

Venerable Khenchen Konchog Gyaltshen Rinpoche's biography

The most Venerable Khenchen Konchog Gyaltshen Rinpoche was born in 1946 in the village of Tsari, one of the most sacred places in Tibet and spent his early years there. In 1959, Khenchen Rinpoche fled to India with his family during the political changes in Tibet. They then settled down in Darjeeling where Rinpoche began his education. At a very young age, Rinpoche was already an excellent and dedicated student who completed his middle school studies in less than the average time required.

In October 1967, Rinpoche travelled to Varanasi, India to further his studies in the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies which was newly established back then. There, Rinpoche began the 9 year course of study which included Madhyamika, Abhidharma, Vinaya, Abhisamayalankara, Uttarantra, as well as history, logic and Tibetan grammar. In early 1968, he took the full monastic ordination from the great Kalu Rinpoche and, shortly after graduating from the Institute, he received teachings from the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa on The Eight Treasures of Mahamudra Songs by the Indian mahasiddhas.

After completing the long and arduous course of study, Khenchen Rinpoche wanted to deepen his knowledge and hence continued and received teachings and instructions from other great masters. One of them was Venerable Khunu Lama Rinpoche, with whom Khenchen Rinpoche studied the great two works of Gampopa: The Jewel Ornament of Liberation and The Precious Garland of the Excellent Path. He also received teachings on Mahamudra and many of the songs of Milarepa. Among all his studies, The Jewel Ornament of Liberation was one of the texts that Khenchen Rinpoche found to be most inspiring. Lord Gampopa lays out the teachings in a clear and systematic way that is understandable to beginners. At the same time, the work is of such profundity that scholars and practitioners can study it over and over again. Gampopa had said on several occasions, "Anyone who knows the Jewel Ornament well enough will really understand Buddhism."

Maintaining a balance between theoretical understanding and the practice of meditation, Khenchen Rinpoche began his 3 year retreat in 1978 under the guidance of the enlightened master Khyunga Rinpoche. During that time, he was able to deepen and enhance his understanding of The Five-fold Path of Mahamudra and the profound Gong Chik text of Lord Jigten Sumgon. He also received many other transmissions. In 1985, Khenchen Rinpoche travelled to the main seat of the Drikung Kagyu lineage, Drikung Thil in Tibet. There, he received personal blessings, as well as instructions and transmissions of Mahamudra and the Six Yogas of Naropa from the enlightened master Venerable Pachung Rinpoche.

Back in 1982, Khenchen Rinpoche travelled to the United States with the requests of many practitioners. By late 1983, the Tibetan Meditation Center was well established in Washington, DC where there were innumerable teachings, practices, retreats and ceremonies. In September 1984, and again in 1987, the Center was blessed with visits and teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and later in 1987, the visit of His Holiness Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche.

Inspired to spread the buddhadharma far and wide, Khenchen Rinpoche swiftly adapted himself to Western forms of communication. He has made appearances on television, been a guest on many radio programs, lectured extensively at colleges and universities, and spoken to the public through countless newspaper articles. Between 1983 and 1990, Khenchen Rinpoche singlehandedly translated critical Drikung Kagyu practices, prayers and histories into English. The originals of the texts were all written out by his hand: Achi Chokyi Drolma, Amitabha, Bodhicitta, Chakrasamvara, Chod, the complete Ngondro, Five-fold Mahamudra, Four-Session Guru Yoga, Green Tara, Lama Chopa and Tsok, Mahakala, Mandala offering, Manjushri, Medicine Buddha, Milarepa Guru Yoga, Nyung Ne, Peaceful Guru Padmasambhava, Phowa, Refuge, Chenrezig, Vajrapani, Vajrasattva, Vajrayogini, and White Tara. "The Illusory Body teachings", "Supplication to Tara", "Treasury of Benefit and Happiness", "Meaningful to Behold" and many other prayers and three of his four books were all translated and published during that time. These priceless works formed the essential basis from which the holy Dharma could be taught and practiced.