



An Interview With Khen Rinpoche

Abbot of Tritten Norbutse Monastery to Visit Serenity Ridge This May

Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche will be leading a very special retreat this May at Serenity Ridge, Ligmincha's retreat center in Nelson County, Va. Khen Rinpoche is the abbot (khenpo) of Tritten Norbutse Monastery in Katmandu, Nepal, a major Bon monastery established in 1987 by H.E. Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche. He is widely known for his command of the English language and for his transmissions that illuminate the teachings of dzogchen. This interview took place at Tritten Norbutse in March 2011.



Khen Rinpoche (R) with Tenzin Rinpoche (L) and Yongdzin Rinpoche. Photograph by Tomas Ward
Sue

Davis-Dill:

Students of Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche first met you in 1998. It was Ligmincha Institute's summer retreat held in New Mexico, and you were attending Yongdzin (Lopon) Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche. You have been traveling and teaching with Yongdzin Rinpoche for so many years.

Khen Rinpoche: Yes, since 1998. That is the first time that I went to the West with him, and since then I have been traveling and teaching with him. We have been to the U.S., Mexico, and many places in Europe teaching students of Bon. Also, I have given teachings at Oxford University.

SDD: Can you tell us a little about your training? When and where did you receive your geshe degree?

KR: I received my Geshe degree in 1994 from Menri Monastery in India.

SDD: And how did you come to Tritten Norbutse?

KR: When I obtained my geshe degree it was March of 1994. That same year Yongdzin Rinpoche sent me a letter saying I must come to Tritten Norbutse Monastery. With delight I accepted. I already had the intention to study with him, particularly the tantra and dzogchen practices.

In 1994 I gave some informal teachings at the monastery; there were only about 10 to 20 monks at that time. Later that year, I think it was around November, Tritten Norbutse Monastery's Yungdrung Bon Academy of Higher Study, which has the dialectic school and program of geshe degree, was inaugurated with the presence of His Holiness Menri Trizen Rinpoche and Yongdzin Rinpoche. Since then I have been teaching. In 1996 I was appointed as lupon, which means the principal teacher, and then in 2001 I was appointed as khenpo, the abbot.

SDD: Who have been your primary teachers?

KR: His Holiness Menri Trizen Rinpoche, Yongdzin Rinpoche, and also, one of my main teachers of philosophy in the dialectic school at Menri Monastery was Geshe Yungdrung Namgyal, who was a great scholar and has a geshe degree from Yungdrungling Monastery and Drepung Monastery, which are both in Tibet.

SDD: Is this the same Geshe Yungdrung Namgyal who taught Tenzin Rinpoche?

KR: Yes, the same. Until 1986, when Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche graduated with his geshe degree, we were together at Menri Monastery – but not in the same class. I began in 1981, so for six years, we were together.

SDD: For the teachings that you will be giving at Serenity Ridge in May on the Five Buddha

Bodies, can you say some words of explanation, and address the question: “How can Westerners benefit from this particular teaching?”

KR: This teaching is part of the preliminary practices of dzogchen of the Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyu, or Oral Tradition of Zhang Zhung. But it is not very, very preliminary.

Similar to many other meditation practices, people can benefit from this practice on many different levels. Of course one can benefit at a very profound spiritual level. And not only that, by practicing this, it can help in our normal day-to-day life. It can help to expand the mind, control or overcome different kinds of emotions, and also positively affect one’s physical health. The main principle of this practice is to liberate oneself at different levels — the physical level, the energetic level, and also the mental, or spiritual, level. It helps to liberate from the different negative emotions, and then to develop positive attitudes.

SDD: What are these negative emotions and positive attitudes?

KR: There are five principal negative emotions: anger, attachment or desire, jealousy, pride, and ignorance. Every human being, every sentient being, has these five emotions.

Of course some people have them in a more manifested way, and some people have them in a more hidden way, but there is nobody who does not have these kinds of emotions. Sometimes in day-to-day life, people feel if they don’t have these emotions, they lack something and they cannot accomplish things, which is not exactly right. When you engage with certain emotions — like when you feel strong anger with a particular person, and with this take action — at that moment you may feel relief, but it does not end there. It will lead you further into negative emotions. And then it leads you in more and more. Engaging with negative emotions does not liberate them.

Through this practice with the Five Enlightened Bodies we work with the antidotes of the negative emotions. For anger, we practice with compassion or loving-kindness. If you develop the attitude or feeling of loving-kindness or compassion, then naturally this will reduce your feeling of anger or hatred.

It doesn’t mean that you liberate anger completely, but it reduces it. This gives you more openness, and the more you open, the less you get this emotion of anger. Same way with desire. The antidote of desire, of attachment, is to practice great generosity. For the antidote or

method to liberate jealousy, we practice great openness. The more we are open, the less jealousy we experience. Jealousy is based on the feeling of the lack of openness. For pride, we have great peacefulness. The antidote of ignorance is the practice of wisdom. Of course when we speak about wisdom, there are many different levels of wisdom.

All of the preliminary practices are different methods to develop these positive attitudes and to overcome or dissolve or reduce these negative emotions. So in this way, we keep our mind and our energy more peaceful and in more favorable conditions. In this way, all the other good conditions will naturally arise.

Particularly in this practice, we deal with our physical body, which is composed of a combination of the five elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space. Within the physical body there are five main organs, which are the main machines of our physical body. These five organs are the spleen, kidney, liver, lung, and heart. According to our spiritual teachings and also according to the Tibetan medical system, these are the five main points of the five elements at our physical level.

Each organ is connected to one of the five elements, and each element is connected on an impure level with our five negative emotions. If we speak about the pure aspect, or the liberated aspect, then this is connected with the five positive emotions and the five wisdoms.

In this practice we try to connect on a spiritual level with what we call the five enlightened bodies, which are the manifestations of the five wisdom deities, who in turn are the manifestations of the five wisdoms. The five wisdoms are none other than the liberation of the five negative emotions which I just mentioned. We begin by visualizing seed syllables in specific organs; these seed syllables are like the energetic level of these positive attitudes or five wisdoms. This experience then connects with the elements, the wisdoms, and then the five enlightened bodies. On the spiritual level there are many different names we can talk about, but in fact it all goes to the same point.

On a physical and energetic level, this practice also helps to liberate health problems. Our health problems are connected with the imbalance of the five elements and disorders or defects of the five organs. So this visualization practice can also help us achieve better health or overcome health problems.

Of course when you are in a good attitude, this is very important for anything, any activity you do, including business.

SDD: And the five wisdoms?

KR: They are the wisdom of emptiness, wisdom of equanimity, mirror-like wisdom, discriminating wisdom, and all-accomplishing wisdom.

So, we find out all these five wisdoms and all these five enlightened bodies are within ourselves. Realizing this is the purpose of this practice.

SDD: Thank you Rinpoche.

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Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche will be giving these teachings on “Self-Purification through the Five Enlightened Bodies of the Five Buddhas” at Serenity Ridge from May 18-22, 2011. [More information / register online >](#)