

OBITUARIES

Lama Zopa Rinpoche requests that “students who read Mandala pray that the students whose obituaries follow find a perfect human body, meet a Mahayana guru and become enlightened quickly, or be born in a pure land where the teachings exist and they can become enlightened.” Reading these obituaries also helps us reflect upon our own death and rebirth – and so use our lives in the most meaningful way.

Advice and Practices for Death and Dying is available from the Foundation Store www.fpmt.org/shop

Venerable Geshe Tsulga (Tsultrim Chophel), 72, died in Medford, Massachusetts, USA, November 21, 2010, of liver cancer By Tsunma-la (Ven. Sue Macy)

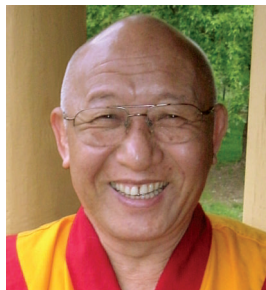


Photo by David Kittelstrom

Venerable Geshe Tsulga (Tsultrim Chophel) was born to a nomad family on May 8, 1939 in Kham, Tibet. He was one of ten children. The family shared a tent with their yaks and horses, and moved with the seasons from their base at 18,000 feet [5,486 meters].

At the age of seven, Geshe-la applied to Dhargye Gompa, a main teaching monastery of Kham. He entered at age 11, the first nomad to do so. There he studied grammar, the main texts, debate, and received transmissions, commentaries and initiations. In 1957, he received the transmission of the *Lamrim Chenmo* from Geshe Jampa Khedrub, a transmission he, as the last living lineage holder for his monastery, would give back to Dhargye Gompa in 2006.

As was the custom, when he turned 17, Geshe-la entered at Sera Je College, one of the five great monastic universities of Tibet. Two years later, in 1959, the Chinese invaded. The Sera monks were told to hide in the mountains for three days then return; they left with just the clothes on their back. After three days, Geshe-la's group received a note to follow His Holiness to India; those that did not, returned to Sera and were imprisoned, tortured or killed.

For four months, Geshe-la traveled barefoot over glacier-covered mountains and rocky passes at night. Half of his traveling party were captured, killed or died from the elements. After arriving in India, he was housed in a former prisoner of war camp in Buxa Duar. There, many who survived their escape from Tibet died from typhoid, malaria and other tropical diseases.

Several years later, Geshe-la and about 120 monks were offered 200 acres of jungle land in Southern India. For three

years, they cleared the land by hand and rebuilt Sera Monastery. Geshe-la witnessed the death of many great scholars from tuberculosis and other diseases native to the area.

Despite this hardship and adversity, Geshe-la continued his studies and in 1989 became a lharampa geshe, the highest achievement a monastic can attain. Geshe-la graduated the top of his class in each of the disciplines within this degree.

In 1993, at the request of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Geshe-la came to America. He first arrived at the Kadampa Center in North Carolina and had responsibility for the Kurukulla and Milarepa Centers as well. Geshe-la frequently traveled the East coast, teaching at FPMT centers and study groups in Massachusetts, Florida and Washington, D.C. He was delighted when he was requested to teach in Mexico and his visit helped establish several centers. Additionally, he taught at established Tibetan Buddhist centers in the United States and Canada.

Geshe-la was referred to as “a lama’s lama” and known as a great scholar. He left a rich body of works including biographies of his teacher, Kangyur Lama Geshe Losang Thubten Khensur Rinpoche, and of the three incarnate lamas of Dhargye Gompa’s Gyalten Lama. Shortly before his death, he completed the definitive two-volume history of Sera Je Monastery; the second printing was offered to each monk at Sera Je. This was his last puja at his monastery.

Most of us, however, are familiar with his book on guru devotion, *How to Practice Buddha Dharma*, composed at the request of his Western students. He always said he had two homes, so it was no surprise it was published with Tibetan and English side-by-side.

Geshe-la stopped breathing on November 21, 2010 – a full-moon and Medicine Buddha puja day. In my heart, I know he manifested relics to help us keep and develop our faith in our holy gurus and the teachings, not just for ourselves, for the benefit of all.

Please visit page 69 for a more detailed feature story on Geshe Tsulga.