

Feb. 4, 2007
From John Deweese

This year, the annual ten day Sakya Monlam prayer festival began on December 29, 2006, the tenth day of the eleventh Tibetan month, in Lumbini, Nepal, the birthplace of the Buddha, where Chogye Trichen Rinpoche has two monasteries. At each Monlam festival, all the lamas make a great offering to Chogye Trichen Rinpoche with requests and prayers for his long life. Normally, Chogye Rinpoche would always receive the offerings of the mandala, the three objects, and so on, with great enthusiasm, carefully participating in the ceremony. This year, Rinpoche was reluctant to participate and to accept the offerings and wishes for his long life, saying it was not necessary. After repeated appeals by those present, finally H.H. Sakya Trizin requested that Chogye Rinpoche recite the four lines of acceptance, just in order to make an auspicious connection. Rinpoche accepted but only recited one or two of the four lines. This was the first indication Rinpoche gave that he might be preparing to leave his body.

Following the Monlam festival, Chogye Rinpoche remained in Lumbini, and diligently practiced the Kun Rig ritual of Buddha Mahavairochana. Every night for one week, Rinpoche would summon his attendants at midnight or even 2 or 3 a.m. to begin the ritual with him. Chogye Rinpoche explained that he had received many offerings to liberate people from the suffering of illness, and that if he did not fulfill those wishes it would not be good. Rinpoche said he needed to complete this activity.

Chogye Rinpoche's blood sugar reading in Lumbini was a little high, and a doctor was brought from the nearby city of Bhairava to offer Rinpoche a check up. Rinpoche met the doctor but insisted he did not need to be examined. The doctor remarked that Rinpoche seemed quite well and strong. Many others also commented that Chogye Rinpoche looked healthy and fresh during his time in Lumbini.

On one of his final days in Lumbini, Chogye Rinpoche was in his room and gestured toward one wall, asking his attendant to open the door. Rinpoche was indicating a wall which had no door, and the attendant informed Rinpoche that there was no door there, and that even if there was a door, there would be no way to go from there. Rinpoche replied, "No, there is a way to go there; that is to the west, it is the direction of the Pure Land of Great Bliss (Dewachen)."

During these last days in Lumbini, Chogye Rinpoche's attendants observed that Rinpoche seemed to be having a lot of experiences of pure vision (dag nang). For example, once when no one was in the room other than an attendant who was nearby, he heard Chogye Rinpoche say, "Now we have finished the earlier empowerments, Rinpoche, which is the next empowerment I must give?" In his state of pure vision, Chogye Rinpoche was continuing to bestow empowerments.

In mid-January 2007, Chogye Rinpoche decided to return to Kathmandu from Lumbini. Normally, Rinpoche would conduct ten days or more of the rituals of Mahakala and Mahakali in the last month of the Tibetan year, which began on Jan. 20. This year, for the first time, Rinpoche said that he wished to return to Kathmandu, and that the monks knew well how to perform the rituals and could do so without Chogye Rinpoche being present. As he left Lumbini, Rinpoche remarked to the Lumbini monks that now he was going to Kathmandu, and that he would be happy and relaxed there. At the Lumbini airport, as Rinpoche sat waiting for his plane, he said to his attendants, "I need to go now, I am ready to go", while making walking movements with his legs. Chogye Rinpoche returned to Kathmandu by plane. Rinpoche's attendants noticed that it seemed difficult for Rinpoche to walk up the few steep steps into the small airplane. Chogye Rinpoche would never let his attendants carry him, saying that if people carry you, it means that your life is at an end. But when Rinpoche's attendants asked how Rinpoche would like to get down the steps to exit the airplane, Rinpoche paused for a moment, and said "Carry me."

On returning to Kathmandu, Chogye Rinpoche was checked by his doctor. Rinpoche's attendants had been concerned by a slightly high blood sugar reading in Lumbini, but otherwise Rinpoche had seemed quite fresh and healthy. Rinpoche's doctor in Kathmandu found no signs of fever or cough, no difficulty breathing, and Rinpoche's oxygen levels were found to be normal. Gar Shabdrung Rinpoche had been in retreat in Lumbini, and Chogye Rinpoche sent word to him on Wednesday, January 17 that he should leave his retreat and come to Kathmandu within two days.

On Saturday, January 20, Chogye Rinpoche was staying at his monastery, Jamchen Lhakhang, at the Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu. During the afternoon, Chogye Rinpoche kept thanking his attendants as they helped him about his rooms. Rinpoche told them, "Thank you so much for always helping me and taking such good care of me. It is very difficult for an elderly person to find people to take such excellent care of them. I really appreciate it so much, but I don't want to be any more trouble for anyone." Rinpoche's attendants immediately replied, "No, no Rinpoche, please don't say that. We are so happy to help however we can."

Then on Sunday January 21, in the evening about 6 p.m., Chogye Rinpoche showed a slight difficulty in getting his breath. This passed, and Rinpoche was fine the rest of the evening. Again about 11 p.m., Rinpoche again showed a little difficulty in breathing, and the attendants offered him tea to drink, and again he seemed better. A little after midnight, Rinpoche again expressed difficulty in taking his breath, so the attendants offered Rinpoche soup, but Rinpoche began to show signs of gasping somewhat to catch his breath.

Chogye Rinpoche's attendants called the CIWEC Clinic in Kathmandu, and made an appointment to meet the American doctor who was on call that night at the

clinic. An ambulance came to Jamchen Lhakang in Boudhanath to take Rinpoche in his wheelchair, and they reached the clinic by 1:30 a.m. Once the doctor had completed Rinpoche's examination, he concluded that Chogye Rinpoche's oxygen levels in his blood were very low, and that Rinpoche's lungs had filled up with fluid, indicating a sudden onset of pneumonia. The doctor felt that there was not much more that could be done, but that Rinpoche could be taken to another clinic and given oxygen to breathe.

Chogye Rinpoche's attendants phoned H.H. Sakya Trizin in India from the clinic at about 2:30 or 3:00 a.m. on Monday January 21. His Holiness performed a Mo divination, and said that the divination did not look auspicious, which caused everyone to be concerned.

At the advice of the American doctor at CIWEC Clinic, Chogye Rinpoche was taken to another nearby clinic and given oxygen. After some time, the doctors found that this had not raised Rinpoche's oxygen levels, and so there had been no improvement in Rinpoche's condition.

The decision was made that it would be best to go from Kathmandu to Chogye Rinpoche's retreat house near Narayantan on the edge of the Kathmandu valley, not far from Nagi Gompa. Further up the same hill a few kilometers is Rinpoche's retreat center at Bagdora, the place of the Buddha of an earlier age, Buddha Krakucchandra.

Chogye Trichen Rinpoche took his last breath about 6:45 a.m. Monday morning January 21, 2007, entering the state of tukdam, the spiritual practice of recognizing and resting in the clear luminosity of death (chiwai osal)

As of today, Feb. 4, Chogye Rinpoche has remained in tukdam or 'spiritual practice' (thugs dam), the meditative state where the breathing has ceased but the mind is still connected to the body. Only the most subtle consciousness remains, becoming all-pervasive, and the subtle life-force withdraws from the entire body, and remains only as warmth in the area of the heart. When great lamas pass away, their tukdam experience is resting in the clear light of the dharmakaya, the clear light awareness of the ground of being (zhii osal). A realized master such as Chogye Trichen Rinpoche remains in the state of dharmakaya buddhahood, resting in the nature of reality, dharmata. A master may remain in this state for a few days or longer, prior to manifesting sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya enlightened emanations for the benefit of sentient beings.

His Holiness Sakya Trizin and H.E. Luding Khenchen Rinpoche made arrangements to allow Chogye Rinpoche to remain in tukdam as long as he wishes with no disturbances. Rinpoche has presently rested for fourteen days in the tukdam state. Some of the high lamas have regularly checked Rinpoche's body for signs of the completion of Rinpoche's tukdam practice. There was not the slightest scent of decay in Rinpoche's room, nor any signs of any fluids or anything leaving Rinpoche's body. Rinpoche's skin looked fresh, with his normal complexion as though he were still alive. Chogye Rinpoche remained sitting upright in meditation, with his head leaning slightly forward and his eyes closed. Those who have viewed Rinpoche in this state say that he looks like he is resting in meditation. Many

people have commented that this is quite amazing from the scientific point of view. As of today, Feb. 4, Chogye Rinpoche has remained in tukdam for fourteen days without any noticeable change in his condition.

At present it is planned that following the completion of his tukdam, Chogye Rinpoche's holy body (kudung) will be brought to the Boudhanath Gompa Jamchen Lhakang. Rinpoche's kudung will make one round of circumambulation around the Boudhanath Stupa, following which the kudung will be placed in Rinpoche's meditation room on the top of the Boudha gompa for three days. Rinpoche's kudung will then be placed in the Lamdre Lhakhang temple at the back of the Jamchen Lhakhang for the remainder of the ceremonies until his cremation on the Buddhist holy day of Chotrul Duchen, the fifteenth day of the Tibetan New Year, March 3, 2007. Rinpoche's cremation will take place in the back residential area of the Boudhanath Jamchen Lhakang Monastery.

May everyone receive the blessings of Chogye Trichen Rinpoche through the practice of Guru yoga, and may he always remain with those who have faith in him. May Rinpoche send forth countless further emanations for the sake of sentient beings, and may he be swiftly reborn among us and continue to guide his faithful disciples.