The Contemporary Ogis Orukpa Lineage

Drubwang Shakya Shri and Kyabje Apho Rinpoche by Khandro Thrinlay Chodon

Drubwang Shakya Shri

The renowned Drubwang Shakya Shri was born into a humble nomadic family in the Kham region of Tibet. He began his spiritual life at Dugu monastery, as an ordinary monk who specialized in cooking. Yet he was never distracted by his mundane activities, and in the evening after his daily tasks were done, he would sit beside the stove and, tying his hair to the ceiling, single-pointedly practice the whole night.

Shakya Shri's yogic abilities remained unnoticed at the monastery for many years. Once he was offering tea during a high teaching session given by the great yogi Drubwang Tsoknyi (1828-1904), who was the First Tsoknyi Rinpoche and a reincarnation of both Milarepa's disciple Rechungpa and of Terton Ratna Lingpa. The other tulkus and monks noticed that Shakya Shri was at the same time eavesdropping on the teaching itself, and they mocked him saying "Petsa Naring (i.e., Pema's nephew with a long nose), you will get nothing out of these teachings so it's better that you go back to your cooking!" Drubwang Tsoknyi immediately stopped them in their tracks, saying, "Stop ridiculing him! In the future you will be longing for a mere drop of his pee." The words

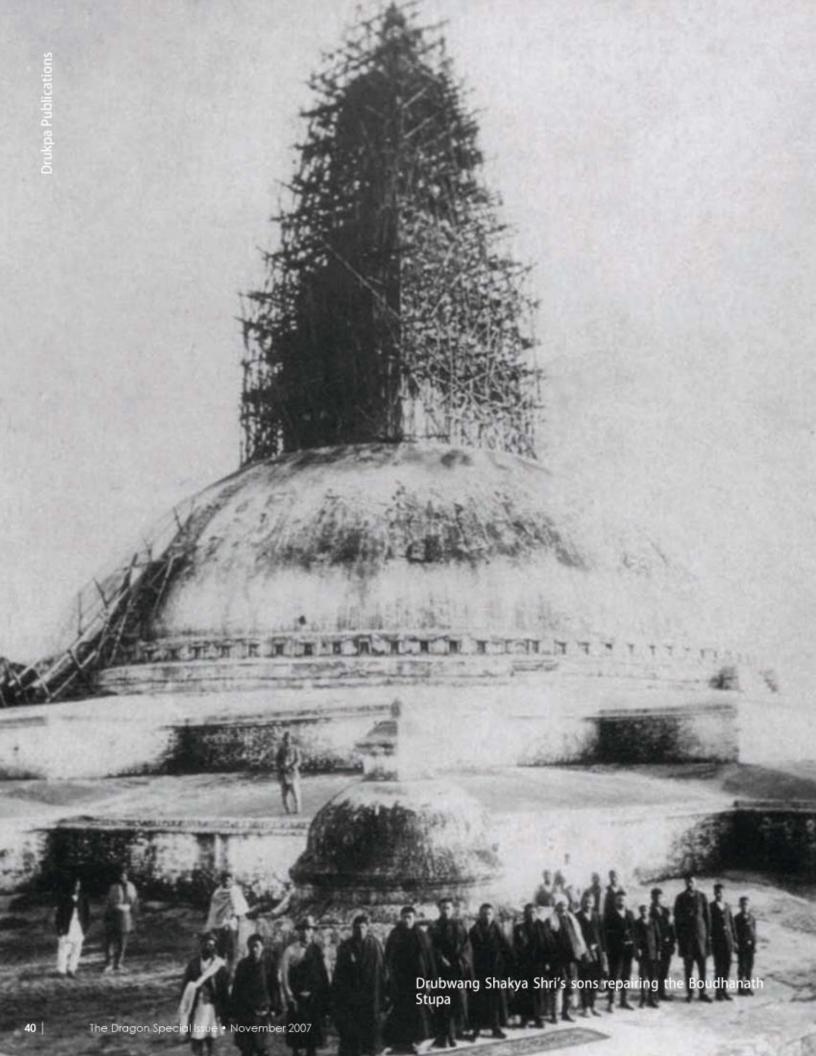
of this great master became a reality

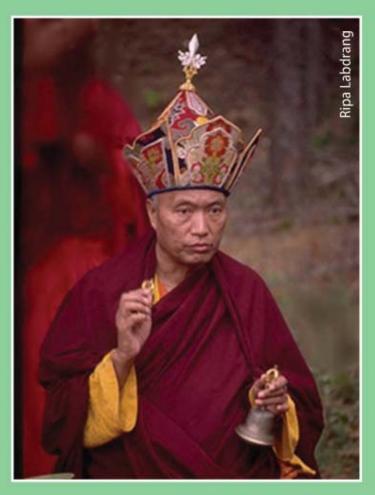
Shakya Shri practiced with great diligence under the guidance of the Sixth Khamtrul Rinpoche Tenpai Nyima (1849-1907) who became his root guru, and from whom he received all the higher teachings of Mahamudra. Shakya Shri was also a contemporary of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892), and it was from him that he received all the Nyingma transmissions and teachings, thus accomplishing mastery of Dzogchen.

For many years Shakya Shri lived and practiced in a remote cave above the Khampagar Monastery in Kham with his consort and children. All the family were happily living and practicing in absolute solitude and poverty. The mocking of narrow-minded monks continued and they became known as "that dirty yogi family in the cave above, who pollute the water in the valley."

It was not until the Sixth Yongdzin Rinpoche Sheja Kunkhyen traveled to teach in this area that the greatness of Shakya Shri's realization became known. Yongdzin Rinpoche was camping with his retinue in a pasture below Shakya Shri's







H.E. Namkha Drimed Rinpoche

cave, and while meditating there had a vision of the entire mandala of thirteen Chakrasambhara manifesting exactly where Shakya Shri's cave lay. Upon asking the locals who lived there, they replied, "the dirty yogi". Yongdzin Rinpoche then invited Shakya Shri down to the monastery and tested his realization, and was amazed at what Shakya Shri had achieved. He then named him "Drubwang Shakya Shri" (*Drubwang* meaning "Great Yogi") and composed a prayer in praise of Shakya Shri's greatness, which is still recited by his students and his students' students everywhere. He was also often known as "Shakya Shri Jnana", a title given by Mipham Rinpoche, after recognizing his profound understanding of the Dzogchen view.

After this incident Shakya Shri became very well-known throughout Kham and his activities flourished, so that soon he had thousands of yogi students. His main center became Siddhikha in Kham. About seven years before he passed away, Shakya Shri was invited by the Tenth Gyalwang Drukpa to Druk Sangag Choeling Monastery in Southern Tibet for personal teachings and also to propagate the Drukpa Lineage. However, because Shakya Shri preferred an ascetic lifestyle, he requested to live in a remote place nearby, and so the Gyalwang Drukpa assisted him in settling at Kyiphuk (meaning "Happy Cave"). Shakya Shri became the root guru of the Tenth Gyalwang Drukpa, and many students from all over the Himalayas flocked to him to study. Thus Kyiphuk became a huge yogic training center where practitioners of all kinds – monks, nuns, lay men and women – all practiced diligently under tight schedules, living in caves, dens, tents and holes, for no building was allowed. Each was trained according to their capacity in Dzogchen or Mahamudra, and there was one hill for Dzogchen practitioners and another for those of Mahamudra. Many signs and miracles of realization were displayed at that time, and people's minds were transformed just by visiting the place. Everything was imbued with the Dharma

There are countless miracles that his students witnessed and recounted, including one where his body was totally transparent so that a butter lamp could be seen through it and he cast no shadow. Every one of his students at this time was also said to have manifested great signs at the time of death, showing their level of realization to be very high. His students and student's students are still scattered everywhere throughout the Himalayas, Tibet and Bhutan. The depth of their devotion is amazing, boundless even to this day.

Venerable Gyetrul Jigme Rinpoche



Towards the end of his life he used all his resources to renovate the three holy stupas of Nepal – Boudhanath, Swayambhunath and Namo Buddha. Though not all renovations were completed in his lifetime, his sons finished the work soon after his passing. He had ten children – six sons and four daughters, and all were great masters and lineage holders in their own right.

The daughters were all realized yoginis and emanations of Wisdom Dakinis, and they displayed many miraculous powers.

The eldest daughter, Ashi Lhuncho, was the spiritual consort of the Sixth Khamtrul Rinpoche Tenpai Nyima and had a son called Setrul Dondrup, who became very well-known in Kham.

The second daughter, Ashi Drolkar, was married to a Nyingma master and her descendents are Namkha Drimed Rinpoche, and Azin Rinpoche and family.

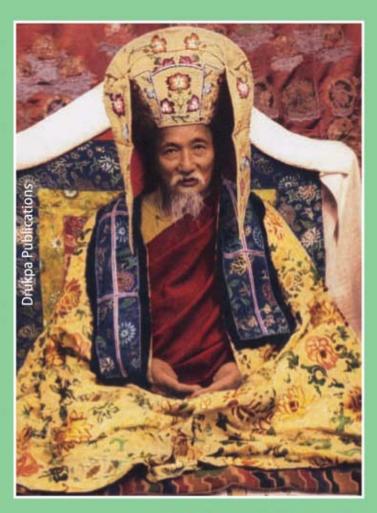
The third daughter, Ashi Apay, became the spiritual consort of the Seventh Dugu Choegyal and was a great yogini.

The youngest daughter, Ashi Phurla, was the spiritual consort of the Tenth Gyalwang Drukpa and their son was the First Thuksey Rinpoche, without whom the Drukpa Lineage would have fallen apart at the critical time of the Cultural Revolution. Thuksey Rinpoche selflessly raised the current Gyalwang Drukpa and re-established Druk Sangag Choeling Monastery in Darjeeling, India.

All of these women and many other female descendents showed infinite dakini qualities in their lives and at the time of their deaths. Many stories of these great women of wisdom are yet to be revealed.

The contribution of Drubwang Shakya Shri's life and teaching makes him indispensable to the Drukpa Lineage, in particular to its yogic tradition. He inspired people to continue and deeper the practice at a very critical time, and thus the lineage of Togden (Yogi) and Togdenma (Yogin) whether in Bhutan, Tibet, the Himalayas or Nepal can always be traced back to him.

Many of his students were ordinary beings



H.E. the First Thuksey Rinpoche

who, like himself, attained a high level of realization and practice in one lifetime. He also had silk-robed high lamas as students, including Taktsang Rinpoche from Ladakh, the Seventh Drukpa Yongdzin Rinpoche Ngagkyi Wangpo and the Eighth Drukpa Choegon Rinpoche Thutob Choekyi Gyatso, as well as royalty and scholars. Yet his down-to-earth, simple and diligent practice inspired thousands of ordinary beings to attain the highest levels of practice.

Kyabje Apho Rinpoche

Kyabje Apho Rinpoche was born at Kyiphuk, the retreat place of Shakya Shri, with a knot of long matted hair that reached down to his mouth, which was recognized as a sign of his past practice. His father, Apho Kunlha, was the third son of Shakya Shri, and his mother, Sonam Palzom, came from royalty of the Sangag Choeling region.

While still in his mother's womb he was given the name Ngawang Yeshe Rangdrol by his uncle, Phamchok Rinpoche, and recognized as the incarnation of the youngest son of Shakya Shri, Apho Ngawang. Apho Ngawang was said to be the body emanation of Drukpa Yongdzin Rinpoche and had died in Nepal during the renovation of the Boudhanath Stupa.

When Apho Rinpoche was two years' old his family was living in Kham, and it was there that he was further recognized as a tulku of Sindar Gompa, part of Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's monastery. At eleven years of age, due to a local war in Kham, he returned to Kyiphuk. Here he studied with Lama Sonam Zangpo, a student of Shakya Shri from Bhutan (and Dzongzar Khyentse's maternal grandfather).

Later he pursued his Drukpa yogic training with Tripon Pema Choegyal from Ladakh, holder of Shakya Sri's Mahamudra lineage, and completed his training to perfection, becoming Pema Choegyal's heart student. During the training of the Six Yogas of Naropa, all the yogic postures were naturally and effortlessly accomplished, as if they were always in his mind, carried from a previous life. Later, when Pema Choegyal was training others including the Eleventh Gyalwang Drukpa, the First Thuksey Rinpoche, Yogi Gegen Khyentse and Omze Sherab, Apho Rinpoche became the guide and instructor.

The Eleventh Gyalwang Drukpa was particularly fond of Apho Rinpoche and often confided in him. Apho Rinpoche's lifelong devotee and attendant, Imi Drupten, was sent to him from Druk Sangag Choeling Monastery by the Gyalwang Drukpa. His heart student, Gegen Khyentse, also came from this Drukpa monastery.

It was these two devoted beings who together selflessly supported the family and lineage after their guru's passing in India.

Apho Rinpoche continued his three-year retreat at Kyiphuk and was so concentrated in his practice that he often forgot to eat and even his guru became worried. This resulted in his poor health later in life.

Following his three-year retreat, Apho Rinpoche was requested by Phamchok Rinpoche to help with the building of a three-story Guru Rinpoche statue in Kyiphuk. It was after this project was finished that Apho Rinpoche's activities really flourished, for he was then invited to teach and train practitioners in all the Drukpa retreat centers throughout Tibet. Still, in present day Tibet, there are many who have unrelenting devotion to him.

Sangyum Urgyen Chodon was chosen by Pema Choegyal, their guru, as Apho Rinpoche's consort, to continue the yogic family lineage. "Ama-la" (meaning "mother" in Tibetan) as she later became known, was said to be a descendant of Lonpo Ghar (Songtsen Gampo's royal minister who was thought to have been an incarnation of Vajrapani). Ama-la was a profound practitioner and became a living example to everyone of how to be a yogini in daily life.

It was at this time, when Apho Rinpoche's activities were at their peak, that the events of the Cultural Revolution forced him to leave Tibet with his consort and retinue and undertake the arduous journey to India.

In India, Apho Rinpoche continued to teach and was invited to all the Himalayan regions such as Lahaul, Pangay, Sikkim, Ladakh and Zanskar. In these remote places he re-established many centers and revived the Yogi and Yogini lineage of Shakya Shri. The family spent a few years in Gangtok, Sikkim, and it was here that his eldest son, Sey Rinpoche, was born. Later they moved to Garsha (also known as "Khandroling", or "The Land of Dakinis") where his two daughters, Semo Dechen Wangmo and Khandro Thrinlay Chodon,



were born. They also lived in Pangay for one year where Sey Jampal Dorje, the second son was born. The youngest son, Sey Jigme Dorje was born during a three-year stay at Gotsang hermitage, Ladakh.

In these extremely cold regions where Apho Rinpoche stayed and established retreat centers, there are still practitioners to this day who are doing the Six Yogas of Naropa training, including the psychic heat practice which involves sleeping out in the snow and then being able to dry damp bed sheets from the resulting body heat.

After so much journeying in the Himalayas, Apho Rinpoche finally settled in Manali. Here he set up his home and small monastery which became a study and training center for all yogis and yoginis throughout the Himalayas, a center like the Kyiphuk and Siddhikha of Tibet. The students would come to Manali to train in strict retreat, and then return to their homelands and continue their practice with devotion.

Apho Rinpoche also became one of the first Buddhist teachers famed in the West, though he never actually traveled there; Westerners flocked from the Tibetan Library in Dharamsala to Apho Rinpoche in Manali. His understanding of the mind, together with his clarity, incisiveness and humor meant he was much respected and loved by all whom he met and taught. His Holiness the Dalai Lama later requested him to teach at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, but his early passing in 1974 prevented this.

Apho Rinpoche received all the Nyingma empowerments from Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodoe, Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdral Yeshe Dorje, Dzogchen Khenpo Gonri, Polo Khenpo and many more. He received Drukpa Lineage empowerments from the Seventh Drukpa Yongdzin Rinpoche, the Eighth Drukpa Choegon Rinpoche, the Eleventh Gyalwang Drukpa and Tripon Pema Choegyal. He had many students all over the world, among them the late Sengdrak Rinpoche, the late Korzok Tulku, the late Khamdrag Rinpoche, Bodong Drogon Rinpoche, Gegen Khyentse, Omze Sherab and Imi Drupten.

At the time of his death, Apho Rinpoche told

Imi Drupten to persuade Gegen Khyentse to start teaching and giving initiations to his students, which Gegen Khyentse happily did until his own death.

The lineage still continues with the blessings of all the great masters of the past. Each of the children and the deeply devoted students of Apho Rinpoche and Gegen Khyentse are now serving the lineage according to their own capacities. Imi Drupten is the only person alive from the original entourage of Apho Rinpoche, and he is at present the backbone around which all the activities evolve. Sey Rinpoche continues to manage the family monastery and its responsibilities, Sey Jampal continues with his humanitarian work, Khandro Thrinlay Chodon with her Khachodling vision, and Sey Jigme devotes his life and skills to giving support wherever necessary. The hills of the Himalayas are dotted with practitioners whose unwavering devotion and practice inflames the beauty and depth of this yogi lineage.

The above abridged biographies were compiled and written by Khandro Thrinlay Chodon with the help of Jane Miknius in September 2006, Manali, India. © Khachodling Trust Archive and reproduced here with permission.