

THE FUTURE OF THE

# gelug

TRADITION



HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA IN  
LADAKH, INDIA, JULY 2014 AND BASEL,  
SWITZERLAND, FEBRUARY 2015.  
PHOTOS BY OLIVIER ADAM.



**OVER THE MONTHS** of June and July in 2015, hundreds of thousands of people around the world celebrated His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday with prayers and festivities, offering profound gratitude to His Holiness and sincere wishes for His Holiness to live a very, very long time. From his side, His Holiness offered his assurance that he intends to be here for many years to come. But that hasn't stopped His Holiness from taking steps now to ensure the continuation of the Gelug tradition and the preservation of Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings far into the future. Over the past decade, His Holiness has been giving strong encouragement to the tradition's high lamas, abbots and geshe to act now to secure the strength and vitality of the Gelug monastic system for the time when His Holiness is no longer here.

His Holiness advises that this can be done through creating a strong central organizational structure for the monasteries and nunneries in India, Nepal and Bhutan. One important aspect of this is the establishment of an administrative office for the Ganden Tripa, who is the head of the Gelug school, and the enhancement of the Ganden Tripa's authority.

FPMT spiritual director Lama Zopa Rinpoche has offered his support towards realizing His Holiness' wishes in this area, making an initial gift of US\$100,000 for the establishment of the office of the Ganden Tripa and the construction of a building that will house it. Later, Rinpoche raised more funds and increased his pledge to US\$300,000 for these initiatives.

The new building, which is located at Ganden Monastery in Mundgod, Karnataka, India, will serve as the headquarters of the Gelug tradition. It will hold the offices of the Ganden Tripa and the International Geluk Foundation. In addition, the new three-story building, called the Gaden Tri Thog Khang, will have a large assembly hall and accommodations for the Ganden Tripa, the Shartse Chöje and the Jangtse Chöje.

In this issue of *Mandala*, we explore in more detail how developing the office of the Ganden Tripa will support His Holiness' aspiration to preserve Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings long into the future. We feature interviews with the 102nd Ganden Tripa Rizong Rinpoche; with Jangtse Chöje Lobsang Tenzin Rinpoche, who will step into the position of Ganden Tripa in the future; and with Samdhong Rinpoche, the former prime minister of the Central Tibetan Administration. These three important lamas share their understanding of His Holiness' vision, the significance of Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings and the importance of the monasteries in preserving them.

Lama Yeshe, the founder of FPMT, insisted on the importance and significance of the name "Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition." Lama Zopa Rinpoche, through supporting His Holiness' wish to strengthen the seat of the Ganden Tripa, demonstrates the organization's commitment to preserving the Mahayana tradition's future.



## BECOMING THE GANDEN TRIPA

Ganden Tripa, which can be translated as "holder of the Ganden throne," is the title given to the head of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. Unlike reincarnation lineages, the Ganden Tripa is an appointed position based on knowledge and merit, and held for seven years. There is a saying in the monasteries that "If a mother's child has the knowledge and wisdom, then there is no ownership of the Ganden throne," meaning that any monk who has the intelligence and makes the effort could eventually become the Ganden Tripa.

In order to progress into the position of Ganden Tripa, a monk must first achieve the Lharampa Geshe degree, the highest degree awarded by the Gelug monasteries, and then study for at least one year and take exams at one of the tantric colleges – Gyuto or Gyume. After that, the geshe would have to be appointed to serve as the tantric college disciplinarian and then be chosen as the head lama of ritual ceremonies, an appointment currently made by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. From that position, one becomes the abbot of the tantric college, a position held for three years. Then the former abbots of the tantric colleges are in line to be appointed as the Jangtse Chöje or Shartse Chöje, coming from Gyume and Gyuto Tantric Colleges respectively. The Jangtse and Shartse Chöjes alternate to finally become the Ganden Tripa.

The first Ganden Tripa was Lama Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), who founded the Gelug lineage. His disciples Gyaltsab Je and Khedrub Je were the second and third Ganden Tripas respectively. Ganden Tripa Rizong Rinpoche is the current Ganden Tripa and the 102nd to hold the position. He will complete his term in 2016.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE

# 102ND GANDEN TRIPA RIZONG RINPOCHE

Born in Ladakh, India, in the early 1930s, Ganden Tripa Rizong Rinpoche (Thubten Nyima Lungtok Tenzin Norbu) was recognized and enthroned as a child as the reincarnation of the founder of Rizong Hermitage. In the mid-1940s, Rinpoche joined Drepung Loseling Monastery in Lhasa for his higher training, remaining until the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959. He then joined His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile community in India. He was appointed by His Holiness as abbot both of Gyume Tantric College and of Drepung Loseling. Rinpoche was appointed as the Ganden Tripa, the spiritual head of the Gelug lineage, in October 2009.

Rinpoche has made the practice of meditation his principal focus in life and has conducted numerous extensive retreats, including a three-year tantric retreat on the Yamantaka mandala in a remote hermitage in Ladakh. He is known for his achievements in practice and scholarship in both the sutra and tantra traditions.

In November 2015, on behalf of the FPMT and *Mandala*, Gaden Jangtse Gen Lungthok conducted an interview with the 102nd Ganden Tripa Rizong Rinpoche to discuss His Holiness the Dalai Lama's wishes to create an administrative office of the Ganden Tripa and strengthen the position. The interview took place at Drepung Loseling Monastery in South India and was translated into English by Ven. Kalden of Sera Je Monastery.

*What is the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in relation to the preservation of the Gelug teachings? What is His Holiness' advice on how we should be working toward the preservation of the Gelug teachings after His Holiness manifests passing away?*

His Holiness' actual vision for the preservation of the Gelug teachings is well known to everyone. His Holiness has time and again expressed his commitment to the cause of the preservation of the Buddhist teachings in general and the preservation of the sutra and tantra heritage unique to the land of Tibet in particular. In regard to the history of Buddhism in Tibet, after the nirvana of Je Tsongkhapa Rinpoche, we have had 102 Ganden Tripas. Tibetan Buddhism has seen several ups and downs in its long history. However, up until now, we have not been able to establish the Ganden Tripa's administrative office.

It has become imperative that we establish such an office for the Ganden Tripa soon. By this, I do not just mean mere construction of a building that will house the office. We need an office to oversee effectively this very important mission of preserving the Buddhadharma in general and Je Tsongkhapa's teachings in particular. We need to have a framework that is consistent with the current times and context to help preserve these teachings and help them prosper. This would be principally the Ganden Tripa's responsibility assisted by the Shartse Chöje and the Jangtse Chöje and who in turn will be assisted by the teachings' preservation committees, venerable abbots of the

various monasteries and the numerous philosophy teachers on the various monastic campuses. It is absolutely important that all of us reflect on how best to preserve Je Tsongkhapa's teachings.

*What are your views on the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in relation to the preservation of the Gelug teachings?*

I have expressed my views on this matter in the past too. In accordance with the present times and as per the intentions of His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatso, following an exercise that spanned several years, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama drafted the Charter of the Tibetans-in-Exile. Acting in accordance with the provisions of the constitution, His Holiness passed on all political authority to the Tibetan people, both those in Tibet and those in exile. At the same time, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has continued to oversee spiritual affairs through the Ganden Photang [the administrative institution of the Dalai Lama], as it has been done from the time of His Holiness the 2nd Dalai Lama all the way up through His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama.

*What are your views in relation to the preservation of the Gelug teachings?*

In my opinion it is important to establish an office of the Ganden Tripa, which entails setting up a teachings' preservation committee and an administrative and management committee.





**GANDEN TRIPA RIZONG RINPOCHE,  
LADAKH, INDIA, JULY 2014**  
PHOTO BY OLIVIER ADAM.

We are very fortunate that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has assured us that he will continue to oversee the mission of preserving Je Tsongkhapa's teachings until the age of 97. Therefore, for the realization of His Holiness' commitment, it is imperative that all the various constituents working for the preservation of the Gelug teachings come together, collaborate and organize themselves better and make the most of His Holiness' guidance while His Holiness is with us. Otherwise, I feel it will be very difficult for us to realize the objective of preserving the Gelug teachings.

***Why is it necessary to enhance the authority and position of the Ganden Tripa?***

The relationship between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Ganden Tripa's seat is very intimate. Therefore, while we are still fortunate to benefit from His Holiness' guidance, we should often make requests to His Holiness for advice and instruction. Enhanced authority ensures we can respond in accordance with his advice and instruction and organize ourselves more effectively, thus making ourselves useful in the mission to preserve the Gelug teachings.

***Do you have any other thoughts to share?***

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has received advice and guidance from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Lama Zopa Rinpoche has established many Dharma centers around the world as per His Holiness' guidance. These centers have a mission to preserve the Buddha's teachings in general and Je Tsongkhapa's teachings in particular. I request these centers to carefully reflect on how, in accordance with the current times, we can improve the academics at these centers and what changes need to be made to our organization.

## **FIRST GELUG INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

Following the long-life ceremony celebrating His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday on June 21, 2015, in Dharamsala, India, representatives from 97 Gelug monasteries and nunneries gathered for the first Gelug International Conference. The two-day event, which began on June 23, was organized by the International Geluk Foundation. About 300 delegates attended the conference, which included high lamas, many abbots and former abbots, and dignitaries.

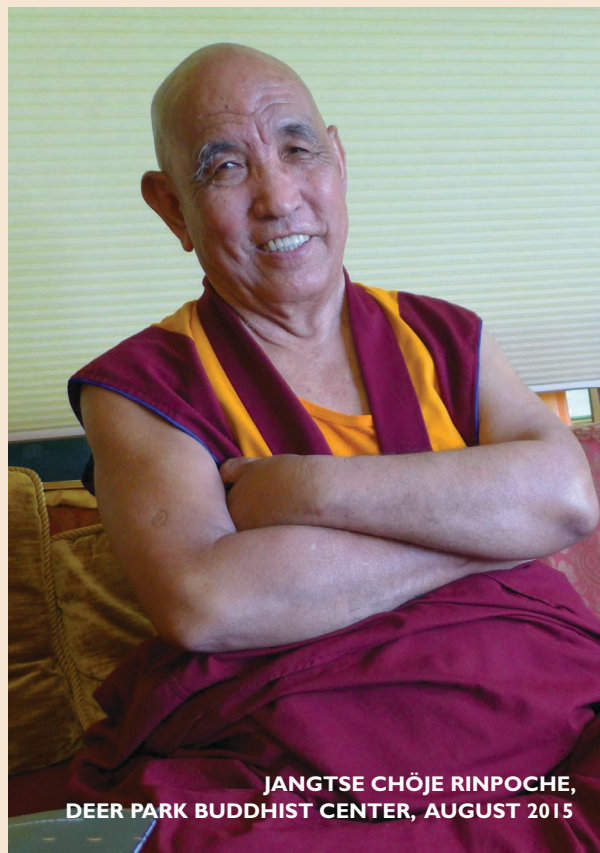
The Ganden Tripa, with the Shartse Chöje and Jangtse Chöje, presided over the meeting. Discussions focused on preserving the Gelug tradition. Sikyong Lobsang Sangay, the prime minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile, was a special guest of the conference. Former Prime Minister Samdhong Rinpoche also attended the event. Lama Zopa Rinpoche made a special effort to be at the meeting, cutting short his Australia teaching tour in order to be at both the long-life ceremony and the conference. His Holiness the Dalai Lama attended the second day of the event and offered his blessings during the closing ceremony.

AN INTERVIEW WITH

# JANGTSE CHÖJE LOBSANG TENZIN RINPOCHE

Jangtse Chöje Lobsang Tenzin Rinpoche was born in Tibet in 1934 and ordained as a monk at the age of seven. He entered Sera Je Monastery in Tibet at 17. He obtained his Geshe Lharampa degree in 1979 at the reestablished Sera Je Monastery in South India. Following this, he entered Gyume Tantric College and two years later became the master of discipline. In 1985, His Holiness the Dalai Lama appointed him abbot of Gyume, a position he held for six years. Since then he has taught extensively in India and the West, including at many FPMT centers. In 2010 he was appointed to the position of Jangtse Chöje, which places him in line for the position of the Ganden Throne Holder – the Ganden Tripa – who is the head of the Gelug tradition.

In August 2015, Katrina Brooks and *Mandala* editor Laura Miller met with Jangtse Chöje Rinpoche at Deer Park Buddhist Center in Wisconsin, United States, to learn more about the mechanisms for preserving and strengthening the Gelug tradition. Rinpoche, who at the time was teaching the summer course at Deer Park, kindly took time to explain the current situation and the plans for the future. Katrina, who is the resident interpreter at Deer Park, conducted the interview with Rinpoche in Tibetan and translated Rinpoche's answers into English for *Mandala*.



JANGTSE CHÖJE RINPOCHE,  
DEER PARK BUDDHIST CENTER, AUGUST 2015

*What measures are being taken to ensure the preservation of the Gelug tradition, in particular when His Holiness the Dalai Lama is no longer here? I understand they are building a new residence for the Ganden Tripa at Ganden Monastery. Is this with the aim of preserving the Gelug tradition in accordance with His Holiness' wishes?*

There now exists a Gelug council, which has met once. They are constructing a residence for the Ganden Tripa at Ganden. Before, when we were in Tibet, the residence and administrative offices of this position were at Ganden. Right now, however, there isn't an official residence with offices, and so they are in the process of constructing one at Ganden in India. Whenever it may be that the Dalai Lama is no longer here, the duties he normally performs, such as appointing the Gelug abbots and so forth, will be given to the Ganden Tripa.

In India, the Gelug monasteries – the three great seats [i.e., Ganden, Drepung and Sera] as well as the other individual monasteries – are paying attention to the preservation of the tradition by means of rigorously studying the authentic teachings. And things have improved from how they were before when Tibetans first came into exile. They all are continuing to make efforts to improve the study programs within the monasteries.

Until recently, there had not been a general gathering or consortium of Gelug monasteries. A council has been created for the purpose of continuing to improve education in the Gelug tradition. When His Holiness is no longer here, the Ganden Tripa will be in a role of leadership. The need for this general council is to have some kind of central oversight to help ensure that educational improvements continue and so that the Ganden Tripa can exercise good leadership while assembling the





JANGTSE CHÖJE RINPOCHE TEACHING  
AT DEER PARK BUDDHIST CENTER,  
WISCONSIN, US, AUGUST 2015.  
PHOTO BY L. DAYCHEN HILSENHOFF.

conditions conducive for continued improvement. He will observe and assess how things are going within the various monasteries. In the past in Tibet, when the Dalai Lama was not able to lead, government officials or great lamas took over the duties of appointing abbots and the other work associated with the Dalai Lama's title. The tradition of an official such as the Ganden Tripa providing interim oversight of the Dalai Lama's duties has already been well established.

The main things for preserving the teachings are monastic education and the pursuit of study. From their own side, the individual monasteries have been making an effort to improve education within their own institutions and they will continue in this effort. His Holiness has given


advice on this on many occasions to the monasteries and they have been making a great deal of effort to act in accordance with His Holiness' wishes. This is why there is no cause for concern about the decline of the tradition. If individual monasteries follow His Holiness' advice and make effort in this, things will continue to go well and to improve.

*Would you explain more about how the Gelug council will work with the Ganden Tripa?*

In order that the Ganden Tripa's decisions about whom to appoint at monasteries be received well and for the continued improvement of the education at these various

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A close-up photograph of a young Buddhist nun with dark hair, wearing an orange robe, looking down intently at an open book she is holding with both hands. The background is softly blurred, showing other people in similar robes. The lighting is warm and focused on the nun and her book.

**MORNING TARA PUJA,  
DOLMA LING NUNNERY,  
DHARAMSALA, INDIA, 2012.  
PHOTO BY OLIVIER ADAM.**

institutions, the Gelug council is implementing a general Gelug policy.

Building the Ganden Tripa's residence and headquarters is so that there is an actual office and meeting place. Currently, there are some scattered residences at Gelug monasteries and so forth, but no official residence for the Ganden Tripa, like there was before in Tibet. This is for the three seats, and also for all the individual Gelug monasteries, to be connected. There can be some kind of oversight and some interaction.

#### *Are nunneries included in this plan?*

Yes, this is for the nunneries as well. When we met for two days in Dharamsala in June [at the Gelug International Conference, see page 31] representatives from the monasteries and nunneries gathered, and His Holiness also attended on the second day. This year was the first time that we have had all the monasteries come together in this way. This meeting included not just the monasteries from India, but also Gelug monasteries in Nepal and Bhutan. Most all of the monasteries in India, Nepal and Bhutan were represented. Lama Zopa Rinpoche also came. In the future, there are plans to have a general meeting such as this of all the Gelug monasteries and nunneries from time to time, whether every year or every other year. No definitive plans have yet been made. It hasn't been completely decided, but we will be meeting again.

So far, the council has written bylaws, a kind of foundation

of rules for the Gelug monasteries, and it has distributed this to all the monasteries who came to the meeting.

#### *What do you think is important for people to know about this situation? About not allowing the Gelug tradition to decline?*

Not having the teachings decline depends on the amount of effort given to studying Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings at the individual monasteries. If there is sincere study in the individual monasteries, then the teachings remain. These teachings – scriptures and realizations – as they were taught by the incomparable Lama Tsongkhapa, are being practiced and studied in the monasteries right now. The preservation of these scriptures and realizations means that they are studied and put into practice. Other than that, there's not some special thing to be done.

Today, in most monasteries, and certainly in all the three seats, the Gelug teachings are healthy. Due to the kindness of His Holiness, most monasteries, and now also nunneries, study the major texts and things are going well. Most monasteries are engaged in hearing and reflection on the great texts, and generally, studies have improved.

In the past, except for preforming rituals and making offerings, nunneries engaged in no study. However, now, Drolma Ling in Dharamsala, India; Khachoe Ghakyil at Kopan in Nepal; Phagpa Shing Nunnery and several others now teach philosophy and there are programs to give the exams for the Geshe degree

[see page 52]. There was nothing like this before and this is definitely an improvement. So, as education is improving in the monasteries and nunneries, there is no cause for concern about the decline of the Gelug teachings.

### ***What is the importance of having a general policy for Gelug monasteries?***

There is now a general policy governing how the individual monasteries must engage in study and practice. If there is a particular case where a monastery, for some reason, cannot follow these, then there can be exceptions to accommodate that. However, in general, there is a set of rules dictating how a monastery should structure education and practice, how they should meditate and train.

Previously, monasteries were expected to follow these guidelines, but more remote monasteries may not have learned exactly what these policies were. A number of great scholars were consulted to resolve all the points of disparity and now they have made decisions regarding these. And now there is a book with all of these regulations, and in order that all the various monasteries might follow them, these books have been distributed to all.

### ***How can Western students support the preservation of the Gelug tradition?***

For Western students, they should study well the teachings of the supreme refuge and protector Lama Tsongkhapa. The rules established for the monasteries are not intended for Western centers. They don't need the rules for monks; these rules don't apply to Western Students and are not integral to their studies. What they do need is the way of studying the great treatises as set forth by the incomparable Lama Tsongkhapa. If they do this, then the result of understanding will be the same as in the three seats. Examining these teachings with special awareness and reasoning, and coming to understand their value – this is what they need. The manner of approaching these teachings in the monasteries is something that Western students can look at. They can see how Lama Tsongkhapa's great texts are studied in the monasteries and try to emulate that, but the rules of the monastery themselves are not intended for Western Dharma centers.

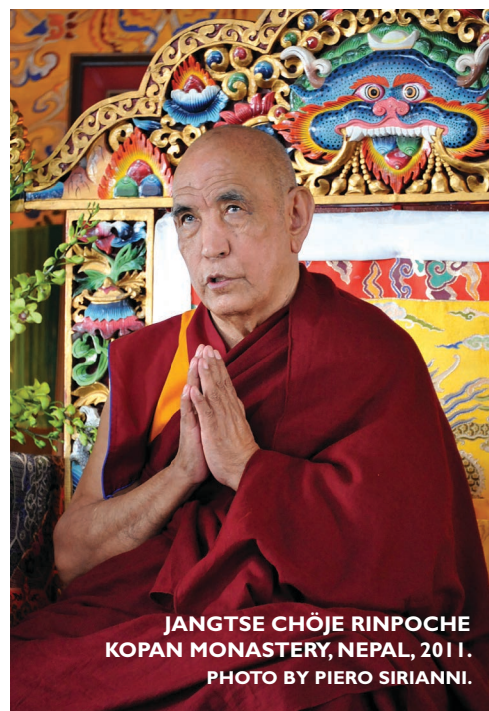
However, those FPMT Dharma centers with monks and nuns, those that are more like monasteries and nunneries, if they were to come into conformity with the general guidelines for Gelug monasteries, that would be very good. For example, Nalanda Monastery in France is now working to follow the general Gelug guidelines as far as how to arrange their course of study, and that is very good.

### ***Do you have any other advice for FPMT centers and students?***

In general, the studies by FPMT students are strong, but this is something always to work on to improve. The most important thing for those who work to develop the FPMT curriculum is to make good plans for the continued strengthening and improvement of study programs. The focus should be on having a curriculum that works well for the students and making plans as to how to best benefit students. This is something that FPMT has done well so far, but you should always strive to improve. Additionally, having correct, good teachers is essential. Thinking about how best to get really good teachers is so important because without them the students will not get authentic teachings. So these two things – having a good course of study as well as having very pure teachers – are most important. Designing the lessons to be in accordance with the students' mindset is something that FPMT has done well, but this is also something you should also always try to improve.

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Katrina Brooks met Geshe Lhundup Sopa, one of Jangtse Chöje Rinpoche's principal gurus, in 2005 while attending college in Iowa in the United States and became a student of Dharma in the Tibetan tradition. She began studying Tibetan language during a Master's program at the University of Chicago, which she completed in 2010. She has continued her studies at Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Nepal and later as a continuing education student at Maitripa College. She has been the resident interpreter at Deer Park Buddhist Center in Oregon, Wisconsin, since 2014.



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SAMDHONG RINPOCHE,  
DHARAMSALA, INDIA, OCTOBER 2015.  
PHOTO BY SIMON HOULTON.



## AN INTERVIEW WITH SAMDHONG RINPOCHE

Professor Samdhong Rinpoche (Lobsang Tenzin) was born in 1939 in Jol in Eastern Tibet. At age five, he was recognized as the reincarnation of the fourth Samdhong Rinpoche. He became a monk two years later and began his studies. He entered Drepung Monastery in Lhasa at age 12. Rinpoche went into exile in India in 1959 at the age of 19.

He received his Geshe Lharampa degree in 1968 from the reestablished Drepung Monastery in India and then attended Gyuto Tantric College. During this time he also had teaching and administrative responsibilities at several different Tibetan schools in India. From 1971-2001, he served as the principal and then director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Varanasi (now called the Central University of Tibetan Studies).

In 2001, Samdhong Rinpoche was elected prime minister of the Central Tibetan Administration, or the Tibetan government-in-exile, which is based in Dharamsala, India. He served two terms, leaving office in 2011, when he was succeeded by Lobsang Sangay.

Rinpoche is regarded as a leading Tibetan scholar of Buddhism and is fluent in Hindi and English. He has received many other high-level academic and administrative appointments, including currently serving as a member of the expert advisory committee for the Government of India's Ministry of Culture.

In October 2015, Melissa Mouldin and Simon Houlton interviewed Samdhong Rinpoche in Dharamsala for *Mandala*. They conducted the interview primarily in English.

### *Would Rinpoche please describe for us your impressions of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's concerns and wishes in relation to the preservation of the Gelug tradition now and after His Holiness has passed away?*

His Holiness' concern is for the preservation of the Nalanda tradition, which remains in the form of the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism, the complete teachings of the Buddha and includes the three *yanas* [the vehicles of the *shravakas*, *pratyekabuddhas* and *bodhisattvas*] and the four classes of *tantra*. Buddhism exists in many countries, but many of the other countries have only the *Shravakayana* [Hearer Vehicle], which is the Buddhism preserved in the Pali language. The Pali canon contains only the *sutras* that belong to the *Shravakayana* and not a single *Mahayana* *sutra* has been included in the Pali canon nor anything specific about the *Vajrayana* *tantras*.

When we talk about the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism in this context, it should not be understood in terms of nation or country, but in terms of canonical language. The Tibetan canon has the largest amount of the Buddha's own words – the *sutras* and the *tantras* – and also the commentaries written by the great Indian scholars, from Nagarjuna to Shakyashribhadra, including Atisha and so forth. The *Kangyur* [texts attributed to the Buddha] and *Tengyur* [canonical commentaries] in the Tibetan language

form the largest amount of Buddhist literature available. Tibetan is a very authentic language for a Buddhist canon. The origins of the Tibetan-language canon are Sanskrit and whatever is expressible in Sanskrit is expressible in Tibetan because the nature of the two languages is very similar. In the history of Buddhist translation, the translation from Sanskrit, or any Indian language, into Tibetan is the best.

The Buddhism preserved in Tibetan is complete and without error, and benefits from the unbroken lineage of oral transmission. In addition, erudite Tibetan scholars have written enormous commentaries on the Indian literature. So therefore, if someone wants to study the entirety of Buddha's teaching, then the Tibetan canon is the best source. Hence, it is very important to preserve Tibetan Buddhism if you wish to have a complete picture of Buddha's teachings and not just a small segment of them.

Also, the Tibetan system of study – through logic and reasoning – includes study of the *pramana* *shastras* (epistemological treatises) of Dignaga and Dharmakirti. Logic comes first and then later comes the study of the other subjects such as *Prajñaparamita*, *vinaya*, *abhidharma* and *Madhyamaka*. This kind of tradition does not exist in any other country's Buddhist tradition. Tibetan Buddhism is the comprehensive and



complete form of Buddhism, which needs to be preserved for the sake of understanding Buddhism as a whole.

We usually say we have four schools of Tibetan Buddhism: the Nyingma, the Sakya, the Kagyü and the Gelug. The Gelug is the youngest one. All four traditions, generally speaking, are actually no different philosophically, their differences concern the lineage of teachers, the rites and rituals, and the emphasis on particular schools of thought, deities, tantras and shastras. His Holiness the Dalai Lama always says that all four traditions need to be preserved without any distortion.

As far as the Gelug tradition is concerned, it is the newest tradition because it came from the study of the earlier traditions. So we as Gelugpas have the essence of all the three earlier schools *and* whatever Lama Tsongkhapa synthesized as he studied and analyzed all these different traditions. For example, Tsongkhapa merged three traditions of Atisha – the Kadam Practice, Oral Instructions and Textual Lineages – into one. Similarly, Tsongkhapa synthesized the lineages of Manjushri and Nagarjuna (the Profound Dharma Lineage); Maitreya and Asanga (the Extensive Dharma Lineage); and Vajradhara and the mahasiddhas (the Practice and Blessings Lineage). And Tsongkhapa did not only study these lineages, he internalized them and then had the experience of them.

Lama Tsongkhapa himself said, “First I sought out vast, extensive learning. Next, all the textual traditions dawned as personal instruction. Finally, I practiced diligently day and night.” So Lama Tsongkhapa had the experiential understanding and was able to write 18 volumes; it is really monumental to understand the Buddha’s teaching comprehensively and without any error. So the Gelug tradition’s preservation is very important, not only for the sake of the Gelug tradition per se, but for the sake of the entire understanding of the Buddha’s teaching as a whole. It is very important.

When we were in Tibet, there was support for all of the traditions – no single tradition was threatened with degradation or extinction. Tibet is no longer in that position and the people are in diaspora. It is in India where the organized monastic learning tradition is most alive, which is indispensable. We cannot have such erudition in Buddhism without the monastic structure, where students can have qualified teachers and all the texts, and where they can debate day in and day out for several years, which is one of the very important instruments for learning the Dharma. Therefore, this monastic system needs to be preserved and survive.

The Gelug tradition in Tibet had its great centers around Lhasa – Drepung, Sera and Ganden Monasteries – and also Tashi Lhunpo, which was looked after by His Eminence the Panchen Lama. There were big monasteries in Amdo, such as Tashi Gomang and Tashi Kyil, which were patronized by the great scholars of Amdo. Each learning center had a kind of ensured

security. There was no problem of finances or lack of incoming monks. However, in the diaspora, there are some concerns. At the moment, the Buddhists of the Himalayan region have been taking ordination in the monasteries, but the population of Himalayan-region Buddhists is limited. There is a possibility that the monasteries may become empty and the great scholars will gradually pass away without new ones taking their place.

When we were in Tibet, this kind of organizational thinking was not important. Teaching and learning were most important, and the organization came automatically. The monasteries now have to think about how to feed the monks and how to make sure that the monks will be able to survive day-to-day. Also, they have to take care to find suitable teachers to stay in the monasteries. The other Tibetan Buddhist traditions are doing this well. For example, the Sakyas have a very well organized, well established organization. The Nyingmas are not very consolidated, but they have many good teachers and very high lamas. And the Kagyüs, with their internal four sects, have their own organizations.

For the Gelugs, the Ganden Tripa always changes after seven years; it is not a permanent position of leadership. It is very democratic, but the continuity and stability are not there. Ganden Tripas come and Ganden Tripas go, but there is no permanent institution looking after the entire Gelug tradition and this is why His Holiness is advising that there must be an *institution* of the Ganden Tripa, so that although Ganden Tripas come and go, there will be some administrative staff, such as a manager or director or some officer, who remains continuously within the institution. Then, whoever receives the post of Ganden Tripa can take over, work for seven years, and retire, but the organizational work of the office of the Ganden Tripa can be looked after by the institution itself. This is what His Holiness is thinking and advising. And now they are trying to implement it, and my hope is that it will be done according to His Holiness’ wishes.

***Are there other ways that His Holiness has mentioned or that are being discussed to strengthen the authority of the office of the Ganden Tripa for setting policies and settling matters in the monasteries and in other Gelug centers?***

When we were in Tibet, each monastery had their own constitution, called the “Great Rules and Regulations.” The Ganden Tripa had little administrative work and instead gave teachings and remained as the head of the Gelug tradition. Each monastery was self-organized and self-governed. They had endowment funds and were self-sufficient. This is not the case in India.

Unlike the other Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Gelug monasteries were more dependent on the Dalai Lama because the first four Dalai Lamas were exclusively the head or the leader of the



Gelug tradition. With the Fifth Dalai Lama [17th century], the position became the political head of the whole Tibet, but the tradition of appointing abbots and other functionaries in the Gelug monasteries was still being done by the institution of the Dalai Lama. From the Fifth Dalai Lama and onwards, if the Dalai Lama is not present or if the Dalai Lama is not old enough, whoever is the regent looks after the Gelug monasteries.

Today, the political responsibility of His Holiness has completely devolved. He has separated the Dalai Lama institution from the leadership of the Tibetan government and has no political responsibility. When His Holiness is no longer present, the Gelug monasteries will have no one to appoint the abbots and functionaries. So this is why His Holiness has said that now the Ganden Tripa and the two Chöjes – the Shartse Chöje and the Jangtse Chöje – should have a kind of panel authority or committee and that they should do the appointments and oversee the examinations and all the other things that were previously looked after by the state or the head of state. Otherwise, there could be a power vacuum and confusion. It would be an absolute error for that to happen. Therefore, the institution, or office, of the Ganden Tripa needs to be developed and the future Ganden Tripa, the two Chöjes and the council of the abbots have to be well organized and have full authority.

A few years ago, I think it was 2008 or 2009, they adopted a charter for the Gelug sect and at that time those institutions were recognized and established. So the



ABOVE: DEBATING AT SERA JE MONASTERY, TIBET.  
LEFT: MONKS AT SERA JE MONASTERY, INDIA.  
PHOTOS BY PIERO SIRIANNI.





**SAMDHONG RINPOCHE,  
PARIS, FRANCE, 2012.  
PHOTO BY OLIVIER ADAM.**

organizational side needs to be strengthened and is being strengthened gradually. And I think it will be well established in the near future.

***What is important for us Western students to do to support His Holiness' wishes in this matter?***

I have not given much thought to this, but what comes to mind is that Western students should first of all recognize the institutions and the authorities that have been assigned to a particular institution, such as recognizing the Ganden Tripa as the supreme head of the whole Gelug tradition. The Ganden Tripa position is bestowed after completion of the “paramita study” [at Sera, Ganden, Drepung, or smaller monasteries like Tashi Lhunpo or Rato] and completion of tantra study at a tantric college. They become the abbots of either Gyuto or Gyume [the tantric colleges] and eventually become the Shartse Chöje or Jangtse Chöje. This is well set tradition.

Also, whenever there is need of financial support, that is particularly the lay followers' responsibility because they can do business and earn money. They should give necessary support to the institutions.

I feel these days, in order to make the central Gelug organization the institution of the Ganden Tripa, all the different Western Dharma centers should have some kind of affiliation or recognition from the Ganden Tripa or some such other central organization. Similarly, the learning programs can be done in many different ways, but they must have some kind of final

recognition from one of the monasteries in India, Nepal or Bhutan, or in the future, possibly Tibet. A relationship between the Western centers and monasteries in Asia should be there.

***Could Rinpoche comment on how strengthening the office of the Ganden Tripa would relate to Gelug study and practice in Tibet itself?***

That is difficult to comment on. All the Gelug followers in Tibet would recognize and hold their allegiance to the office of the Ganden Tripa. And whoever is the Ganden Tripa would be in allegiance to them. But the Ganden Tripa cannot reach inside Tibet at this moment. And they cannot reach out to the Ganden Tripa directly; so this is political and therefore we cannot do much. Under Chinese control, I think they might have their own Ganden Tripa inside Tibet. And so the Chinese central government or local government appoints the abbots within Tibet. At this moment, reaching out to them is very difficult practically speaking. ■

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