



The 5<sup>th</sup> Shamarpa Könchog Yenlag

## A brief account of the successive Shamarpa reincarnations

This brief account of the successive Shamarpa reincarnations is extracted from 'The Garland of Moon Water Crystal' authored by Situpa, Chökyi Jungne and Belo Tsewang Künkhyab.

(Compiled by Khenpo Chodrag Tenpel; translated by Kiki Ekselius)

**T**he tradition of a successive line of reincarnations originated in twelfth century Tibet with the first Karmapa Düsum Khyenpa. The lineage of the Shamarpa reincarnations dates back to the same century and that lineage is the second line of successive reincarnations in the history of that tradition. The Shamarpa lineage of reincarnation began during the time of Rangjung Dorje, the third Karmapa who presented his principal disciple, Khaydrup Tragpa Senge, with a ruby-red crown while conferring the status Shamarpa which means 'Holder of the Red Crown'.

That red crown is a replica of the black crown worn by the Karmapas, and it exemplifies the close relationship that exists between these two lines of reincarnation in that the Karmapas and the Shampas are emanations of the same mind-stream and that they are therefore regarded inseparable. The second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, said: "Future Karmapas will manifest in two forms". That statement was later clarified by the fourth Karmapa, Rolpe'i Dorje, when he designated the Shampas as a second manifestation of himself. The Shampas are also known as an emanation of Amitabha, The Buddha of Boundless Light.

Tibetan historical records refer to the Karmapa as 'Karma Shanagpa' which means 'Karmapa, Holder of the Black Crown' and the Shampas as 'Karma Shampas' which means 'Karmapa, Holder of the Red Crown'. These designations are found in the historical records authored by several well-known Tibetan Buddhist masters, masters such as Golo Shonnu Pal (1392-1481), Pawo Tsuglag Trengwa (1504-1516), the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lozang Gyamtso (1617-1682) and the eighth Situpa Chökyi Jungnay (1700-1774).

It is important to understand that the crowns are simply symbols of the activity to accomplish the welfare of beings, the crowns do not denote separate lineages, both, 'The Black Hat Lama' and 'The Red Hat Lama' are of the Karma Kagyü Lineage.

### **The First Shampas, Khaydrup Tragpa Senge, (1284-1349)**

was the principal disciple of the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje. He is known as an accomplished master both in terms of scholastic achievements and meditation.

### **The Second Shampas, Kachö Wangpo, (1350-1405)**

was recognized by the fourth Karmapa, Rolpe'i Dorje. He was Rolpe'i Dorje's main student and he was learned as well as accomplished in meditation. Kachö Wangpo recognized the 5th Karmapa, Deshin Shegpa, and he was his principal Lama. He is well-known for having furthered the Kagyü teachings to a great extent and he authored many treatises that elucidate the teachings of the Kagyü lineage.

### **The Third Shampas, Chöpal Yeshe, (1406-1452)**

was identified by the fifth Karmapa, Deshin Shegpa, and he became his disciple. Chöpal Yeshe is renowned for having constructed several monasteries and retreat-centres. He was also able to abolish the practice of animal sacrifice in the regions of Tibet where that custom had continued.

### **The Fourth Shamarpa, Chökyi Tragpa Pal Yeshe, (1453 -1526)**

was recognized by the seventh Karmapa, Chödrak Gyamtso, who became his Lama. Chökyi Tragpa Pal Yeshe is known for having embraced, without bias, the different approaches in Buddhism. The famous Tibetan monastery Ga Mamo Tashi Rabten was founded by him. He also established many smaller monasteries. During his travels outside Tibet, Chökyi Tragpa built many monasteries, among others there are four monasteries in Bhutan and he was the first of the Shamar reincarnates to visit Nepal where he built a small monastery in Swayambhunath, one of the country's most sacred places. Upon returning to his home-land, he acted as the king of Tibet for a period of twelve years and he ruled the country on the basis of strict adherence to Buddhist principles. His scholarly achievements include his fourteen compositions which interpret the meanings of various Sutras and Tantras.

### **The Fifth Shamarpa, Könchog Yenlag, (1526-1583)**

was identified by the eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje. The eighth Karmapa stated that the Karmapa reincarnations and the Shamarpa reincarnations are, in fact, of the same mind-stream, that they are inseparable. Könchog Yenlag was a scholar and a meditation master. Among his written works are seven well-known texts on Buddhist meditation. He also recognized and became the Lama of the ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje.

### **The Sixth Shamarpa, Chökyi Wangchuk, (1584-1629)**

was recognized by the ninth Karmapa who was his main Lama. He also received teachings from many other masters and is famed for his deep insight. By the age of seventeen he had already memorized fifty volumes of the Sutras and the Tantras and he had developed great skills in the art of debate. Thus he became known as 'the Pandita of the North, the Omniscient Shamarpa in Whom the Great Manjushri Delights'. Chökyi Wangchuk became the Lama of the then ruler of Tibet, Desi Tsangpa and he taught extensively throughout the country. During his travels in East Tibet he recognized and became the Lama of the tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorje. At the time, as there was unrest in that part of the country, Chökyi Wangchuk mediated and he was able to achieve a peaceful settlement of the conflict. His travels also took him to Nepal where he taught Buddhism in Sanskrit to King Laxman Naran Singh (*Lakshminarasimha Mala*) as well as to others who showed interest and devotion. Chökyi Wangchuk passed away in the mountains of Helampur in Nepal in the vicinity of a cave where Tibet's great yogi, Milarepa, had stayed. His written works include ten treatises where he elucidated the meanings of both the Sutras and the Tantras.

### **The Seventh Shamarpa, Palden Yeshe Nyingpo, (1631-1694)**

was recognized by the 10th Karmapa, Chöying Dorje, and he became the Karmapa's disciple. Palden Yeshe Nyingpo devoted his life to the practice of meditation. He recognized the 11th Karmapa, Yeshe Dorje, according to the instructions that the tenth Karmapa had left behind.

### **The Eighth Shamarpa, Palchen Chökyi Döndrub, (1695-1732)**

was born in Helampur, Nepal to a Nepalese family. The 11th Karmapa, Yeshe Dorje, sent a representative from Tibet to Nepal with the instructions as to the whereabouts of the Shamarpa reincarnation. At the age of seven, Shamar Palchen Chökyi Döndrub was brought to Tibet and he was enthroned by the 11th Karmapa who took charge of his training. Palchen Chökyi Döndrub, in turn, identified the 12th Karmapa, Changchub Dorje and he became his Lama. Both travelled to Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, India and China where they taught extensively. Both, the 12th Karmapa and the 8th Shamarpa passed away in China with just one day between their deaths (1732).

### **The Ninth Shamarpa, Könchog Geway Jungnay, (1733-1741)**

was discovered by the 13th Karmapa, Dödül Dorje. However, Shamar Könchong Geway Jungnay lived just for nine years, therefore the historical records of his life are very brief.

### **The Tenth Shamarpa, Mipam Chödrub Gyatso, (1742-1793)**

was recognized by the thirteenth Karmapa, Dödül Dorje, who was his Lama. Mipam Chödrub Gyatso became a scholar and a meditation master. In his forties he travelled to Nepal where he attracted and taught many followers. He also restored the great stupa of Swayambhunath, one of Nepal's great Buddhist monuments. He passed away in the vicinity of the Boudhanath Stupa, another well-known Buddhist pilgrimage spot in Nepal.

### **The Eleventh Shamarpa**

During the eighteenth century, due to an outbreak of sectarian disputes, the Tibetan government, prohibited the official recognition of the Shamarpas. Because of this, most biographical material concerning the eleventh Shamarpa is unavailable. However, it is known that he became a physician and that he lived in and cared for people in the northern part of Tibet.

## **The Twelfth Shamarpa, Jamyang Rinpoche,**

was the son of the 15th Karmapa, Khakyab Dorje. Because the Shamarpas were banned officially the precise dates of his birth and death are not known. However, it is recorded that he taught and practised Buddhism as a layman.

(There was yet another incarnation, that is not mentioned in this text, before the present 14th Shamarpa, Mipham Chögyi Lodrö)

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## **The 14th Shamarpa, Mipam Chokyi Lodrö**



**H**e was born in 1952. Just as the 5th Shamarpa had foretold, the 14th Shamarpa manifested as the nephew of the 16th Karmapa. In Tibetan poetical term, a nephew is a brother-like relative. Long before the Shamarpa was born, there was a stir of anticipation in the monastic communities; for it was widely circulated that there was soon to be an auspicious birth in the Karmapa's family. From the Karmapa, Black Pills were sent to his sister-in-law, with which, was a

special protective cord for the baby yet unborn. It was at a time, when no one was even aware that she was an expectant mother.

At the age of six, the child Rinpoche saw some Yangpachen lamas at a distance coming towards Tsurphu Monastery. He was delighted, "*They are from my monastery*" he remarked. Indeed they were, for the Dechen Yangpachen Monastery was a Shamarpa monastery. This spontaneous out-burst of recognition had prompted his lamas to plead for a formal recognition of their Rinpoche, in readiness for future enthronement. For political reasons, the Karmapa did not think it prudent to do so.

1956 was the year of the pilgrimage to India, when most of the great Tibetan lamas were invited by the Indian Mahabodhi Society. The Karmapa and the Shamarpa, on their return, visited the Dechen Yangpachen Monastery; in the main temple of which, were the statues of all the previous Shamarpas. The child-Rinpoche came up to them; from the first to the tenth, he needed no prompting to identify them. Playfully he took their crowns to try them on, saying: "*These are my hats*" - He was only four years old, at the time.

Another four years had passed. The political situation in Tibet, uncertain for sometime, further deteriorated. The 16th Gyalwa Karmapa with the eight-year-old Shamarpa left Tibet to settle in Sikkim. Finally when permission was sought, for the official recognition of the Kunzig Shamarpa, it was granted by H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama. The enthronement took place in 1964 at Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim. With the solemn occasion over, the Shamarpa remained in the monastery until 1979 for some very serious studies. He received all the instructions of the Kagyu Lineage from the Karmapa. The traditional arts and sciences, the Sutras and the Tantras, he studied mainly under Thrangu Rinpoche. He also received some teachings from Kalu Rinpoche. By any standard, those were very hard years for the Tibetan exiles. And for this student-Rinpoche, no special privileges, otherwise accorded to a great reincarnate, were expected; and none was given. Under very inclement conditions, and under the vigilant eyes of his Gurus, the special qualities of a true Mahayana teacher was brought to the fullest maturity. In 1979, his studies completed, he left for Nepal to take up residence as the Chief Representative of the Kagyu Teachings [*in the Monastery at Swayambhu*]. In 1981, His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa passed away. Among his other monastic obligations, the Shamarpa, undertook to complete his far reaching project of building a large institute of Buddhist studies in New Delhi. It was inaugurated in February 1990 by the President of India, *Mr. Venkataraman*. In accordance with the wishes of His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa that the Karmapa International Buddhist Institute is to serve as an establishment of higher learning to further universal wisdom and compassion, based on the correct study and translation of the great treatises of Buddhism.

As for the Shamarpa himself, he has in his vision, the revival of the true spirit of the Mahamudra; the energy and the essence of which have been sadly dissipated through the gradual un-mindfulness of preceding generations. He has been in the process of retracing its roots through the ages, by collecting, revising and researching into the important works of many Mahasiddhas, culminating in "*The Treasures of Mahamudra*" by the 7th Karmapa. His vision includes the setting up of a teaching centre with special emphasis on Mahamudra [*Bodhi Path Buddhist*

Centres], that future generations may not be deprived of something, which is the very essence of Buddhism, and uniquely Kagyu in lineage.

In 1988, H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama called for a meeting with all the leading Tibetan lamas at Varanasi (Benares), India. It was to be the summoning of a concerted effort among the leading Lamas, towards a better future for Tibetans. In the history of Tibet, Lamas have long been the ruling class. Any changes brought about, both temporarily and ecclesiastically, have always been innovated by Lamas. This form of social structure had given the country enduring stability and order; and unity too, to a certain extent. It was made possible only by the unswerving loyalty of the people to their spiritual leaders and unquestioning faith in their political judgements.

However, in face of injustice, there was sometimes little redress; where there was discontent, the voices were too feeble and unorganized to be heard. It was left entirely to the benevolence and the practical sense of the rulers to see to their every need. The responsibility must have, at times, been overwhelming. The Shamarpa saw the basic weakness in the infrastructure of the Tibetan society. Religion and politics are mutually stifling. The logical solution to it, would be the segregation of the two, with the religious leaders continue to see to the spiritual needs of the people, leaving the running of the state in the hands of the social-minded lay men. The religious leaders thus far responsible for the general well-being of the people, must now feel responsible to affect some fundamental and drastic changes, adapting to the changing needs of the people, in accordance with changing times. The Kunzig Shamarpa is of the firm belief that a better future for the Tibetans, lies in the carrying out of these social and political restructuring. It was truly a test of moral courage to give voice to these convictions before the gathering in Varanasi; to some of whom, the thought of relinquishing temporal power must have been as new as it was painful.

(Written by the group of Khenpos in the Karmapa International Buddhist Institute – in short KIBI, published in 2002 on the Internet: <http://karmapa.controverse.free.fr.>)

Lara Braitstein writes about the 14th Shamarpa on his website:

He began to travel and teach in various Buddhist centres throughout Asia and the west starting in 1980, and in 1982 went to U.C. Berkeley to study English for ten months. In 1996 he started to organise the Bodhi Path Buddhist Centres, a network of centres based on a non-sectarian approach to Buddhism. The curriculum of Bodhi Path Centres is grounded in the teachings of the 11th century Indian Buddhist master *Atisha*, as they were transmitted by *Gampopa*. Atisha's methods are the most effective for taming the mind and deepening wisdom, and in addition can be taught and employed in a secular way.

Shamar Rinpoche does not encourage most of his students to become monks and nuns, instead emphasising the ideal of being a lay person who studies and practices Buddhism. This is because becoming a monk or nun requires virtuous dedication and discipline, and should not be undertaken by those unwilling to follow the full set of guidelines explained in the Vinaya (the code of conduct). For monks that mean 253 rules, and for nuns 364. In order to provide a shining example of how the renounced followers of the Buddha are really supposed to live, in 2005 Shamar Rinpoche founded the retreat centre of Shar Minub in Kathmandu, Nepal. At Shar Minub, twenty resident monks strictly maintain the full 253 vows of the Vinaya. These monks are total renunciants and dedicated meditators. Shar Minub is at the present time the only monastery among the many in the Himalayan regions where the monks are fully committed to the Buddha's Vinaya discipline.

In January, 2009 Shamar Rinpoche founded the *Infinite Compassion Foundation* to promote animal rights. The Infinite Compassion Foundation was formed to promote the humane treatment of animals that are raised for consumption of their meat and other products (especially dairy and eggs). Instead of promoting vegetarianism, Shamar Rinpoche advocates a transformation of the meat industry, such that animals will no longer be forced to live and die in brutal conditions.

Shamar Rinpoche is also the author of two books. *Creating a Transparent Democracy: a New Model*, the first book written about democracy by a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, lays out a framework for establishing a genuine democratic system of governance that promotes the welfare and prosperity of a population. This model proposes a system of democracy based on the decentralisation of political power, the promotion of political literacy among the population of democratic states, and an end to campaigning. It is Shamar Rinpoche's wish that this new model of democracy will inspire volunteers to dedicate themselves to improving the lives of their fellow citizens through sincere engagement with the structures of their governments.

In *The Path to Awakening*, Shamar Rinpoche provides an extensive commentary on *Chekawa Yeshe Dorje's Seven Points of Mind Training*. Chekawa's text was based on the Mind Training (lojong) teachings brought to Tibet by Atisha in the 11th century, and Shamar Rinpoche's commentary elucidates the inner meaning of Chekawa's Seven Points. It is both a guide to living a fulfilling life as a Buddhist and a comprehensive manual of meditation techniques.

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Shamar Rinpoche died on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2014 from a stroke in Renchen-Ulm Bodhi Path Centre in Germany, and was later cremated at Shar Minub in Nepal.