

SHEY NARO PHOTANG:

His Eminence Kyabje Thuksey Rinpoche was born in Chushul in 1986. In July 1987 he was recognized as the reincarnation of 1st Thuksey Rinpoche (Drukchen Dungse Rinpoche) by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and His Holiness the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa. In June 1988, he was taken, first to Chemday monastery and then to Druk Sanga Choeling monastery for enthronement. Until 18 years of age, he studied at his own monastery in Darjeeling. For higher studies, he went to Bhutan where he spent nine years. He graduated from Tango Buddhist University in March 2013. He is the chairman of Druk Padma Karpo School. Thuksey Rinpoche has been given the responsibility of overseeing the Drukpa Buddhist Centers in Europe by his spiritual teacher, His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa.

Q. Could you briefly tell about yourself, your holiness, your birth, and early childhood?

My name is Kyabje Thuksey Rinpoche, Jigmet Shedup Tenzin and I was born in Chushul in 1986 as the reincarnation of 1st Thuksey Rinpoche (Drukchen Dungse Rinpoche) whose father was the 10th Gyalwang Drukpa. Druken Dungse Rinpoche was born in 1917 in Tsari in Tibet. He escaped to India, along with his father, the 10th Gyalwang Drukpa after Chinese Liberation Army took over the city of Lhasa (Tibet) in 1959. He then decided to stay in Darjeeling and established a small monastery and later a huge monastery called 'Druk Thubten Sangag Choeling Monastery'. He passed away in 1983 at the age of 66, soon after the monastery was completed. Thereafter, His Holiness the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa who is the spiritual head of Drukpa Kagyu lineage took over the overall responsibility of the monastery and the welfare of the 400 monks residing in the monastery.

In July 1987, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa went together to Gyalwa Gotsangpa's cave near Hemis monastery and meditated there for a few hours. In those days Gotsang was not easily accessible, as there was no road to Hemis village. It took grueling two to three hours on the horseback and foot to reach the cave. Through meditation and pure visions, they both decided I was the true

reincarnation of the late Thuksey Rinpoche. His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa then visited Chushul to meet my parents and to see me. Unfortunately, my mother passed away while giving birth to me. My father took care of me and I have two fathers as in polyandry system in Ladakh and Tibet in those days. His Holiness wished to take me with him but my father refused to give away as I was too small. His Holiness told my father that he would come back after a year.

On 30th June 1988, when I was two and a half years' old, His Holiness came and took me away. First I went to Chemday monastery and the monks conducted a small enthronement ceremony. Thereafter I went to Druk Sanga Choeling monastery in Darjeeling, the monastery built by my predecessor and the monks had organised a big enthronement ceremony. When I was four years old, I started my formal education under a Khenpo of Drukpa lineage. Until 18 years of age, I studied in my own monastery in Darjeeling. Besides Buddhist philosophy, I also studied English, Tibetan literature and rites and rituals performed by Drukpa monks and all the religious text and prayers that we have to do in monastic life.

Q. Why did you choose to study in Bhutan?

His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa decided to send me to Bhutan for higher studies. There is a reason behind this decision. Although there are many universities and monasteries in India and yet His Holiness realise the importance of learning one's own tradition and history. There is no better place than Bhutan to learn about the history and traditions of Drukpa Kagyu lineage. The whole kingdom of Bhutan follows the Drukpa tradition. To understand it wholly, we have to go back in the history. The founder of Drukpa Kagyu lineage, Drogon Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje was the 1st Gyalwang Drukpa (1161-1211) born in Nyangto Shulay in southern Tibet. The 4th Gyalwang Drukpa, Pema Karpo (1527-1592) was the most learned spiritual masters of the Drukpa lineage. Before passing away, Pema Karpo promised that he would take birth in two separate incarnations, so as to propagate the spiritual lineage. In accordance with this prophecy, two incarnations were discovered: Shabdung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) and Shabdung Pagsang Wangpo (1593-1653).

Following the prophecy of Pema Karpo, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal left for Bhutan, where the Drukpa Kagyu School had already been established, and founded the Cheri Monastery in 1619 in Thimphu valley. When he came to Bhutan, the country had no law and order, people slaughtered each other and there wasn't enough food to eat and they survived on leaves and roots. As the temporal and spiritual ruler of Bhutan, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal unified Bhutan for the first time in its history. Subsequently, the Drukpa Kagyu had become the principal state religion and everyone in the kingdom followed the lineage since the early 17th century.

I studied at Tango Buddhist University in Bhutan with 250 monks and other tulkus or reincarnated lamas for nine years. Those years are the best time of my life. After completing my studies in March 2013 I went back to Darjeeling and took over the responsibility of the Druk Sangag Choeling monastery from His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa.

Q. Since you have completed your education, what is your plan for the future, your holiness?

Although Darjeeling is my main seat and but being a Ladakhi, this region holds a special place in my heart and I wish to spread the Buddha Dharma here and also to serve the community, particularly in the field of education. The people of Ladakh have been following the Buddha Dharma for more than thousand years. We should preserve that tradition for our future generations.

I am planning to spend 4 to 5 months stay in Ladakh and during my stay I will devote 70% of my time towards the education and youth development. I feel the youths are a very important part of society. They need to be properly guided and counseled. Because of lack of help, support and attention by the elders, they dwelled into bad behaviours such as smoking, drinking, drugs and worst of all, suicide. It is our responsibility to guide them so that they become a good human being and to teach them the message of Buddha Dharma. I will try to go to all the schools with this message and to talk to the students and share my experiences, and share the messages of Lord Buddha. My message would be clear and simple for easy

understanding; there is no need to go deep in religious teachings. During my talks and teachings, I won't be sitting on high thrones, I like to come down and sit close to the children and talk to them.

Children are like white blank paper that we can write anything on it. We the elders are like a pen. When we go to school, we find all the blank papers. It is our duty to write nice letters and words on it. That means we have to teach them nice things and make them a good person when they grow up. So that they live a meaningful life, the learning and wisdom will stay with them forever. This wisdom will help them to serve their communities better and Ladakh will become a much better place to live. The future of Ladakh depends on the new generations and it is our responsibility to make sure that the white blank papers are nicely written because when they reach their twenties there won't be any space left to write.

In addition to that, I have to serve the Drukpa lineage, all the monasteries, monks and nuns, and old-aged people. Right now there are over 262 monasteries of Drukpa lineage under the administration of Hemis monastery. I also wish to do social work especially with the youths of Ladakh. I also want to spend 20% of my time on protection and conservation of the environment and ecology. I know that it is a big challenge.

Besides Ladakh, I have a responsibility towards spreading the Buddha Dharma, particularly the Drukpa lineage in India and other parts of the world. Drukpa Buddhist centres are now established in many European countries such as France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland. So far, His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa has been looking after these centres, but recently he asked me to take the responsibility of all the Drukpa centres in Europe. So, I will be travelling to Europe from time to time for teachings and religious sermons.

I would also like to go for a 2 months solitary retreat every year. Without going for a retreat and meditation you can't experience yourself and without experiencing yourself, you can't teach others.

Q. What is your role and responsibility as Chairman of the Druk Padma Karpo School?

I am responsible for the overall management of the School as being the Chairman. My responsibility is towards the management of the staffs, education of students and construction of school infrastructures. Right now I am focusing more on the education of the children. Being an education institute, I have to find good teachers who can show the right path to the children. I have to help the children and make them happy and enjoy their time in school. I have to advise the principal and teachers. By the grace of His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa and with the support of our patrons and sponsors, we are able to raise the funds for the necessary infrastructure. At the moment, there are about 720 students studying in the School, out of which more than 300 students are on sponsorship programme. We are trying to provide the best education and best food with minimum fees. We have targeted the children from poor families in the remote villages of Ladakh, including Zaskar and Kargil because their parents cannot afford to give quality education to their kids. Many of these children are not able to go home for a winter holiday as the roads are blocked by snow and some of the villages inaccessible by road. We also have 25 children who were victims of the flash floods or mudslides that traumatized Ladakh in August 2010.

Q. In the present day, the youths of Ladakh are too much influenced by modernisation and westernisation and they are losing touch with their traditional values and customs. The rates of crime, suicide, alcoholism and road accidents are increasing year by year. How do we overcome these problems? What advice will you give to the youths of Ladakh?

This is happening all over the world, not just in Ladakh, the figures and rates may vary from place to place. Some people say that modernisation and modern technologies are not good but I believe that modernisation if used and applied properly, can be very useful and beneficial.

In the last 4 to 5 years I have seen big changes in Ladakh. More and more kids have started smoking and on other hands, the Ladakhi traditional dress is less worn by both boys and girls. The people of Ladakh have started showing less interest in their own culture, tradition, and religion. I feel that there is a lack of effort from teachers, parents, and leaders in educating them on the importance of traditional values and customs. It is not entirely their fault, because culture and religion were never under threat and it wasn't a major issue in the past and hence it wasn't discussed openly and frequently. But now the problems are getting severe and everybody has started talking about it.

I think that the problems and social issues started in Ladakh when it was exposed to tourism. With money came luxury and comfort and when life is too comfortable you lose your respect to the culture, tradition, and religion. The root cause is the money, I believe. When you have too much money, you think too much and when you think too much, you do too much and then it goes beyond your control and beyond your traditional way of life. Why many youths are inclined towards smoking, drinking, and drugs? I think it is because of a lack of spiritual teaching. When people take drugs and alcohol and kill themselves they don't understand how precious human life is. It also shows that they are not happy with their lives and there is no peace of mind. In older times, people lived a happier life and they didn't have to consume intoxicants due to depressions. They were satisfied with what they had. There are no tension and no competition. They loved to live long. But now there is so much competition, because of money and wealth. Anger and jealousy come along with the competition. When there is

too much modernisation, spirituality automatically goes down and many people fail to realize the importance of human life and they don't know how to refrain from negative emotions and behaviours.

How do we overcome these problems? First, we have to give them a chance to understand the importance of human life, rather than yelling at them for the misdoing and misbehavior. Secondly, we have to talk to them more about spirituality. That is a medicine that can help them overcome these mental problems.

Q. In modern day, people live a fast-paced and stressful life. There is little or no time to practice religion and develop spirituality. How to find time to develop spirituality?

Spirituality doesn't mean meditating or reciting prayers and mantras. I believe spirituality is more than performing just religious activities. The inner spirituality is more important and it has to be developed in our mind. In simplest of terms, I say "to be a good and warm-hearted human being" is inner spirituality. To make them a good person, teachers, parents, and leaders have to give them good advice constantly. By doing so, they will automatically become a soft, gentle and compassionate person. Once you develop a compassionate and warm heart, without so much jealousy and anger, you owe to live a happier life. Anger and jealousy create all sorts of problems in today's world.

Q. Do you think you will serve the community better as a political leader than a spiritual leader? Do you have any plan to get into politics?

Frankly speaking, I don't know anything about politics. I haven't learned about politics and political system. It doesn't mean I don't like politics. Being a monk and a Buddhist leader, I can help the community and I don't think I have to get involved in the politics to serve the community. I don't have any plan or interest in getting into politics. Our government is trying its best to preserve the ancient old tradition of Ladakh. But there is a lack of effort and initiative from the people to preserve their own culture and Buddhist traditions.