



*His Holiness the Dalai Lama with Geshe Lhundub Sopa in 1989.
Photo by Kalleen Mortensen.*

The Dalai Lama Completes His Studies

By Geshe Lhundub Sopa

Geshe Lhundub Sopa has led an extraordinary life by any measure. Born in 1923 in Tsang, Tibet, to farmers, he eventually became an accomplished scholar at Sera Je Monastery in Lhasa, where he taught Lama Yeshe. He witnessed firsthand the shifting political tides as Chinese Communist forces bared down on Tibet, eventually fleeing into exile in 1959. In the early 1960s, he went to the United States and joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin in 1967. In time, Geshe Sopa became a full professor and trained many prominent scholars of Tibetan Buddhism. At the same time, he continued to serve as a teacher for important Tibetan teachers, including Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Yangsi Rinpoche. He established Deer Park Buddhist Center in Oregon, Wisconsin, which hosted the first Kalachakra initiation given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in the West in 1981. Geshe Sopa, now retired, continues to publish scholarly works on Tibetan Buddhism.

Like a Waking Dream is Geshe Sopa's autobiography, published by Wisdom Publication and edited by Paul Donnelly, one of Geshe Sopa's students. In the book, Geshe-la shares detailed memories of his youth and early days in the Tibetan monastic system, giving valuable insight into a now-vanished world. He offers a unique and heartfelt perspective on exile and establishing Tibetan Buddhism in the West. We're happy to be able to offer you a short excerpt from Geshe-la's autobiography in Mandala.

Though His Holiness had already taken leadership of Tibet by the end of 1950, he didn't take his geshe examination until 1959. Shortly afterward, things got much worse, and His Holiness fled to India. Interestingly, everything came to a head right after His Holiness finished his education.

His Holiness Bestows Jangchup Lamrim

On November 30, 2012, His Holiness the Dalai Lama began a series of teachings and transmissions on 18 classic lam-rim commentaries at the request of His Eminence Ling Rinpoche. The teachings and transmissions took place over two weeks at Gaden Monastery and Drepung Monastery in Doeguling Tibetan Settlement, Mundgod, India. The historic event was organized by the Jangchup Lamrim Teaching Organizing Committee (JLTOC).

As part of FPMT's mission to preserve the Mahayana tradition, Lama Zopa Rinpoche offered to support these rare and precious teachings. FPMT's Preserving the Lineage Fund contributed US\$370,000 to offer vegetarian food to all of the 12,000-15,000 monks in attendance; sponsor the travel of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and entourage; fund a sound system for the event; and support the printing of 50,000 copies of five different texts for the event and bags for the texts being offered. In addition, FPMT's Education Services and Translation Offices provided 23 texts in English, Chinese, German, Spanish and French for a new critical edition of the 18 Jangchup Lamrim commentaries that has been produced for the teaching series by JLTOC.

A live webcast of the teachings was available for those unable to attend in person. The series will continue in the latter part of 2013, when His Holiness will offer these teachings and transmissions at Sera Monastery in Lugsung Samdupling Tibetan Settlement, Bylakuppe, India.

For more information on the teachings, texts and for video, visit www.jangchuplamrim.org.

You can learn more about the Preserving the Lineage Fund and make a contribution at www.fpmt.org/projects/fpmt/plf.html.

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Geshe Sopa at Lama Zopa Rinpoche's house in Aptos, California, 2009. Photo by Kalleen Mortensen.

... At the time of his geshe examination, the Dalai Lama had to go to each of the Three Seats: first Drepung, then Sera and then Ganden. At each monastery, he defended his thesis against the abbots and other high scholars who asked him questions. He also had to get up and debate with these scholars. The final examination took place during the Mönlam Festival, when all the monks of the Three Seats came to Lhasa.

Each of the Three Seats selected several scholars to ask His Holiness questions in this examination.

During the Mönlam Festival there were three wet assemblies [assemblies with tea and a meal] and

noon and evening sessions. The scholars asking the questions in the morning tended to be younger, though they were still advanced scholars. During the noon session they would be intermediate-level scholars, and in the evening session the interrogators would be the abbots and the old geshe and lamas. In the case of Sera Je, the abbot selected the monks for this task, and I was chosen to be one of these examiners. Once we were selected, we had to prepare ourselves. We didn't know exactly what the subject would be until it was almost time, but we would know the general area based on which session we were doing. Since I was doing the questioning during the noontime session, I knew that the topic would either be Perfection of Wisdom or Madhyamaka. It wasn't necessarily the case that scholars in the Madhyamaka class, for example, would be assigned Madhyamaka subjects. It was simply a matter of the abbot selecting good scholars, regardless of their class. That was a truly wonderful experience for me. Being chosen was a great privilege, but it was also intimidating. I didn't want to look foolish in front of all those great scholars and, of course, in front of His Holiness himself.

On the day of the debate, all the great scholars from the Three Seats were there, as were government officials, the abbots of Sera, Drepung and Ganden, the tsenshaps [His Holiness' debate teachers and partners], and His Holiness' two tutors. And there I was, debating in front of all these people.

three dry assemblies each day. In the morning the Dalai Lama had to go to a place in Lhasa called Sunghöra. This is also where the Ganden Throne Holder gave teachings during Mönlam. This place had several levels. The Ganden Throne Holder and the abbots sat on the highest level, the geshe who were receiving their degree that year sat on the next level down, and the rest of the monks sat on the huge stone floor. During the morning dry assembly His Holiness had to defend his thesis there on the subject of logic, mostly on the works of Dharmakirti. At noontime His Holiness had to answer questions on Perfection of Wisdom and Madhyamaka in the big outer courtyard of the Jokhang Temple, which is called the Khyamra. Finally he was examined on Vinaya and Abhidharma at the same place in the evening.

Every college at each of the Three Seats had to select scholars to examine His Holiness in the morning,

On the day of the debate, all the great scholars from the Three Seats were there, as were government officials, the abbots of Sera, Drepung and Ganden, the tsenshaps [His Holiness' debate teachers and partners], and His Holiness' two tutors. And there I was, debating in front of all these people. I asked His Holiness questions, and he had to respond. It was not easy. There is some film footage of this session at the Khyamra. I can be seen debating His Holiness, though my face is not shown. The camera was behind me facing His Holiness, so you can only see me from the back. You can't tell that it is me, but I remember it, and I can recognize myself. It was just coincidence that I was the one who got filmed; not everybody who debated there was recorded.

I had to dress up for this event, so I had to borrow a good robe from one of my students because I didn't have anything all that nice. I didn't have to wear the silken kind of clothing that high

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officials and some lamas wore to debate His Holiness, but we ordinary monks had to at least wear good-quality, new robes. In our normal lives we wore pretty rotten clothing. That kind of thing was just not important. As the debate began we had to wear the outer robe a certain way then shift it to another way. Finally, we folded it down around the waist, and the actual debate started. That was the traditional, ceremonial way of doing it.

My debate topic was the Perfection of Wisdom literature, and I was assigned to ask His Holiness about the subject of the buddha-nature. In Mahayana Buddhism, it is said that although everybody has the potential to become a buddha, that potential is usually sleeping. Through study and learning, this potential can

be awakened, and this is called *awakening the lineage*. There are many sutras on this subject, and it is discussed in Maitreya's *Uttaratantra* in many passages. I recall that it was one of those passages that formed the basis of my question to His Holiness. His Holiness reminded me a couple years later that this was the question that I had put to him during his exam, and we joked about it a little bit. Then he said that since I had done this, I had to go to America to awaken the buddha lineage there.

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Reminiscences of Geshe Sopa

By Roger Jackson

In coordination with the publication of Geshe Lhundub Sopa's autobiography Like a Waking Dream, Mandala asked several of Geshe Sopa's students to share their stories of Geshe-la. We've collected more than a dozen reminiscences, which we've published at mandalamagazine.org. We share one of the contributions with you here.

I first heard the name Geshe Sopa in the fall of 1974, when my girlfriend (now wife) Pam Percy and I were attending the seventh Kopan course. Having survived and ultimately thrived at the sixth course and spent most of the summer studying at the Tibetan Library in Dharamsala, we both had begun to ponder what to do

who was, to boot, among the most respected gurus of my teachers at Kopan, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

I was accepted into the Buddhist Studies program, and Pam and I moved to Madison late in the summer of 1975. We shared a house on Lake Mendota Drive with Beth and Elyse Mergenthaler. Geshe Sopa was living in a small house just a few doors down, with his eccentric but indispensable assistant, Elvin Jones. Geshe-la had been in Madison for eight years at that point, and already had seen a number of fine scholars through the Buddhist Studies program at the university, including Jeffrey Hopkins. He also had given Buddhist teachings

Geshe-la's own inclinations always have been monastic, scholarly and conservative, yet he developed a remarkable ability both to teach and counsel a group of disciples whose personal, intellectual and spiritual needs were all over the map.

when we returned to the United States in December, after 15 months on the road.

By nature inclined to scholarship, I had begun to think that graduate work in Buddhism might be the ideal course for me. Serendipitously, a letter arrived from our friend Beth Newman (née Solomon), who had just moved to Madison, where she was studying at the University of Wisconsin with Geshe Sopa. "Roger," she wrote, "he's your intellectual dream come true." I'm not sure that my hairs stood on end or tears spontaneously formed in my eyes when I read this, but I was overjoyed to know that there was someone in the States who was both a university professor and a Buddhist master – and

off and on, but never, so far as I know, within a formal organization.

By the fall of 1975, however, the number of Kopan and Dharamsala veterans in Madison, combined with interested locals, was sufficient that some structure seemed necessary. Thus was founded Ganden Mahayana Center, which began with Geshe-la teaching Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo* to a small group every Sunday morning in his living room. Typically, after beginning with a long, slow recitation of "The Foundation of All Good Qualities," refuge and bodhichitta prayers, a mandala offering, and a brief meditation, he would quote from memory a verse from Shantideva's *Way of the Bodhisattva*,

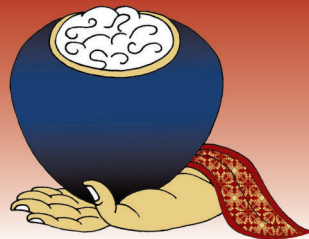
then comment on it with great energy, insight and humor, before turning at last to Tsongkhapa's text. (His discourses on the *Lamrim Chenmo* would continue not just for years but for decades and are being issued by Wisdom Publications as a multi-volume set.)

As the group surrounding him grew, Geshe-la moved to a larger house across the street, teaching other texts during the week and beginning a tradition of summer courses involving discourses and initiations by visiting Gelug masters (including Lamas Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche) and, eventually, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who first visited in 1979. In 1981, in anticipation of His Holiness' visit to confer the first-ever Kalachakra initiation in the West, Ganden Mahayana Center became Deer Park Buddhist Center, and Geshe-la moved to the property in Oregon, Wisconsin, where he still resides (though the split-level ranch house now has been supplemented by a residential annex, a Kalachakra temple, a stupa, and the magnificent Deer Park temple, which was inaugurated by His Holiness in 2008).

While I lived in Madison, from 1975 until 1983, I was closely involved with Geshe-la's centers and was able to witness first-hand how he dealt with the motley crew of American Buddhists who came to study with him: a mix of students, working people and unreconstructed Dharma Bums who were

alike in their dedication to the Buddha's teachings but not always certain how to apply them as lay people in the West. Geshe-la's own inclinations always have been monastic, scholarly and conservative, yet he developed a remarkable ability both to teach and counsel a group of disciples whose personal, intellectual and spiritual needs were all over the map. The name he was given at ordination, Lhundub Sopa – "spontaneous patience" – surely was prophetic, for it was a quality he would manifest again and again over the years, as he dealt with our neuroses, off-the-wall questions and crises of faith, all quite sincere, but far from what his geshe training had prepared him for.

From the time I first met him, my relationship with Geshe-la has been dual, for he has not only been my principal spiritual teacher but also my graduate-school instructor, my dissertation advisor and a scholarly collaborator. I remember with pleasure sitting in seminars at the University of Wisconsin with the likes of José Cabezón, John Makransky, Beth Solomon, Beth Simon and John Newman, working through *really* difficult Tibetan texts with Geshe-la, trying to find just the right English equivalent for a Buddhist psychological term or understand properly what it means to say that "the two truths are one in essence but have different contrapositives." This is not everyone's cup of Tibetan tea, but for those of us prone to philosophy, it seemed



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the very inseparability of bliss and, if not emptiness, at least mental elaboration.

As my dissertation advisor, Geshe-la showed remarkable patience and flexibility. I worked on a Tibetan commentary on the second chapter of Dharmakirti's *Pramanavarttika* (*Commentary on Valid Cognition*), the source of the classic proofs of such basic Buddhist claims as the possibility of

struggled through the knottiest passages in Thuken's text. Though Geshe-la was already in his eighties, it was Ann and I who always flagged first; even far into the session, his eyes twinkled as he eagerly awaited the next question.

So Beth was right: Geshe Sopa *was* my intellectual dream come true. But he's been far more than that: he's been a mentor, a friend, an advisor, an interlocutor and a father figure. Above

Above all, with his humility, compassion, humor and a razor-sharp mind, he's been an example – a living proof, really – of the power of Dharma.

enlightenment, the existence of past and future lives, and the liberating power of the realization of no-self. Geshe-la labored tirelessly to help me understand the text and its ideas and accepted with good humor my doubts about some of the arguments, even when my views diverged from his own. He also, not without some bemusement, encouraged my persistent enthusiasm for Kagyü traditions, especially Mahamudra.

In the late 1990s, Geshe-la asked me if I would serve as editor of his long-in-the-works translation of Thuken Chökyi Nyima's great 1802 study of Asian religious thought, *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems*. I accepted with pleasure and worked for almost a decade with him, Ann Chavez, Lenny Zwillig, Mike Sweet and others to bring the work to completion. My fondest memories of that process are of sitting for hours on end in Geshe-la's room, usually with Ann, as we

all, with his humility, compassion, humor and a razor-sharp mind, he's been an example – a living proof, really – of the power of Dharma. Whether scholars, practitioners, or both, we who have benefited from his life and teaching can only hope that we honor him by thinking clearly, living rightly and dedicating ourselves to the great task of Geshe-la's life: the benefit of sentient beings. ♦

Roger Jackson is John W. Nason Professor of Asian Studies and Religion at Carleton College in Minnesota, where he teaches South Asian and Tibetan religions. He is the author of numerous books, articles and reviews, including two books on which he collaborated with Geshe Sopa and others – *The Wheel of Time: Kalachakra in Context* and *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems: A Tibetan Study of Asian Religious Thought* – as well as a collection of essays in honor of Geshe Sopa, co-edited with José Cabezón, entitled *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*.

Our coverage of 'Dharma and the Modern World' continues online:

- Read more contributions from Geshe Sopa's students, including Yangsi Rinpoche, Sharpa Tulku, Jim Blumenthal, Ann Chavez, Beth Newman, John Newman, George Propps, Tenzin Dechen Rochard and others.
- Listen to an audio interview with *Like a Waking Dream* editor Paul Donnelly.
- Özer Rinpoche explains the significance of the mummification of His Holiness the 9th Bogd Jetsün Dampa Rinpoche of Mongolia.
- Karla Ambrosio shares her experience with the Mexico-based Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, a grassroots group working to end the violence associated with the illegal drug trade.

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