

Namchak Khen Rinpoche Ngawang Gelek

Namchak Khen Rinpoche Ngawang Gelek was born in 1966, the fire horse year of the sixteenth sexagenary cycle, to his father Lama Namchak Tashi and his mother Peya.¹ From an early age he too showed a propensity for virtuous activities, and showed interest only in the sacred dharma. Their noble father taught him to read and write, and to perform the majority of our liturgies and rituals. He also memorized the four tantras of the medical tradition and other texts and became proficient at identifying medicinal plants and preparing them. In addition, he learned the chants, melodies, and music for our own Namchak tradition from Tashi, the chief chant master of Ngangzo Monastery.

First and foremost, his intention was solely to take monastic ordination and pursue the study and contemplation of the teachings. Thus, when the sublime Khawa Tulku Chökyi Nyima was staying at their family home for a night, Khenrinpoche and his elder brother Chökyi Lodrö together requested that he bestow the monastic vows on them. He advised them, prophesying, “I cannot do so at present. You both should go to India, where your elder brother Tulku Sang-ngag is staying, and he will definitely be the one to show you the path, providing whatever you need in the way of empowerments, ordination, and the study and contemplation of the teachings.” Accordingly, on the third day of the third Tibetan month in 1985, having kept everything secret from their parents and others, Khenrinpoche and his elder brother Chökyi Lodrö fled on foot to seek the dharma, arriving at Shechen Monastery in Nepal during the eighth Tibetan month. Immediately the refuge lord Khyentse Rinpoche took them under his care in response to Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche’s devoted and humble request, and at Paro in Bhutan conferred on them such transmissions as *The Four Higher Collections of the Heart Drop Teachings* and the six volumes of Jatsön Nyingpo’s teachings.

They then accompanied their lord to Bodh Gaya in India, where they received the Kalachakra empowerment, teachings on *Engaging in the Conduct of a Bodhisattva*, and the bodhisattva vow conferred by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Then their refuge lord Khyentse Rinpoche advised them that they should request that the refuge lord Trulshig Rinpoche ordain them according to the Mindroling tradition of the great abbot Shantirakshita’s lineage of ordination. Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche offered a petition on their behalf to Trulshig Rinpoche, who was extremely delighted. He said, “At present, Minling Khentrul Rinpoche is to take monastic ordination under the bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya. Since he needs noble companions to join with him in doing so, this is a most wonderful and auspicious circumstance.” With the refuge lord Trulshig Rinpoche serving as abbot, some thirty monks, as well as Minling Khentrul Rinpoche, Khenrinpoche Ngawang Gelek, and the Namchak vajra master Chökyi Lodrö simultaneously received the vows of novice monks. The refuge lord Khyentse inspired them by giving them gifts and saying, “Since this event involved the five aspects of excellence—place, occasion, teacher, retinue, and

¹. Ngawang Gelek is another of Gochen Tulku Sangak Rinpoche’s younger brothers.

teaching—your coming here from so far away has proved most worthwhile.” He then led them with him to visit the eight great holy sites.

Because Khenrinpoche Ngawang Gelek’s primary resolve was to study and contemplate the teachings, Rinpoche took it upon himself to formally request of the refuge lord Drupwang Penor Rinpoche that his brother be accepted into his Ngagyur Nyingma Institute at Mysore. When Rinpoche did so, Penor Rinpoche promised him, “I will provide for his training and make a thoroughly capable man of him, whereupon I will hand him back to your care.” Following this, in 1987 Ngawang Gelek achieved full monastic ordination in the presence of the refuge lord Drupwang Penor Rinpoche. He entered the Ngagyur Nyingma Institute higher studies at Ngagyur Palyul Tekchok Namdroling (Nagyur Nyingma Institute of Higher Studies) 1986 where, during the three-year program of Madhaymaka studies, he studied and contemplated *The Three Levels of Ordination*, *Engaging in the Conduct of a Bodhisattva*, *The Ornament of the Middle Way*, *Entrance in to the Ways of the Wise*, *The Source Verses on the Middle Way*, *The Entrance to the Middle Way*, and *The Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way*. In this way he gained the diploma for his Higher Secondary degree (called “Powerful Maser of Speech Free from Extremes”).

He then studied *The Treasury of Abhidharma*, *The Detailed Commentary on Valid Cognition*, *The Higher Continuum*, *The Ornament of the Sutras*, *The Distinction Between Phenomena and Their True Nature*, *The Distinction Between the Middle and Extremes*, *The Lamp of Certainty*, Paltrul Rinpoche’s *Overview of the Perfection of Wisdom*, *The Commentary that Illuminates the Meaning*, and other texts. He thus achieved the fine title of Bachelor’s degree (“Master of the Vast Range of Sutras and Tantras”).

In the final three years of his program Khenrinpoche studied and trained with such texts as *The Treasury of Qualities*, *The Heart Essence of Utter Lucidity: An Overview of the Guhyagarbha Tantra*, *The Treasury of Wish-Fulfillment*, *The Key to the Treasury*, *The Source Sutra on Ethical Discipline*, *Pith Instructions: The Garland of Views*, *Taking Ease in the Nature of Mind*, *The Trilogy of Natural Freedom*, and *The Detailed Explanation of the Eight Commands*. With this he received his Master’s degree (“Great Illuminator of the Sutra and Tantra Teachings of Definitive Meaning”).

In 1988, while Khenrinpoche Ngawang Gelek was in his third year of studies, the sublime Khenchen Namdrol Rinpoche told him, “These days, while H.H. Drupwang Penor Rinpoche is still with us, it would be excellent if you were to receive from him the tsalung practices from the Namchö tradition. Generally speaking, in the Palyul tradition the custom has been to bestow the tsalung teachings after people have completed the three-year shedra program, even if they have not completed the preliminary practices.” In accord with Khen Rinpoche’s encouragement, Ngawang Gelek received teachings on the Namchö system of tsalung, followed in the second year by those on trekchöd and tödgel, and all of these he practiced.

When H.H. Khyentse Rinpoche was conferring the transmission for the collected works of Mipham at Namdrol Ling, Khenrinpoche Ngawang Gelek requested an audience with him and asked for Khyentse Rinpoche's spiritual support for him to complete his studies and contemplation. Khyentse Rinpoche ordered him, "Recite the Gangloma prayer² one hundred thousand times!" To honor this directive, Ngawang Gelek undertook a retreat on the phases of approach and accomplishment for the form of Mañjushri known as Simhanada (Lion of Speech), during which he accomplished one hundred thousand repetitions of the Gangloma prayer, along with the supplementary repetitions.

From 1988 onward, every year during the winter break from his shedra program, Ngawang Gelek would undertake a retreat for spiritual practice, thus completing many practices such as Yangphur and Guru Dragpo. In 1993, while he was still enrolled in the shedra program, Drupwang Penor Rinpoche instructed him to serve as a substitute khenpo at the shedra of the glorious monastery of Shechen,³ where he taught texts for some three years. When Drupwang Rinpoche came there to confer the empowerments and oral transmissions for *The Treasury of Precious Hidden Treasure Teachings (Rinchen Terdzöd)*, Ngawang Gelek continued his former process of receiving personal teachings on trekchöd. For six months he practiced the meditation of calm abiding, both involving a support and without a support. Over time, he also received the kindness of Drupwang Rinpoche's guided oral transmissions of *Holding Buddhahood in the Palm of Your Hand (Sangye Lakchang)*, *Timeless Awareness as the Guiding Principle (Yeshe Lama)*, *The Flight of the Garuda (Khading Shoklap)*, and *The Three Statements that Strike at the Key Points (Tsiksum Nedek)*.

In 1994, following Rinpoche's explanation of "the four stages of penetration," (of Vajrakilaya) Ngawang Gelek spent two months in strict retreat, concluding with one hundred thousand fire rituals, accomplished while abandoning everything he possessed except the robes he wore. In 1995, he gave teachings on texts for one year at Rigön Monastery in Bir. In 1997 Rinpoche had an audience with Drupwang Penor Rinpoche, during which he humbly asked that this lord recall his previous commitment and allow Ngawang Gelek to serve at the two Namchak centers for study and practice at Pharping in Nepal. In answer to Rinpoche's request Penor Rinpoche said, "For the time being, send an application to the administration of Namdroling Monastery. It would be of the greatest benefit if I were to send him to you in the future, once he has been enthroned as a khenpo." As Penor Rinpoche, directed, Ngawang Gelek taught at the Namchak monasteries for several years. Eventually, when the temple of Namdroling was inaugurated, His Holiness the Dalai Lama conferred on Ngawang Gelek his diploma for completing the nine-year study program. In the midst of a vast assembly at Tekchok Namdroling, Ngawang Gelek was actually enthroned as a khenpo, whereupon he was sent as the khenpo specifically assigned to our monasteries.

². A well-known prayer invoking the blessings of Mañjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom.

³. In Boudhanath, near Kathmandu in Nepal.

Following this Sang-ngag Rinpoche transmitted to him the empowerments and oral transmissions of the profound Namchak teachings, the tsalung and trulkor exercises of the Nyingthig tradition, and the teaching manual Timeless Awareness as the Guiding Principle, passing on to him such systems of instruction based on experience as the Oral Lineage of Ngagchung. In particular, during a drupchen ritual involving the community of monks and nuns, he accepted the title of Khenchen (Supreme Khenpo) upholding the continuity of this extensive lineage of the Namchak tradition. Thenceforth he was appointed to be the spiritual mentor of all Ewam centers in the Eastern and Western hemispheres of this world. Rinpoche hopes that in the future he will prove to be a unique and trustworthy individual upholding and protecting this spiritual lineage.

Over the years Ngawang Gelek has sought out the teachings, receiving and studying them. From the refuge lord Penor Rinpoche he received the entire range of empowerments and oral transmissions for *The Great Treasury of Precious Hidden Treasure Teachings (Rinchen Terdzöd Chenmo)*, *The Four Higher Collections of the Heart Drop Teachings (Nyingthig Yabzhi)*, the six volumes of Jatsön Nyingpo's teachings, the Namchö tradition, the termas of Ratna Lingpa, *The Sutra of the Gathering of Enlightened Intent*, and the source volumes of the Nyingthig teachings. From the refuge lord Yangtang Rinpoche he received the extensive historical transmission of the Nyingma school (*kama*). From Ladakh Togden Rinpoche he received the transmission of *The Collected Nyingma Tantras (Nyingma Gyüdbum)*. And from the refuge lord Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche he received the oral transmissions for *The Great Treasury of Precious Hidden Treasure Teachings*, the Northern Treasure (Jangter) tradition, the source volumes of the Heart Drop teachings, and the six volumes of Jatsön Nyingpo's teachings. To summarize, in such ways he has avidly sought the nectar of the dharma from more than twenty spiritual mentors by receiving, meditating on, and practicing their teachings. He continues to turn the wheel of the dharma and ensure enormous benefit for beings at centers in the East and West—primarily the two centers for study and practice at Pharping in Nepal, Nupchen Namchak Monastery in India, and Ngarik Daki Ling Buddhist University of Five Sciences.