



## Enthronement in Nepal

### Senghe Wangyal Rinpoche Recognized as Reincarnation of 15th Menri Abbot

*On Feb. 18, 2011, 5-year-old Senghe Wangyal was recognized as the reincarnation of Kundun Yungdrung Tshultrim, the 15th Menri Abbot. On March 8, 2011, Senghe was enthroned at Triten Norbutse Monastery, Kathmandu, Nepal. Senghe's parents, Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and Khandro Tsering Wangmo, spoke in April with VOCL about their experiences surrounding these events. An accounting of what they shared, along with some photographs taken during the ceremonies, appears below.*

Early one December morning in Valle de Bravo, Mexico, Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, the most-senior teacher of the Tibetan Bon tradition, called Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche to his room.



Enthronement — Senghe with Tenzin Rinpoche and Khen Rinpoche Both Bon masters were at the lakeside resort town to officiate at the internal consecration of the

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, a giant sacred structure at the Chamma Ling Retreat Center. Also officiating was Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, abbot of Triten Norbutse Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal. They

were joined by other lamas of the Tibetan Bon and Buddhist traditions; Tenzin Rinpoche's wife, Khandro Tsering Wangmo; their young son, Senghe; local shamans; as well as hundreds of devoted sangha members and friends who were there to celebrate the consecration.

Yongdzin Rinpoche's reason for meeting that morning was unexpected. It had nothing to do with the matters of the day. But as Tenzin Rinpoche looks back on it, he was not entirely surprised by what his root teacher had to tell him.

"He said, 'Senghe is a reincarnated master,'" Tenzin Rinpoche says. "He told me he wanted to go through the traditional process that would identify who he was in his previous life."

### Noticing the Signs

When asked recently if they had noticed any signs in their son during the years leading to this recognition, Rinpoche and Tsering noted that they had long been aware of Senghe's special connection to the teachings.

"On some days, as soon as he would get up in the morning he would spend anywhere from 5 minutes to half an hour praying," Rinpoche explains. "He was not imitating adult prayers, but was reciting something that was clearly his own." During long car rides Senghe often would not allow his parents to play anything on the CD player but one song, over and over: his favorite prayer, the "Invocation of Nyame Sherap Gyaltzen," which invoked the first abbot of Menri Monastery in central Tibet. "If we stopped playing it even after two hours, he would cry. Tsering would tell him 'That's enough!' but he could not be consoled."



Senghe with Yongdzin Rinpoche

Tsering recalls a visit to Kathmandu when 3 1/2-year-old Senghe would keep insisting on going to the monastery so he could make friends with the monks. “He would wrap himself in a white towel, wearing it like a *gnakpa* to imitate the lamas. The monitor would try to shoo him away,” she says. Sometimes he would head straight for Yongdzin Rinpoche’s drum and start striking it, to the senior master’s amusement. When Senghe saw the lamas doing the traditional mask dance, he would imitate the dance in front of Yongdzin Rinpoche. On a visit to Tsering’s brother’s house in India, when they offered Senghe the usual tea and cookies, Senghe took off his shoes and dashed to the shrine room, where he beat the drum and blew the conch shell.

One sangha member in the United States, too, remarks about how struck she was by Senghe, as a toddler, taking her prayer beads from her to bless them with reverence. At Serenity Ridge, Ligmincha’s retreat center in central Virginia, students have frequently witnessed Senghe darting into the meditation hall to play cymbals and drum. “Senghe would continually wait until the next bell so he could go in the gompas to play,” Tsering notes.

### Recognizing Through Ritual

As part of the formal identification process, Yongdzin Rinpoche advised Tenzin Rinpoche and Tsering to perform certain prayers at Menri Monastery in India, as well as at Triten Norbutse Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal. They found a convenient opportunity to follow his instructions within just a few weeks, during a planned trip to India and Nepal. There, Rinpoche and Tsering engaged the monks at both monasteries to perform the prescribed rituals and prayers.

Then, one day in early February at Triten Norbutse, Yongdzin Rinpoche completed a series of prayers and purification rituals. The abbot, Khen Rinpoche, entered the guardian shrine room with Senghe and Tenzin Rinpoche, accompanied by Ghen Yeshe, the monk charged with doing morning and evening rituals related to Sipe Gyalmo, the most powerful protector of Bon. More rituals were performed.

The next day, on the auspicious full-moon date of Feb. 18, 2011, the final rituals were completed. Senghe’s identity was confirmed. Senghe Wangyal was recognized by His Eminence Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche as the reincarnation of Kundun Yungdrung Tshultrim, the 15th Menri Abbot. The recognition took place in the presence of Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, Khandro Tsering Wangmo, Lhari-la Kalsang Nyima, and Geshe Tenzin Loday. Yongdzin Rinpoche gave Senghe a blessed cord and a *khata* (traditional offering scarf), and anointed his head with water.

### The Ceremony

The official enthronement took place a few weeks later. There was only one day’s notice, and so it was that Tenzin Rinpoche made a surprise announcement to all the international students and friends accompanying Tsering and him on their trip to Kathmandu. The large group of travelers had journeyed there for the main purpose of celebrating Tenzin Rinpoche’s 50th birthday, a joyful event organized about a year in advance by Tsering. But as Rinpoche describes it, that celebration quickly took second place to the enthronement.

Senghe Wangyal Rinpoche was enthroned at Tritten Norbutse Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal, at 1:30 p.m. on March 8, 2011, the auspicious date of the birthday of Nyame Sherap Gyaltzen, founder and first abbot of Menri Monastery in central Tibet. In attendance were Yongdzin Rinpoche; Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, abbot of Tritten Norbutse Monastery; other lamas and monks of Tritten Norbutse; and the members of Ligmincha Institute's international sangha.

Senghe, a very active 5-year-old often given to mischief, rose to the occasion. "Tsering and I were concerned about how he would make it through the ceremony. But throughout, he was amazingly still and focused with presence," Rinpoche notes.

Tsering agrees. "I think the experience was powerful for him. Normally he would fight against wearing a *chubba* at Losar ceremonies at Serenity Ridge. But on the enthronement day, we asked him if he wanted to wear it and he said 'Yes!' 'You have to be nice.' 'Okay!'"

### What the Future Will Bring

Tsering and Rinpoche's plans for the immediate future are life as usual, so they can permit Senghe to enjoy the opportunities now available to him. He will go to school in Virginia, take swimming lessons, continue his taekwondo classes.

Within a few years Tsering will accompany him to Kathmandu, where Senghe can be close to Yongdzin Rinpoche and begin his studies with teachers at Tritten Norbutse Monastery, one of the two most important Bon monasteries in the West, while he also attends a regular school.

"We will both try our best to give him an education," Tsering says. "Yongdzin Rinpoche told us, 'Now Senghe is recognized as the 15th Menri abbot, but it is up to you how you take it from here.'" The next step, she adds, is for Senghe to receive all the spiritual teachings and transmissions, both at Tritten Norbutse and Menri Monastery in Dolanji, India.

Tsering plans to return with Senghe to Virginia each summer and during other convenient school breaks. Tenzin Rinpoche will make frequent trips to Nepal to be with his family, amid his busy international teaching schedule. "As parents, we will do our best to try to give him our support," Rinpoche says. "Tsering in particular loves our home here in Charlottesville. We are used to the comforts and amenities of the West. Tsering will have to give this up for long months of the year. Kathmandu is dirty, dusty, and polluted, and it goes for hours at a time without electricity. But she is willing to do that."

"We have been very thankful to have Senghe in our lives," Rinpoche adds. "Who knows what this recognition will mean for the future? What Tsering and I wish is that Senghe will pursue whatever the blessings may be from Yongzin Rinpoche or from his previous life — that he will pursue this path so he can be beneficial in preserving the teachings and be helpful toward others' illumination. As his parents, that is our wish."

— Article by Polly Turner. Photographs of recognition and enthronement ceremonies by Martin Schröder.

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