

Lama Tashi Dondup

A Biography of Lama Tashi Dondup

Born to a Lama Family Lama Tashi Dondup was born in Lodrag, Tibet, in 1952. His father's family was descendents of Dagmema, the wife of Marpa Lotsawa, who lived in her family house for a number of generations. The family followed both the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions. In each generation a "natural siddha" appeared and Lama's great-grandfather was one of them. He was famous for having left an imprint of his entire body in the rock wall of his meditation cave as a sign of his attainment. The small temple that his students and his family later built around this cave still exists. From that time, his family was called "Lama Family". Chogyal Ratna

Lingpa known as
Jewel Island Yogin

Advised to Be a Good Practitioner

Lama Tashi's mother was descended from the family of the Ratna Lingpa and was well known in Tibet. Her family practiced less intensively, however, Lama's mother was an exception. All of Lama's family members are serious dharma practitioners today. His father was a Nyingma Lama. At a young age Lama Tashi was thought to be the reincarnation of Tulku Dhi-Sa of the nearby Lodrag Nyide Monastery. Although most of the circumstances matched the details described in Karmapa's letter, his father did not want him to be recognized as a Tulku and refused to allow the recognition. Officially, he stated that he could not give his only son to the monastery as not all circumstances had matched. To his son, he explained that Tulku was just a name and that was not important to him. He wanted his son to focus on dharma practice without a great name even though he was indeed a Tulku. According to his opinion, the real qualities of a person were much more important than a great name. He wanted his son to focus on the essence of a Rinpoche through good practice instead of inheriting the title to it. So he advised his son to become a good practitioner, and success would come through this practice. Lama states that he has yet to fulfill the wish of his father. Became a Lama Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim

In 1959, Lama Tashi's father moved his family to Bhutan. During the following eight years, he studied with his father. In 1965 Lama received the novice vows from His Holiness 16th Karmapa during his Holiness's visit to Bhutan. He received Rinchen Terzod empowerments from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and many other Nyingma teachings from Dudjom Rinpoche, Dzogchen Rinpoche, Thomb Tulku and Samdrup Tulku. In 1970 he spent three months in Kalu Rinpoche's monastery in Darjeeling, India, to receive as many teachings as possible to prepare him for a three-year retreat. During a visit to the Rumtek monastery in Sikkim, His Holiness the 16th Karmapa advised Lama to stay and study in Rumtek before beginning his retreat. Lama stayed at Rumtek for the next 18 years. During this time, HH Drikung Kjbgon asked the Karmapa for teachings of the Six Yoga of Naropa and of Milarepa. When Lama learned that, he asked the Karmapa for permission to participate and his wish was granted.

From that time onwards, he has received many other teachings from the Karmapa. He also received teachings on major texts from Thrangu Rinpoche, Salje Rinpoche, Jamgon Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, from whom he had already received a six-month Ngondro teaching. He studied ritual procedures and music, the making of tormas and, from Tenga Rinpoche, the making of mandalas.

After teaching in the Shedra of Rumtek for three years, Lama Tashi asked permission to enter a three-year retreat. When the principal of the Shedra asked him why he wanted to go on retreat, Lama Tashi answered that, since life is impermanent, he wanted to complete a retreat before his life ends. In 1982, Lama Tashi began his three-year retreat under the "Kagyu retreat master" Bokar Rinpoche. After completing the three-year retreat, he was so inspired that he wanted to remain in retreat for the rest of his life. Instead, he entered a one-year Kalachakra retreat under Bokar Rinpoche in Mirik in Darjeeling, India. Under Bokar Rinpoche's guidance he also studied the building of stupas and received the necessary transmissions. Lama Tashi in 1994 in

Southern Tibet in front of the building which Milarepa built by order of Marpa Rinpoche Off to the West Lama Tashi with Bokar

In 1988, the "Kamalashila Institute for Buddhist Studies", in Germany, sent a request to the Rumtek monastery for a dharma teacher and Lama Tashi was appointed to take up the post. He was not keen to go, as he spoke neither German nor English. However, the institute would provide translators and Lama became resident lama of the Kamalashila Institute for the following ten years. During his tenure, Lama traveled to various Buddhist centers in Europe and North America to give teachings. Khenpo Kharthar Rinpoche, of the Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, asked Lama to teach in a three-year retreat at the Karma Ling Retreat Centre in Delaware County, New York. As well, Khenpo Kharthar Rinpoche also asked Lama to manage the Karma Thegsum Tashi Gomang Stupa project. Later the Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche asked Lama to teach in the Gampo Abbey in Halifax, Canada.

With Dalai Lama at the
exhibition of a Sand Mandala

built by Lama Tashi in

Hamburg Museum

A Stupa project managed by Lama Tashi Dondup

Karma Thegsum Tashi Gomang Stupa in

Left

Colorada -

Germany for Canada

In 1990, Lama Tashi accompanied His Eminence, the 3rd Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, to Toronto to perform the Kalachakra empowerment and the building of the Kalachakra sand mandala. After that visit, Lama was invited to Toronto many times to teach Buddhism. Lama learned to speak English and sometimes gave his teachings in English without the help of a translator. In 1998, Lama chose his main residence to be Toronto. However, he also became a frequent traveler, going to Europe, Canada and the United States to give teachings.

Lama Tashi's Wishes
Points of Mind Training in Toronto in 2002

Lama Tashi giving teaching on the Seven

Lama Tashi has had many wishes. In 1995, Lama completed eight consecutive Nyungne with his students in Toronto. In 1996, leading a delegation from Toronto and Hong Kong, Lama sponsored a Monlam in Bodghaya, India. During this weeklong gathering of thousands of monks from India, Nepal and other parts of the world, they completed the chanting of 100,000 Samanthabadra prayers, which they offered for the benefit of all sentient beings. In 2000, Lama led his students to Nepal where they completed 100 million Dorgesempa Mantras at the Thrangu Monastery. About 1000 people attended the services each day. In 2001, Lama fulfilled his wish to complete 108 consecutive Nyungnes with three of his students in Toronto. As Lama Tashi plans to live in Toronto, he asked His Holiness 17th Karmapa's advice as to whether he should establish a centre. The Karmapa supported the idea of a centre and granted the name 'Karma Tekchen Zabsal Ling' to the future centre. In 2002, Lama Tashi and his students founded the Karma Tekchen Zabsal Ling in Toronto. The mission of the Centre, as the name implies, is to offer the profound and clear teachings of the Mahayana (great vehicle) according to the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. In July of 2002, Lama gave his first public teaching in Toronto on the "Seven Points of Mind Training*".

As practitioners following the Karma Kagyu lineage, we are blessed and privileged to have the opportunity in participating and fulfilling the wishes of our lineage masters and being able to help as many sentient beings as possible.