



Offering Traditional Buddhist Teachings to Enrich Our Contemporary Lives

Biography of Khen Rinpoche

Childhood in India and Education in Tibet

Khen Rinpoche Geshe Kachen Lobzang Tsetan is a Tibetan Buddhist monk from Ladakh, India, who has been traveling and teaching in the United States for over 30 years. He began monastic life at age seven in Stok, his family village in Ladakh and, at 13, he joined the Stok Monastery, where he studied and memorized Buddhist scriptures.

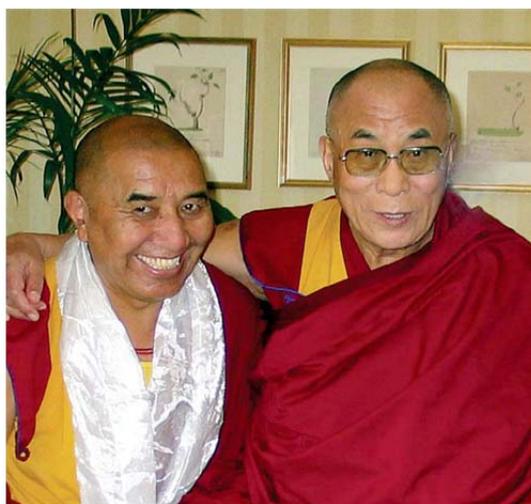
In 1952, at age 15, he and his father walked from Ladakh to Shigatse, Tibet, so he could enter the renowned Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. The 800-mile trek took over two months to complete. Rinpoche received his novice monk vows there and studied Buddhist philosophy with many prominent Tibetan scholars at the monastery's Skilkhang College.

His dream was to receive the Geshe degree in Buddhist philosophy, roughly equivalent to a doctorate. This dream was deferred when the Chinese government intensified its policies on occupied Tibet in 1959. The daily public humiliation and torture of monks and the mass destruction of the monasteries and colleges made it impossible for him to pursue this degree there. Rinpoche escaped to his homeland in 1960.

Return to India

Once back in Stok, Rinpoche studied Vajrayana practices, from a school of Buddhism that uses techniques such as visualizations, meditations, and mantras to achieve enlightenment. Rinpoche then joined the School of Buddhist Philosophy in Choglamsar, where he studied for seven years. Because the Buddhist tradition in Ladakh depends on the Tibetan lineage of teachers to transmit and bestow higher Buddhist degrees, he left Ladakh again in 1970 to pursue his Geshe training. He went to Varanasi, India, where many high lamas in exile had resettled and built new monastic colleges. He received his Shastri degree, the equivalent of a bachelor's degree, there.

He then felt a responsibility to return to Stok and contribute to the community through teaching. From 1974 to 1978, Rinpoche taught high school in Ladakh. Then he received a special invitation to come to the United States and teach at the first Tibetan Buddhist learning center in America, Labsum Shedrub Ling in Washington, New Jersey. He went in hopes of learning English and completing his Geshe degree. He accomplished both, and in 1984 he returned to India to the relocated Drepung Monastery for commencement.



Khen Rinpoche (left) and HH the Dalai Lama (right). BodhiMind Center is hosting Rinpoche's third visit to Colorado Springs in April 2012. The center is planning a week of events featuring Rinpoche. Courtesy of Panchen Lama–Tashi Lhunpo Project.

Travel between America and Ladakh

Since 1984, Rinpoche has been traveling and teaching in the United States for part of the year and returning to Ladakh during the summer to oversee activities at the Siddhartha School. His association with the Manjushri Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, has provided him with extensive teaching positions and lecturing opportunities at a number of schools including Smith, Bowdoin, Amherst, Hampshire, Drew, Maine College of Art, Bangor Theological Seminary, Phillips Exeter Academy, and Deerfield Academy.

In 2008, Rinpoche met David Gardiner, a professor of religion at the Colorado College, during a conference in Wyoming. David and his friend Natalie Morris brought Rinpoche to Colorado Springs in 2009 to give talks on Buddhism. These talks were so popular that Rinpoche suggested that they found BodhiMind Center to provide resources for Springs residents interested in Buddhism. BodhiMind Center is bringing Rinpoche back in April 2012 for his third visit. David and Rinpoche also give talks together around the country.

In 1995, Rinpoche founded the Siddhartha School in Stok. The school seeks to preserve Tibetan Buddhist culture and language while giving the children of this remote Himalayan area a well-rounded education. This allows them to represent themselves and their culture in our rapidly evolving global community.

Appointment by HH the Dalai Lama

In 1996, His Holiness the Dalai Lama appointed Rinpoche to be the head abbot of the newly reestablished Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in southern India. (This appointment was made in the absence of the 11th Panchen Lama, one of Tibet's most revered masters and traditionally Tashi Lhunpo's abbot. The Panchen Lama has not been seen in public since the Chinese government took him, and his family, into custody when he was six years old.) Rinpoche humbly set aside this great honor, with the Dalai Lama's blessings and support, so that he could devote himself to the Siddhartha School.

However, in 2005 the Dalai Lama again asked Rinpoche to accept the abbot position, and this time he could not refuse. In July 2005, Rinpoche was installed as Kachen, or head abbot, of the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. His title at that time became Khen Rinpoche Geshe Kachen Lobzang Tsetan.

Rinpoche's life experiences serve as a living example for Ladakhi youth in the art of transforming the problems of rapid change into fruitful opportunities. He is an inspiration to all who meet him, whatever one's cultural and spiritual background.

For More Information

To learn more about the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in exile and the Panchen Lama–Tashi Lhunpo Project, please visit www.tashilhunpo.org and www.honorpanchenlama.org/. To learn more about the Siddhartha School Project, visit <http://siddharthaschool.org/>.

Source: Siddhartha School Project, <http://siddharthaschool.org/about/index.html>.