

Biography of Gendun Rinpoche

Lama Gendun Rinpoche was the meditation master and the spiritual leader of the four Dhagpos. He spent over thirty years of his life in solitary retreat in Tibet and India. Lama Gendun Rinpoche was one of the last great masters of the old generation of Tibetan Lamas. Everything he taught, had been experienced first hand during his numerous retreats in caves in the Himalayas and in India. He represented the quintessence of the fully realised yogi and the perfectly pure monk.

Receiving teachings from a master who has reached his degree of accomplishment is akin to receiving a very rare and priceless jewel. The reason behind the creation of Dhagpo Kundreul Ling, along with its retreat centers, monastery, and temple, is to ensure that the transmission of these precious teachings is continued so that they will not be lost, but will grow and spread. When the Gyalwa Karmapa sent Gendun Rinpoche to Europe to guide all those who so wished along the path to inner discovery, he once said, "In the person of Lama Gendun Rinpoche, I am giving you a pure jewel".

Gendun Rinpoche's own story

"I was 15 or 16 years old when the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa visited our monastery. At that time, he was still a small child and the previous Situ Rinpoche accompanied him. Karmapa stayed three days and gave a crown ceremony with the small black hat since he could not yet wear the large one. He also gave us a Chenrezig (deity symbolising compassion) empowerment.

Following his visit I started a 3-year-retreat and after that I went on a one year pilgrimage throughout Tibet which led me to Tsurpu (Karmapa's Tibetan seat). Once again I met the Karmapa and took part in a crown ceremony.

From central Tibet, I travelled directly back home to Kham in eastern Tibet and spent about eight years in solitary retreat. Then the Karmapa visited Nangchen again. A large tent was set up and many people came to see him. Our whole community was there, except for our cooks. Two of my retreat-friends travelled with me and after our meeting with the Karmapa, we spent several years in the mountains meditating in complete solitude.

Thereafter we went to Urgyen Rinpoche's retreat-place in Kongpo and practised there for six months. Our next pilgrimage lasted three years; we travelled through Tibet all the way to Mount Kailash. Then we felt that it was time to return home. On the return journey, we visited Tsurpu again. We heard that the Karmapa was already on his way out of Tibet (following the Chinese invasion) and was staying at Paltsen Jowo Ri. We immediately set out to join him there, but on the way we were stopped by the Chinese.

We then met friends and relatives in a town called Nye where we practised a Dorje Trollö (a protective deity) ritual to overcome disturbing influences. Finally we found out that the 16th Karmapa had reached exile in safety.

We then retreated in a cave high up in the mountains in a valley called Lo where Rechungpa (Milarepa's great disciple) once practised and meditated. During a Tsok-ritual we made the decision to flee Tibet, but it seemed almost impossible because the Chinese had already cut off all escape routes.

We came across many Tibetans who told us of their unsuccessful attempts to flee and said that there were no other routes open.

I requested help and protection from the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) and asked them to guide me because I was determined to escape.

Other Tibetans tried to dissuade me as they were convinced that the Chinese would kill me along with the others. But I was sure that fleeing was the best thing to do and that the Three Jewels would protect us.

Our escape route wasn't a real path. On one side were very steep cliffs and on the other the Brahmaputra. The Chinese had the entire route under their control. In order not to be seen we waited until the dead of night had fallen. The Chinese had flashlights and we came so close to them that we could see the glow of their cigarettes, their steaming tea cups and their guns pointing in our direction. Although our whole bodies were shaking with fear, we simply prayed to the Three Jewels and went on.

It took two hours to get through the Chinese lines, and it was certainly due to the blessing of the refuge that they didn't catch us. The Tibetans that accompanied me were overwhelmed and very thankful. They thought it was a miracle. On our way to India we didn't see anyone for three weeks. It was only near the Indian border that we met a few resistance fighters. One of them was sick, folded up in great pain. He requested us as Lamas to help him. So I prayed for him, gave him

blessings and shortly thereafter he recovered. The resistance fighters relayed a message to the next post that a great Lama was on the way and that they should do everything to help him. In this way all difficulties were overcome. (...)

(...) I discovered that the Karmapa was presently in Rumtek (his Indian seat), so I went there with a friend. (...) he told me that he would be travelling to the West during that same year visiting many countries. The Karmapa wanted to find out whether there would be an openness for the Buddha's teachings in the West. The Karmapa said to me, "If the general development in the West is positive, then you will have to go. You shouldn't protest and insist that you would prefer to stay here. I told the Bhutanese minister for internal affairs that you would need a passport and he has already begun to take the necessary steps. If I have the impression that the Dharma could flourish in the West, I will then know whether America or France is more suitable. You should then establish a Dharma centre and a monastery there. The decision is made and you shouldn't resist."

(...) I sat there absolutely speechless. I thought to myself, "What can I say ? - I don't know anything."(...). Tobga Rinpoche asked what had happened and I told him, "The Karmapa said I should go to a place called Europe". Tobga Rinpoche replied, "That's how it should be. You should go to the West". I replied, "If that's the way it is, then I say No. I will apologise to the Karmapa and tell him that I cannot go." I asked Tobgala to lend me his car because I immediately wanted to clarify this with the Karmapa. However, he said, "You won't be able to change anything. I have already spoken with the Karmapa about this, and even the minister of internal affairs has tried to change the Karmapa's mind. Nevertheless, the Karmapa insists that you must travel to the West. If you go and see him now asking him not to send you, it will only make him unhappy." This is what made me give up the idea to go and see the Karmapa again. Shortly afterwards Karmapa left to travel to the West.

On returning from his journeys, Karmapa sent his personal attendant, Sinpön, to take me to Rumtek. We left immediately and I went directly to see the Karmapa. He told me about his travels and said, "I have just been all over America and Europe. I am sure that Buddhism will flourish.(...)

"As far as practice is concerned, it seems there will be more activity in Europe. I've already been given a piece of land in France. That's where you should go."

I replied, "What should I do there ? I am not capable of anything. Why does it have to be me who goes there ?" The Karmapa simply replied, "Don't think like that... (...)

"You see, you and I have a particular karmic connection. Wherever I introduce the Dharma, you are the first to go, like a pioneer (...)

"Therefore, you definitely must go to the West now.. (...)You cannot object. You have to go...In Europe you must give blessings, empowerments and Dharma-teachings (...)

"You shouldn't make yourself out to be an insignificant, unimportant Lama, as if you were a nobody. So that you are completely confident, I can tell you about your past karma that now enables you to do all this. I can tell you who you were in previous lives. But if you don't want to know now, I can also tell you this another time."

I replied that I certainly didn't need to know and that he shouldn't tell me anything.

The Karmapa continued to say, "Once you are in Europe, you should build a temple, a monastery and a retreat-centre and teach the Dharma. You should not restrict your Dharma-activity to one country, or one small area. Rather spread the Dharma everywhere. In that way many people will have contact with and develop confidence in Buddhism. You must go soon, because the time is ripe and one must act at the right time. People have very strong emotions and the situation could change very quickly. Therefore, you must go to the West now. Times will become more difficult. If the Dharma is not established everywhere, enormous suffering will occur, similar to the suffering which beings experience in the hell realms. If we succeed in introducing the Dharma everywhere, this suffering will be minimised. We need to provide people with the possibility to understand their emotions, to distinguish between positive and the negative so that they can act in a positive way. This would really benefit the world, and this is why I am sending you to the West. It is extremely important to truly benefit beings and for this it is essential that the Dharma be introduced everywhere."

The Karmapa continued, "It will be very difficult for Tibet to gain independence. Even if this comes about, we certainly won't be able to return. We will stay here in India. Furthermore, there will be a time when difficulties will arise for the Tulkus (incarnations of great masters) and they will no longer have a place to live. If you go now, you will be able to set up a place where their activity for the welfare of beings can flourish. This is why you must build this monastery.

"In Tibet, the Dharma will be re-established and to a small degree people will be able to practice again. But they will only be able to practice alongside their work. It will never be as it was in the past, when people could fully concentrate on their Dharma-practice. Therefore, it is more than likely that it will be very difficult to fully stabilise the Dharma in Tibet and so it will not last a long time there. In Bhutan the situation is fine, however, it is uncertain how stable it will be in the future. In Sikkim

it is very good at the moment, but Sikkim will soon lose its independence. As far as Rumtek is concerned, it will not remain as it is now. It is possible that the relics in Rumtek will be in great danger. This is why I am now considering taking them to the West, where there is a more stable situation.(...)"

Then the Karmapa invited me to sit down and then blessed me. He put both hands on my head and recited a prayer to the lineage: Dorje Chang, Tilo, Naro, Marpa, Mila and so on. The Karmapa recited this prayer three times and told me that now he had transferred the entire transmission and blessing of the lineage. Thereby I became a holder of his lineage. Then he prayed to the Dharma-protectors, Dakas and Dakinis informing them that he had passed on the transmission to me and that they should provide their protection and support. This he also recited three times. I was so overwhelmed that I could only cry. (...) At that time, I thought to myself, "I am an old man and the Karmapa has given me so many responsibilities. How will I ever possibly manage?"

I was speechless. I just couldn't imagine how this would be possible and so I said nothing regarding these plans. However, the Karmapa knew right away what I thought and said, "You will live longer than me. Even though I am younger than you, I will die before you. And then you must stay to fulfil these tasks. I have transmitted to you all the necessary blessings, powers and abilities. Therefore, you will be able to accomplish all of this. After my present incarnation and before you die, we will certainly meet again. I am sure you will only pass away after that. (...) Trust me, the time is ripe and you have the right karma. You won't have any difficulties. If you only have a little confidence in the name of the Karmapa, you will be able to accomplish everything. Trust me! I am the Karmapa."

"Everything the Karmapa predicted has come true. All prophecies the Karmapa makes come true. A number of them have not yet been revealed, but they also will slowly manifest... "

Gendun Rinpoche

www.dhagpo-kagyü.org/anglais/gksh-ang/lgr1.htm