

## The 14th Shamarpa, Mipam Chokyi Lodre



**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 outburst 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 centers 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 center 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.