational deity of the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.

When news of the letter sent by the King of Nangchen reached Dong-go *drong* to Gar Gön monastery, the secret between little Konchog Gyaltzen's father and mother was publicly revealed. The whole village gasped at this astonishing tale. No one dared to guess at how the holy Drikung Kyabgön from half a world away was able to shed light on this unknown secret as if it were in the palm of his hand. Through dreams, through signs, divination, or mystical powers?

In the old days, it was extremely difficult for anyone to request an audience with a high lama such as the Drikung Kyabgön who was believed to be the embodiment of an ocean of enlightened qualities. People sometimes had to wait for months outside the monastery to be given a chance to meet with the great master, and the thought of questioning the Drikung Kyabgön's authority or his methods of prediction seemed far-fetched and disrespectful.

Nevertheless, as liberation itself was said to be in the palm of an enlightened being's hand, so could anything else of lesser magnitude!

What was revealed was possible through a mind of inconceivable clarity that transcends place, time and conditions as the local lamas later tried to explain to the young boy's family and villagers. And so the secret about his father was unfolded to everyone, including the little boy himself.



Konchog Gyaltzen did not recall the first time he came face to face with his father following the disclosure. Nor did he remember the first time he ever called out to the man *by the name of Masei Sangye* as his *Pala*.

His father, Konchog Gyaltzen was told, belonged to the notable Masei clan who lived in a neighboring village called *Dzong Dza*,<sup>22</sup> over an hour walk from *Dong-go drong*. The Masei clan had always been considered a clan of high status. Originally, this clan dwelled in a place somewhere in the Golok region. *Ma* was the short name of the area where this clan settled, and *Sei* was the short name of the smaller village within that area.  
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<sup>22</sup> *Dzong* is a Tibetan fortress.

<sup>23</sup> The full name of Masei is Mako-Seichen.

Many generations later, members of this clan decided that they wanted to move away from this town to a new place. They prayed to their protectors and *Yidam* deity <sup>24</sup> for guidance, and through their practice and devotion, they were given some signs that lead them to move to and settle in this part of Nangchen.

All generations of the Masei clan had been respectable Tantric practitioners and followers of the Dharma. One famous Masei master by the name of Trung Masei, Lodro Rinchen, was a close disciple of the fifth Karmapa <sup>25</sup> who founded the Surmang Kagyu lineage. He had a student by the name of Kunga Gyaltsen who later built the Surmang monastery, and established a monastic tradition from what was a group of wandering yogis. Before the monastery was constructed, these first adepts met in irregularly shaped reed

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<sup>24</sup> In Tibetan Buddhism, a deity is an enlightened being who embodies the union of wisdom and compassion but who is inseparable from the meditator. A *Yidam* is the main deity that the meditator chooses to focus on for his/her personal meditation.

<sup>25</sup> The Karmapas have been extraordinary and powerful lineage holders of the Karma Kagyu tradition. The First Karmapa, Düsum Khyenpa (12<sup>th</sup> century) was the first reincarnated lama ever in the Tibetan-Buddhist tradition to leave a prediction letter detailing his future incarnation.

huts, and hence, the name “Surmang” or “many corners.”

Little Konchog Gyaltsen’s father himself was a meditation practitioner of deep insight. There were five sons in his father’s family, and they all took as their wife the same girl in a polyandrous arrangement.<sup>26</sup> She came from a high-class family, was a rather well-built woman, and the sister of Pei-Pei Yul Orgyen Nyima, an important local chieftain of noble origin.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the years, she bore the Masei brothers two sons, Masei Chogyam and Masei Kongkyab, but no daughter.

Of the five brothers, one stayed home to take care of their wife and household. Another chose to embrace the life of a hermit, went to Mount Kailash, and then to Nepal, to enter isolated retreat. The other three brothers, on the other hand, regularly took turn entering retreats at the Masei cave in Nangchen, a famous cave that belonged to the First Surmang Trungpa Rinpoche.

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<sup>26</sup> In old Tibet, it was normal practice for blooded brothers to be married to the same wife and live in the same household. As such, the family’s wealth would not have to be divided up among brothers.

<sup>27</sup> This chief became a general in 1958 and fought against the Chinese invasion; he later died in captivity.

Of the three brothers who practiced at the Masei cave, one of them passed away.

When Konchog Gyaltzen was secretly conceived, it was during the time that his father was in an extensive retreat at the Masei cave. This cave was situated not high in the mountain and accessible by foot. To the left of the Masei cave was his father's village, *Dzong Dza*, about forty-minute walk, and to the right of the Masei cave was his mother's village, *Dong-go drong*.

Konchog Gyaltzen's mother, Dega, because of her amiable disposition, was asked to attend to this Tantric meditator by bringing food, yogurt and other provisions to his cave once every few days. To walk from her house in *Dong-go drong* to the Masei cave, it usually took her about an hour. What led the yogic meditator to forsake the strict rules that a meditator must commit to while on retreat to take this girl as his consort and impregnate her? No one could have guessed.

The relationship between the yogic meditator of Masei and the young maiden-attendant was kept in strict secret. When she realized that it was not just a dream and that she was really carrying his

child in her womb, Dega shyly whispered his name to her most trusted confidants when being pressed as to whom the father was. Like a little thief aching with anguish, she begged them to please keep it to themselves. She was petrified that it would have caused a scandalous eruption in the greater Masei family and much suffering to the expecting mother and child had this news traveled far and wide. The powerful noble family to which his first wife belonged, Dega thought, could actually create great trouble for her and her own family – who remained ordinary commoners of humble origin.

Then, one day, by the compelling rift of *karma*, everything became disclosed and authenticated in a letter that arrived from mountains and rivers away, and the illegitimate child, the fruition of a love deeply buried, was now to be recognized as a young reincarnated *tulku*.



Konchog Gyaltzen was never told of the fateful letter nor the heart-stirring news that it brought.

He was told, however, that he would have to come with his mother and search party to the neighboring Lho Migyel Gön monastery.

At this monastery, the 8th Drikung Chagme Rinpoche who was actually the son of the King of Nangchen and himself a high lama of the Drikung lineage,<sup>28</sup> awaited little Konchog Gyaltzen and the entourage. Since he was very small and not able to ride a horse by himself, Konchog Gyaltzen remembered riding with his mother on her lap to Lho Migyel Gön.

There, he remembered being shown a number of sacred objects. He was asked to select from among them, those that belonged to him in his past life. When little Konchog identified all seven objects that belonged to the previous 7<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche, everyone rejoiced. Somehow he was not really mindful of what went on when he was being

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<sup>28</sup> The First Karma Chagme Rinpoche, Raga Asei (1603-1772), was the prophesized, highly realized and learned master who compiled the famous "Mountain Retreat Manual" (Ri-Chu). Due to the request of both Nyemdho monastery (of Karma Kagyu lineage) and Lho Migyel monastery (of Drikung Kagyu lineage), the Second Chagme Rinpoche at the time of his passing indicated that there would be two incarnations in his future lifetimes. Henceforth, since the Third Chagme Rinpoche until the present day, there has always been a tradition of two incarnations: one Karma Chagme Rinpoche and one Drikung Chagme Rinpoche.

tested with these objects. Everything seemed to happen spontaneously – it felt natural as if no effort was necessary.

Finally, they brought little Konchog Gyaltsen to the main temple where he saw a row of beautifully adorned, gold-and-bronze statues placed in front of him. He was told that these statues represent great masters of the past, those who already attained unsurpassable qualities of transcendent wisdom, and had entered the path of renunciation and perfect liberation. Little Konchog looked at them all in awe. Never before had he seen such exalted images!

Then, all of a sudden, he remembered.

“Among these masters, who is your *root* teacher? Who is your *tsawei* Lama? Now, point to him!” Someone came to him and asked.

At that very moment, Konchog Gyaltsen reached out his hand instantaneously and pointed to one of the statues and exclaimed:

“This is my Lama!”

The face of this statue <sup>29</sup> seemed to appeal to him in a way that was beyond what he was able to grasp. It was a rather large-size statue. What he felt and how he felt was new to him. It was something peculiar which he would not have been able to explain. The lama's posture, his robes, his red ceremonial hat, his gazing eyes, his left hand in meditation and his right hand in subdued *mudras* <sup>30</sup> – together, they all seemed to plant something so familiar and at the same time inexplicable in Konchog Gyaltzen's heart.

“This is my Lama!”



The lama, he was told later, was Lord Jigten Sumgön, the Great Drikungpa Ratna Shri. The one who had been prophesized in many Sutras and Tantras, who was believed to be an

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<sup>29</sup> In the past, sometimes it was mistakenly recorded that the 8<sup>th</sup> Gar Rinpoche was asked to point to a *thangka* of Lord Jigten Sumgön but it was actually a *statue* of Lord Jigten Sumgön that Rinpoche pointed to.

<sup>30</sup> A symbolic hand gesture used in meditation or ritual practices.

incarnation of Nagarjuna,<sup>31</sup> and who was proclaimed “*Protector of the Three Words*” by his own spiritual master, Phagmodrupa.

Throughout the encounter, he stared at the face of the statue – *his* Lama. It continued to fill little Konchog’s mind and seemed to leap out to speak to him...



When it became indisputable that this young boy was indeed the new reincarnated *tulku* of the Garchen lineage, the monks brought little Konchog Gyaltsen outside to give him a shower as part of a purification ritual.

They took off his old clothes and started pouring water over him! The water was freezing cold, or so it seemed! The water was so cold that he thought he was being thrown right into an icy river! Today still, Konchog Gyaltsen cannot seem to forget the benumbed shower he received on that special

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<sup>31</sup> Nargajuna (born 150-died circa 250) was an Indian monk and philosopher, and founder of the Middle Way (Madhyamaka) school of Buddhism.

occasion. He stood there shivering, feeling numbed all over as this blessed water rained down on his body to help wash away the countless dust particles – his outer defilements.

Then, they brought him inside to shave his head and dress him in new, saffron-colored robes. The 8<sup>th</sup> Chagme Rinpoche was the one who performed the official hair-cutting and refuge ceremony for little Konchog Gyaltsen. He was given the Dharma name *Konchog* (Precious) *Ngedun* (Ultimate Truth) *Tenpei* (Teachings) *Nyima* (Sun).

*Precious, Ultimate Truth, Sun of the Teachings – the 8<sup>th</sup> Kyabje Garchen Triptrül Rinpoche!* *Kyabje* means the Lord Who Protects. *Garchen* means Great Gar. *Trip* means the One Who is Holding. *Trül* means Throne. *Triptrül* is the Current Throne Holder.

And *Rinpoche*, literally Precious One, is a title customarily bestowed to a high reincarnated lama.

For many generations now, at Gar monastery, traditionally there have been three *tulkus* or reincarnated lamas who were recognized as great masters: Garchen Rinpoche, Gar Mingyur

Rinpoche and Gar Namdrol Rinpoche<sup>32</sup> but only Garchen Rinpoche is the one whose title *Triptrül* was bestowed upon. *Garchen Rinpoche*, or the *Rinpoche from Great Gar*, in this case, refers to the current throne holder who presides over the greater Nangchen area, and not merely the small village of Gar.

From that day onward, people began to address him as Garchen Rinpoche – *the Precious One from Great Gar* – or Garchen Tulku – *the Reincarnated One from Great Gar*. Many other people, especially those in the village, for generations, have been used to refer to their teacher as Gar Rinpoche – *the Precious One from Gar*, and this remains an abbreviated and affectionate form of addressing the lama.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> At the present time, Garchen Rinpoche is the 8<sup>th</sup> incarnation of the previous Garchen Rinpoche, and Gar Namdrol Rinpoche and Gar Mingyur Rinpoche are the 4<sup>th</sup> incarnations of the previous Namdrol Rinpoche and Mingyur Rinpoche. However, it has been said in recent years in the West and in Asia that the three Rinpoches are emanations of body, speech and mind of the previous Garchen Rinpoche which is something that was unheard of in Tibet. (According to Gape Lama, i.e., GL)

<sup>33</sup> In Eastern Tibet, the Tibetans have been used to calling Rinpoche “*Gar Rinpoche*” as a more affectionate abbreviation of his title, but it is considered more respectful to address Rinpoche as “*Garchen Rinpoche*.” Also, in Tibet, it is equally customary to address Garchen Rinpoche as “*Lama Garchen*.” (GL)

To his mother, he was no longer little Kon-Gyam. She, too, began to call him *Rinpoche* – the *Precious One*. He was no longer hers to behold but who had come back into this world due to the powerful aspirations of his past lifetime, in order to guide other beings out of their own self-inflicted sufferings toward the path of perfect liberation. In his mother’s heart, the words of the old yogi-monk, *Lagin Konchog Tengye* resonated... “*We would be very fortunate if we could just take a seat below him!*” Words that the wise monk once spoke when she brought her son to his retreat house for his first hair-cutting ceremony... Words that now became unveiled, clear and luminous like a blazing, cloudless sky.



འཇམ་དབྱངས་ལྷོ་མ་ལྷོ་མ་

*His Eminence D. K. Garchen Rinpoche*

Sue-Sue,

For any disciple to write about the life stories of his or her lama, that is like being directly connected to the lama's body, speech and mind. Now that you are working on this book, there is this karmic connection between us. So the dream that you had is clearly a premonition.

You should also supplicate Arya Tara wholeheartedly so that your heart will become one with Tara's. Then, you will understand and can write about me. Arya Tara is my *yidam* deity. My aspiration is to follow her footsteps to benefit all sentient beings, and I myself also pray continuously that I am inseparable from her.

It is not like after I die, I want to gain some fame from having a book published about me. Everything that I have shared with you about my life, the joy as well as the suffering, is all about the infallible law of karma, all about the Dharma. I only want to speak the Dharma to benefit all beings, and so you are making it possible through this work. I know that you are writing this book with great love, and that is why many people will appreciate it. When people read my stories, may thoughts of love, compassion and an understanding of Dharma arise in their mindstream!

So thank you for making the request and for working on this biography. I know that you have engaged in many hardships working on the book since 2003 but I am extremely happy that you are recording my life stories for the benefit of others. I hold you and all beings with love – *tuchay je*.

This is everything that I wish to say to you...

Garchen Rinpoche, Konchog Gyaltsen

*Words spoken by Garchen Rinpoche to Sue-Sue Luu (Konchog Jimpa Lhamo) were orally translated by Khenpo Tampheh on February 4, 2003, A Bo Lama on December 12, 2008 and Ina Bieler on December 13, 2008 at the Southwest Buddhafield, Garchen Buddhist Institute in Chino Valley, Arizona. Garchen Rinpoche reviewed and signed the letter on December 15, 2008 after his words were transcribed and formatted into a single letter.*

Endnotes...

*This small booklet was created in honor of the 8<sup>th</sup> Kyabje Triptrul Garchen Rinpoche, Konchog Gyaltsen, at the auspicious occasion of Rinpoche's long-life ceremony, along with the celebration of Losar and the ten-year anniversary of the Garchen Buddhist Institute, held on February 25, 2009 at the Institute in Chino Valley, Arizona. The booklet includes "Letter to My Teacher, the Lama of the Many Lifetimes," an introduction to the background history of Garchen Rinpoche's biography, followed by the first two chapters of the book, "Birth and Childhood at Dong-go" and "Recognition."*

*The work on the complete biography of Garchen Rinpoche, "The Lama of the Many Lifetimes: Touching the Living Heart of Garchen Rinoche," is still in progress... and hopefully, will be completed one day, when the writer can, in part, fulfill the heart advice of her Lama!*

*Heartfelt thanks go to Traga Rinpoche, Lama Bu Nima and Lama A Bo for their kindness and encouragement; to Khenpo Tamphel and Meghan Howard for their translation of the oral interviews in 2003 and 2005 which the first two chapters included in this booklet are based on; to Gape Lama for his patience, insights, comments and clarifications; Ina Bieler for her translation*

*of those comments; and especially, to Bertrand Odelys Sauzier for his genuine love and faith towards this biography project, his unfailing support, editorial corrections and comments. Many sincere thanks also go to Donna Guthrie and Carol Bailey for additional editorial suggestions; and to Konchog Thogme, Chi Phan and Andrew Printing (Kim Lai An Quan) for their generosity and sponsorship of the printing of these booklets.*

*And to all of Garchen Rinpoche's disciples – my Vajra brothers and sisters, as we are traveling together on this journey to Rinpoche's living heart, please know that this writing project is only a manifestation of your own love and devotion to our guru and his teachings. May we all awaken to the power of Rinpoche's inexhaustible compassion and mind of enlightenment at the end of our journey... And by the virtue of this writing and our collective spiritual quest, may all beings swiftly be brought on the Path and attain perfect liberation.*

*From the very depth of my heart,  
with folded hands...*

*Sue-Sue  
February 14, 2009*

*Letter to My Teacher, the Lama of the Many Lifetimes:  
An Introduction to Garchen Rinpoche's Biography  
© 2009 Garchen Rinpoche & Sue-Sue Luu*

*The cover image is Garchen Rinpoche's name written in Tibetan script. Photo credit: Katherine Lambert*

*The small image below Garchen Rinpoche's name is a bodhi light close-up found on the following link:  
<http://www.oneplanetdancing.com/i//bodhlightcloseup.jpg>*

*The footnotes included in the chapters are meant to address the mainstream readers who are not familiar with the concepts of Tibetan Buddhism and/or Tibetan history and culture.*

*Comments or inquires about this booklet or the biography project of Kyabje Triptrul Garchen Rinpoche can be sent to:*

*14905 Coles Chance Road  
North Potomac, MD 20878 USA  
Tel.: 240-238-1903  
[suesueluu@yahoo.com](mailto:suesueluu@yahoo.com)*



*Bodhicitta, the Excellent and Precious Mind,  
Where it is unborn, may it arise,  
Where it is born, may it not decline  
But ever increase higher and higher.*