

Khandro Thrinlay Chodon was born in Lahaul (*Tib.* Garsha), known in the sacred texts as the 'Land of the Dakinis'. Her great grandfather was none other than the great Drukpa yogi, Drubwang Shakya Shri (1853-1919), who was a realized master in both Dzogchen and Mahamudra and was widely renowned for skillfully combining these two views. Her father, the late Kyabje Apho Rinpoche (1922-1974), was responsible for reviving the Drukpa Lineage in Lahaul, Ladakh, Manali, Zaskar and Pangay, where he established several retreat centers. He was also one of the first spiritual masters who began teaching students from the West.

Khandro Thrinlay Chodon's mother, Sangyum Urgyen Chodon (1931-1985), was also an accomplished yogini, who first sowed the seed for her daughter's enduring passion for the spiritual teaching and practice in daily life. She was trained



H.H. Shabdrung Rinpoche

Tsering Dorje

as a child with the late Yogi Gegen Khyentse, a master of the Six Yogas of Naropa and Mahamudra, from whom she received all the empowerments and transmissions of the Drukpa Lineage. She also studied with the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and has practiced in solitary retreat in the mountains of Nepal, at Tato Pani Bhakang under the guidance of the late Kyabje Sengdrak Rinpoche (1947-2005), a master known for his humility and ascetic practices.



H.E. Sengdrak Rinpoche

degree in East-West Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, California.

In 1998, Khandro Thrinlay Chodon married His Holiness the Ninth Shabdrung Ngawang Jigme Rinpoche (1955-2003). She assisted in the establishment and management of Shabdrung Rinpoche's monasteries in Bodhgaya, Kalimpong and Manali. 'Khandro' is a title received through marriage to Shabdrung Rinpoche and means 'Dakini' in Sanskrit. This title refers to the wisdom quality within the feminine essence.

Sadly Shabdrung Rinpoche passed away on 4th April 2003, and since his unfortunate death, Khandro Thrinlay Chodon has been devoting herself to her vision of establishing Khachodling, which means 'Blissful Land of the Dakinis'. She sees this project as an outer and inner spiritual practice. In order to bring this project to life she has been traveling and teaching in Europe, Argentina, the United States, Australia and Taiwan. In her travels she has inspired many people by the depth of her devotion and wisdom of her lineage.

In this issue, *The Dragon* is very grateful to be given a chance to interview Khandro Thrinlay Chodon at her home in Manali, where she spoke openly about her experience as a female practitioner, the daughter of an accomplished Drukpa master, and the great granddaughter of one of the most celebrated yogis of the last century.

For more information on Khandro Thrinlay Chodon, please visit her official website: www.khachodling.org

Yayasan Guan Yin

A Living Yogini



An Interview with Khandro Thrinlay Chodon

D: The Dragon

K: Khandro Thrinlay Chodon

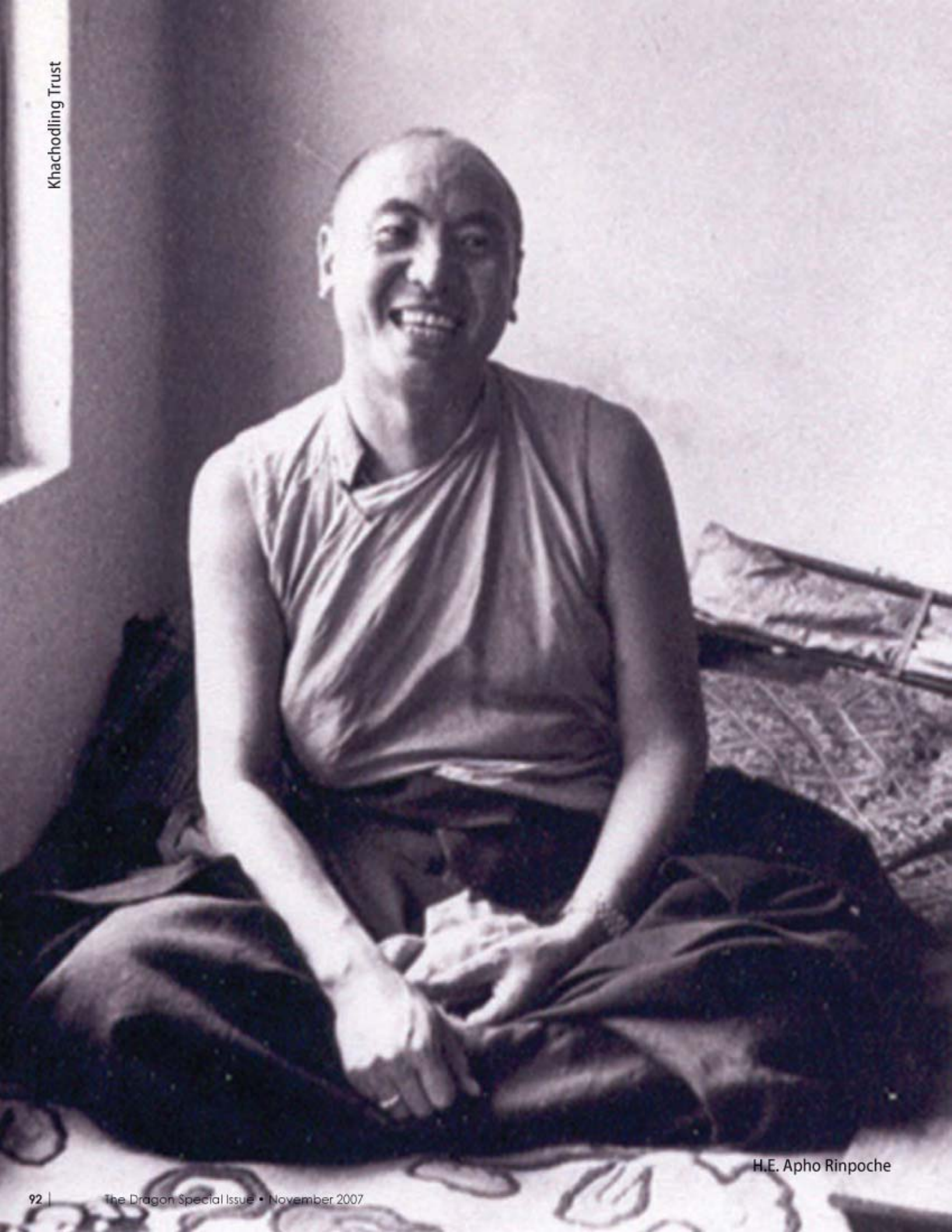
The Family Of Khandro Thrinlay Chodon

D: Can you tell us briefly about your family, especially about your father, the late Kyabje Apho Rinpoche?

K: As you know, my great grandfather is Drubwang Shakya Shri, who lived between 1853 and 1919, not too long ago. To me, this feels so close and so tangible, unlike many yogis who lived a few centuries ago. My father, the late Apho Rinpoche, (Apho in the Kham dialect is the honorific term for royal son) was actually a reincarnation of Drubwang Shakya Shri's son, Apho

Ngawang, who was also recognized as an incarnation of Drukpa Yongdzin. My father was also recognized and enthroned as a very high lama of Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche's monastery and lived there at a young age in Kham. Eventually, of course, he was trained in the Drukpa Lineage and spent most of his life in retreat.

My father was born with knotted hair on his crown, like the yogis. Apho Phamchok Rinpoche who was Drubwang Shakya Shri's son and the primary lineage holder of Shakya Shri, a very



H.E. Apho Rinpoche



Sangyum Urgyen Chodon with her two sons, Jampal and Sey Rinpoche

well-known master at that time, had predicted that Apho Rinpoche would really take care of the Drukpa Lineage at its most critical moment. Apho Rinpoche's realization was on both Mahamudra and Dzogchen, and the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche often used to talk about Apho Rinpoche as one of the most realized masters of this age.

My father, Apho Rinpoche, was very active in promoting the Drukpa Lineage in Ladakh, Zaskar, Lahaul, Pangay and the surrounding areas. Before that, my father lived in Sikkim as the spiritual advisor to the royal family there and continuing in that role could have meant a lot of financial wealth to him personally. However, at the same time, he was invited by the people of the less developed areas of the Himalayan region (led by Stagna Rinpoche who lives in Ladakh) to teach Dharma. Through divination he chose to serve the poorer areas, as, at that time, the lineage was in decline and this would bring greater benefit to more people. This decision showed his deep Bodhicitta motivation. I

remember that it was very difficult for us. We had nothing and moved from one place to the other on foot. My father had many disciples because Shakya Shri's followers were very influential in these areas. My father's presence and activities helped to revive the lineage.

When my father was teaching in Manali, he was one of the first masters to teach Westerners. His teaching was so simple and deep, and he was full of humor, so people loved his teaching. People used to flock to Manali when my father was teaching there. He did so many retreats that half of his life was spent in retreat.

When I was six and a half or seven, my father passed away. All I can remember about my father is that he was a very loving father and he would spend so much time with us. I remember his death very vividly. That morning, just as any other day, I ran to my parents' room, which was just next door, and jumped onto my father's lap to sleep on it. I had this habit of sleeping in his lap under his meditation cloak (*Tib. dagam*).

I didn't know that he had died. He was sitting there like he was still alive. Everyone pulled me away from my father. My mother and everyone were crying; they said that he had already passed away. I looked at my father, but he seemed just the same, and for weeks he was in the same meditative posture. He did not have the look of a dead person. I always remember this.

My older brother, Sey Rinpoche, was recognized as Tripun Pema Chogyal, who was the heart disciple of Drubwang Shakya Shri. When they were children, Sey Rinpoche and my younger brother, Jampal, studied under our uncle Thuksey Rinpoche's guidance at Druk Thubten Sangag Choeling Monastery in Darjeeling; and later they went to Bhutan to receive all the teachings and transmissions of the Drukpa Lineage from the direct student of Shakya Sri, namely Lama Sonam Zangpo (1888-1984). They studied the Six Yogas of Naropa there with Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

who was the maternal grandson of Lama Sonam Zangpo. Sey Rinpoche now continues to lead the family monastery in Manali. He also travels and teaches throughout the world. He is married with two sons and one daughter.

My older sister, Dechen Wangmo, died very young. My two younger brothers are Jampal and Jigme. Jampal is said to be one of the incarnations of the Eighth Drukpa Choegon Rinpoche, but Jampal felt that in this life, he would like to live and practice as a common layperson, so he does not live the formal life of a lama. He has his own travel business called Golden Peak and everyone in Manali knows Jampal as a very kind person. He is always involved in some kind of activity to help others. One of his most recent projects is to help rickshaw wallahs in Chandigarh become owners of their own business. He is also helping my father's monasteries with the help of an American friend, Dr. Joyce, who is bringing in

Sey Rinpoche, Yogi Gegen Khyentse and other yogis of Apho Rinpoche's monastery



western medical treatment. Jampal is married to a Ladakhi, and they have two children.

Jigme is my youngest brother, and he is now helping me as my secretary, assisting me in all my work and projects. He is also a layperson with a spiritual mind. He is interested in my Khachodling vision and he has been supporting me with his skills. With him by my side I feel protected in this endeavor.

D: We heard that all of Drubwang Shakya Shri's daughters were realized yoginis. Can you tell us a little about them?

K: Drubwang Shakya Shri had four daughters, and all of them bore signs of enlightened beings. They all became spiritual consorts of great spiritual masters of the Drukpa and Nyingma lineage.

The youngest daughter, Ashi Phurla, was the consort of the Tenth Gyalwang Drukpa (1884-1930). The First Thuksey Rinpoche was born from this relationship. The eldest daughter, Ashi Lhuncho, was consort to the Sixth Khamtrul Rinpoche Tenpai Nyima (1849-1907), and their son, Setrul Dondrup became renowned. The second daughter was married to a Nyingma master and their descendents are Namkha Drimed Rinpoche, Azin Rinpoche and his family. The third daughter was consort to the Seventh Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche and was a great yogini.

Some years ago a relative, Sherab Dolma, visited me from Kham, and told me some stories of my great aunts. I have since checked these stories with the present Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche. I will do some more research and some day I will write about them. But these are some of the stories I have heard and verified.

One of my great aunts, Ashi Dolkar, was found to have self emanating Taras on her vertebrae after her death. These relics are still in Kham, but I am not exactly sure where they are.

Another of my great aunts, Ashi Lhuncho, the one who became the spiritual consort of the Sixth Khamtrul Rinpoche, was known in Kham to be an emanation of a Wisdom Dakini. The monks at Khampagar Monastery were very upset with Khamtrul Rinpoche for taking a consort and

they blamed her for seducing him. Once they followed her with the intention of killing her, but she turned around and gave them a gaze that turned them into figurines.

Actually, my older sister was also very special. When she was born, I have been told by Imi-la (my father's lifelong devoted attendant) and the nuns of Lahaul that the eight auspicious signs appeared all over her body, like birthmarks. She was amazing. She died very young and they say that where she was cremated in Pangay, a natural spring arose which still remains to this day. When she was cremated, a tent of rainbows appeared over the spring which lasted for nearly a year and the people of Pangay composed a special song in praise of her good qualities.

Lama Sonam Zangpo



Difficulties Being Female Practitioners

D: Can you tell us about yourself?

K: I was born two years after my sister's birth. A few years before my sister and I were born, my father took our entire family to Lahaul where he gave teachings and did extensive retreats. My father had many disciples in his entourage, who were great yogis, traveling and living near him. One of them was the late Gegen Wangyal, who was meditating at Tayul Gompa, opposite Kardang Gompa. A few days before I was born, Gegen Wangyal who was in retreat, had a powerful dream. He saw a rainbow over Kardang Gompa and he was so excited that he left the retreat and went to my father, saying that a very special son would be born and the child would be a very special Rinpoche. While Gegen Wangyal was a hundred percent sure of this, my father just laughed, "Ha! Ha! Last night I dreamed that I was ringing the bell, and the whole world was resonating with the sound of the bell. So I bet you that this will be a daughter. Why must it be a son to be so special?" But Gegen Wangyal refused to believe my father. Then, a few days later, I was born and Gegen Wangyal was really disappointed, but my father was very happy. So this was the attitude towards women; it has nothing to do with good or bad, but it's just how traditional things are in our society.

My mother was the main person who really encouraged me. I remember when I was about seven or eight years old, we were living in Manali and I was going to a Catholic school in Kullu. Every time I came home, my mother would encourage me to study. She would say, "You really have to study Dharma also, it is very important." Then I asked her, "Why don't you make me a nun?" This is because I thought that to practice Dharma as a female, I had to be a nun, there was no choice. My mother told me, "No. If your sister were alive, then you could become a nun. But she died, so now you have to study and practice as a lay person."

My mother would whisper to me, "Thuksey Rinpoche said that you are an incarnation of his own mother, Ashi Phurla." Maybe she said this

just to inspire me. Then she would go on and say, "You will never be recognized. You have to work very hard and prove your spiritual worth through your own life. You should never be distracted from the spiritual path, no matter where you are and what you do."

My mother used to tell me all the time, "You have to study hard at school, but you also can't be like other people. Although you don't have to be a nun, you can practice as a lay person." And then she told me great stories about my great aunts, the daughters of Shakya Shri. Deep inside, I just wanted to practice, but it didn't happen the way I wanted.

My mother kept telling me stories to encourage me. And then, between my Western education and going home to be with Gegen Khyentse, I felt much better. I knew that my life was all about Dharma and spiritual practice, but that it was never going to be straightforward for me. I would have to go through all the different struggles in the world. Since my father's passing, the closest person to me in my family has been Gegen Kyentse, along with Imi Drubten.

My mother had made it very clear to me what my life was going to be. She and Gegen Khyentse were always my masters, encouraging me and giving me full moral support. Then, my mother died, and that was very painful. At that time, I was lucky to meet Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Sengdrak Rinpoche, who inspired and encouraged me on my spiritual path.

Sengdrak Rinpoche used to tell me, "Even if you are a woman, don't worry, you can attain enlightenment, just keep practicing. You don't have to live in a monastery or practice in the mountains. Enlightenment is all about mind. Everything is about mind. When your mind is pure, nothing matters, place doesn't matter, other conditions don't matter." This is advice that I keep very much in my heart. When I look back, this has been one of my main practices. No matter where I went, I was not going to get easily all the opportunities to receive teaching and practice. I

Khandro Thrinlay Chodon, as a child, with her family





Yogi Gegen Khyentse

had to go through education, marriage and all these things. So this is how my personal life has been. It has not been easy.

Many people said "You are Drubwang Shakya Shri's great granddaughter; all the teachings must be available for you." But the reality is not like that. In our tradition, the most common prospect for a daughter of a high Rinpoche is to marry another high Rinpoche; or else to become a nun. When I was fourteen years old, I had proposals from many Rinpoches. But it was not what I wanted, I insisted on continuing my education.

I had great difficulties trying to get teachings and transmissions of the Six Yogas of Naropa. I asked Gegen Khyentse, "Why is it that when it comes to the Six Yogas of Naropa, there's a full-stop? Women cannot see, cannot hear and cannot

practice." Then he thought about it, meditated on it, and one day he told me, "You just come to the room with the monks and join." So I was doing some of the practices of the Six Yogas, until the stage of levitation. Although Gegen Khyentse said, "This is your family's lineage, if I don't offer it to you, then it wouldn't be right on my part, especially since you have done all the requirements that are necessary," But it was still very difficult for some of my family members to let me continue, because in this practice I had to be naked, wrapped only with an *angrak* (meaning 'skirt' in Tibetan), and to do this among monks as a woman was unthinkable. I didn't want to hurt anyone and I was very shy, and still very young, so I didn't pursue it any further even though deep in my heart I really wanted to. Gegen Khyentse encouraged me, saying "Mahamudra is the main practice, and all these other skills are just to bring out and enhance the essential qualities of Mahamudra. You should continue with your Mahamudra practice." And then I went to Kyabje Adeu Rinpoche who said to me, "Come to Kham, we don't have these problems for women there."

In the middle of everything, I fell in love with His Holiness Shabdrung Rinpoche, and we got married. I totally settled in with Rinpoche. He never played upon the fact that he was a very high Rinpoche. In our daily life together I discovered the essence of his being. Whatever he did, from playing football to giving wangs (transmissions) became a beautiful teaching for me. Of course I was so busy that I didn't even have time to look at one text during our five years of married life. Everyday, Bhutanese devotees would come to see Rinpoche and I had to be at his side to serve him. Rinpoche also told me from the day we got married that it was very important that I served him with all my energy because, as he said, "I don't have much time with you, so I want you to be 100% with me." Then we established

Right Top: Khandro Thrinlay Chodon and H.H. Shabdrung Rinpoche at their wedding ceremony in the United States.

Right Bottom: Khandro Thrinlay Chodon and H.H. Shabdrung Rinpoche



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quite a big monastery in Bodhgaya and expanded our monasteries in Kalimpong and Manali. I helped Rinpoche with the affairs of the monasteries. Of course there were many monks there but no women.

As you know, Shabdrung Rinpoche died of cancer. Before his passing, he spent six to seven months in the hospital. It was an extremely special time. He manifested the fearlessness of death so clearly. There is so much in my entire time with Rinpoche that could be a book in itself. But here, now, I only need to say that during this time, I realized that my service was my practice, and these five years with Rinpoche were all service to him. After Rinpoche passed away, I felt myself to be not so useful in the monasteries with 300 monks, being a woman and I'm now almost retired from my duties in the monasteries. And slowly a chapter of my own is appearing.

I am keeping my life very focused, think-

ing about our lineage, how important it is, and about setting up a nunnery in Zanskar. It is really interesting for me to see how a yogini lineage can be revived and practiced. When I was attending the Naropa Ceremony in July 2004 in Ladakh, some nuns from Zanskar came and told me they needed my support. I wasn't sure whether I could help. Around the same time, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche had reminded me of my role in preserving the Shakya Shri lineage. He had been encouraging me to teach for many years but I always thought that I had nothing to teach. However Rinpoche said, "It doesn't matter, it will come." At his invitation I started my first formal teaching, last year in Australia. It was very encouraging for me. I taught whatever was coming directly from my heart and it seemed to touch people. I guess having been through the death of my husband and the struggle of being a woman trying to practice Dharma, I could relate to people's problems. I feel very connected with people and I think I am able to work with

Khandro Thrinlay Chodon with her nuns in Zanskar





Khandro Thrinlay Chodon with H.E. Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche

people directly, especially with women, from my own experience. In this way, I feel a deep meaning in my life to be able to share the blessings of my masters and I work to manifest the vision of Khachodling to the best of my ability.

After Shabdrung Rinpoche passed away, I went to Sengdrak Rinpoche because I thought maybe I should become a nun, cut off my hair and free myself of more worldly entanglements. Then Sengdrak Rinpoche gave me all the teachings and revisions of what he had been given. After that he said, "You cannot cut your hair. In your family, there has been no girl who has cut her hair and practiced. All the girls in your family have gone through their lives being yoginis. Cutting hair is not necessary. It is a difficult path for you, but this is the right path. Please, don't cut your hair and continue your practice. All my blessings are there with you. Never come back to Bhakang." I was so sad because I used to go

to Bhakang to receive teachings from Sengdrak Rinpoche, and I felt I'd lost everybody, even Sengdrak Rinpoche. In fact, I had gone with some money to build a small hut for myself to practice there, but instead Rinpoche gave me some more money and told me, "Your duties are more important, you have to go back to Shabdrung Rinpoche's place and try to finish all the work for Rinpoche, slowly, until somebody takes over, then you do your own practice and your own chapter will start." I feel this is what's happening now. After that time I never saw Sengdrak Rinpoche again. He died shortly afterwards.

D: We are very touched by your experiences and your perseverance. This is very contradictory to what we hear during teachings. The gurus always say, "Females and males, regardless of form, have equal rights to attain enlightenment." And it is shocking to learn about your difficulties in pursuing a spiritual path as a daughter of a



Khandro Thrinlay Chodon with her Western students

high Rinpoche and the great granddaughter of Drubwang Shakya Sbri. Is this attitude towards female practitioners changing now?

K: Now, I think with a lot of effort, things are moving forward. For example, the nuns that I'm supporting in Zanskar, had absolutely no opportunities to learn, no one was willing to teach them. I went there and told the yogis who had done three-year retreats, "You have done a lot, you have to teach these nuns." Finally they agreed and now the nuns have teachers. I especially admired His Holiness the Twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa for making that bold move during the Naropa Ceremony in 2004 in Ladakh, to have his nuns organizing everything. This helped to bring awareness of the abilities of female practitioners. Even the nuns themselves were encouraged to see this. Somehow in their mind, they used to think, "I can't do this." Nuns often have this inferiority complex, and in the society, people think that nuns can only cook and do housework. Now we have examples of nuns who are really doing a lot of things that used to be done only

by monks. My nuns in Zanskar have been learning and practicing under the guidance of Lama Wangdu (a student of Apho Rinpoche and Shabdrung Rinpoche) and Lama Rigdzin (a student of Apho Rinpoche). Lama Wangdu said he was so impressed that the nuns had made so much progress, he couldn't believe it. He was teaching the monks and then I asked him to also teach the nuns. The nuns are not only great in practice, but they are also grateful. The feeling of gratitude is so strong, they don't take things for granted. This is such a precious quality. Lama Wangdu didn't have a house, so the nuns built a little place for him in five or six months, with their own hands. He was very touched by that. And on top of this, the nuns are studying so hard.

D: Now that you have been teaching for almost a year, what do you think are the problems that women face on the spiritual path or in life? What kinds of solutions can you offer?

K: Women face different problems under different circumstances. When I speak to lay women

from the East, they are always facing problems related to their families, their husbands and their children. Within a family, a woman usually feels kind of stuck, not able to move in her life. There is a lot of pressure about her own identity, because there is so much judgment about being a woman - women should do this, they should not do that. There are so many do's and don'ts that they feel stuck and they want to move. For example, this morning a Tibetan girl called me, "Please help me, I need to get out of here. Can you help me to go abroad? Can you find me a man who can just take me out of here?" She is reaching a certain age, and she doesn't want to marry the people whom her parents have chosen. She herself has so many abilities, but due to many conditions, she is not able to exercise these. And she also knows that once she gets married, she will get stuck. This is the kind of problem I always see in our younger girls. They just want to get out there in the world so that they can explore for themselves.

With my own life, it was also the same. When I went to America to study, it really opened me. I didn't know that I had so many choices available to me, and in the West, I had the chance to explore my potential and explore my life as a woman from a different angle. I can see that so many women, especially in the East have a similar kind of problem, even in the Dharma. Nuns in some places are totally dominated by the monks. They cannot do anything and they cannot fully expand into their own potential. I really feel their problems because I myself have gone through this.

But in the West, women have other kinds of problems. They are insecure, because they are overly independent. Due their own conditions, their problems are different.

My advice is that as each of these two extremes – one suffered by women in the East and one by women in the West – can destroy women's own beauty, women need to find some kind of middle path. When I needed to get out of

Khandro Thrinlay Chodon with H.H. the Twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa, at a picnic on the peak of Kulluta, the holy abode of Chakrasamvara





Khandro Thrinlay Chodon's parents

the East, I went to America, but then when you are out there, you might get lost with so much freedom, because suddenly you can do anything

you want. So you need the awareness of not being carried away. Luckily the practice of Dharma comes in handy, to balance your mind.

A Mother as a Guiding Light

D: You have spoken adoringly about your mother, who seemed to have supported you unwaveringly on your spiritual path. Can you tell us more about her in relation to the concept of a yogini?

K: First of all, what do you mean by "yogini"? Then that leads to the next question: What do you mean by "practice"? Being a yogini is not about cutting off your hair and running away from life. The more I think about the meaning of "yogini", the first person that comes into my mind is my own mother. The more I think about her, the more I think that she was a fearless yogini because she really lived in the reality of the world.

My mother was born into an aristocratic family. She was said to be a descendent of King Songtsen Gampo's minister by the name of Lonpo Ghar. On the day she was born, many auspicious events happened in her family, such as many livestock being born and the family, as a result, became wealthier. My grandmother decided that my mother was not to be married into another family but instead a man would be brought for her into the home (this is called *magpa* in Tibetan). This keeps the family fortune intact. This decision made my mother feel that all her family wanted from her was her marriage potential. So she dressed untidily and cut her hair whenever suitors came to see her!

My mother only had one brother so they decided to educate him to become a monk. Deep inside, my mother wanted to become a nun and practice, but it was not possible. Traditionally her family was Gelugpa but they sponsored all traditions because of their deep love of the Dharma. All kinds of teachers were brought into the home to teach her brother subjects such as astrology, scripts, philosophy and so on. My poor mother really wanted to study, but my grandmother said,

"Don't even look at the books. You have to go the field and look after all the workers, because later on you will have to take care of this family."

However her brother understood her deep longing and supported her by secretly passing on the knowledge that he learned each day. Then my mother would spend all her time in the field studying. This was very unusual for women of her time. The workers were so happy because my mother would not look at them working. That's why, when I was small, every time I came back from school, she would teach me more, and when I complained, "Ama-la (meaning "mother" in Tibetan), I don't want to study. I have studied so much. I just finished my exams;" my mother would scold me, "No. You have to. You are so stupid. When I was young, I wanted to study but I had no one to teach me and I had to study secretly."

Finally my grandmother got fed up with my mother, and asked, "Okay, what do you want to do with your life?" My mother replied, "I want to be a nun." Her family then sent her to a nunnery near Kyiphuk, the seat of Drubwang Shakya Sri, near Druk Sangag Choeling Monastery in Southern Tibet.

So my mother stayed beside the nunnery in Kyiphuk. At that time, Tripun Pema Chogyal, the heart disciple of Shakya Shri, usually went and taught in Kyiphuk. My mother said that was the happiest time of her life. Since her family was very rich, food and daily supplies were never a problem. My mother even had an attendant, so all she did was practice, practice and practice. She completed seven *ngondros* (preliminary practices, each comprises 100,000 prostrations, 100,000 Vajrasattva mantra recitation, 100,000 mandala offering and 100,000 guru yogas). Tripun Pema Chogyal was guiding her meditation and was very impressed by her spiritual realization. At the

time my father also went to Tripun Pema Chogyal, wishing to take the ordination vows. Tripun Pema Chogyal told my father, "You have to carry on your family's lineage, so you cannot become a monk." He suggested my father take my mother as his spiritual consort. Actually, my mother had not been ordained yet, although she was living like a nun. Incidentally, it is very interesting that my older brother, Sey Rinpoche, was recognized as the reincarnation of Tripun Pema Chogyal. In one life he was their guru and the next he took rebirth as their son.

Throughout my mother's whole life, she was just serving Apho Rinpoche, my father, supporting him. That was a big example for me. Somehow, in this age, we women have our own ego. Whenever I felt that kind of ego arise within me and I didn't want to serve my husband, I thought of my mother. So I was very happy that I was able to serve Shabdrung Rinpoche the way mother served my father. My mother set an example for me and I always kept this in my mind. Whenever my ego arose, I just saw her serving my father.

As my mother's family was influential, they had so many problems during the Cultural Revolution. My uncle was jailed for twenty-five years, one of my two aunts was raped, and my grandmother was sentenced to death. My mother told me that when she was coming to India, she was able to draw strength only from the Dharma. All her family and Apho Rinpoche's family were totally ruined. I see my mother as a true yogini, due to the way she perceived her struggles and how she faced them all with so much dignity. You could see her strength in practice, and how dignified she was when she went through all these problems in life. Even at her death it was inspiring to witness that she too, like any true lama, any great yogi, remained in Samadhi for one week without any bodily decomposition. Hundreds of her admirers, especially the Indians and locals, came with special sandalwood for her cremation. They expressed their loss by calling her "Devi" (goddess). Though with her passing she physically left me alone in this big wide world, the beauty of her yogini qualities are permanently engraved in my mind and she is my guiding light.

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Fearless Spirituality

D: Can we say that in spiritual practice, as your level of spiritual practice improves, your level of fearlessness also increases? Therefore you are able to face life with more dignity and courage.

K: What do you mean by spirituality? It is the inner aspect of your being, isn't it? There you are developing your strength, but the outer aspect of life is also a play of that. How do you react? If you get carried away by suffering, it becomes suddenly so overwhelming that you have no strength to look at the suffering as a teaching. So the more you practice, the more you are able to look at this manifested aspect of your worldly life as inseparable from the Dharma itself! Once we understand this dance of the outer and the inner...that is the view. Fearlessness, dignity and courage become the effortless display of this profound view. I think so.

D: Khandrola, thank you so much for your time, sharing your experiences and history of your revered family. We look forward to hearing more stories of your great aunts and your enlightened family members. We wish you all the success in your life as an active proponent of the Yogini Lineage. བཤེད།



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