

The Lama of *Many* Lifetimes: *Touching the Living Heart of Garchen Rinpoche*

Interview with Garchen Rinpoche about Lapchi Retreat

[Sue Sue's question - not recorded in English]

[GaR 3:38] In the Drikung... generally the Kagyu tradition, the most principal root guru is Milarepa, and he had some very special features. He went to the snow mountains in order to engage in retreat practice, and so he also went to the snow mountain of Lapchi, and therefore, his own story is strongly related to the sacred place of Lapchi. And in this place of Lapchi, there were different demons and ghosts who performed all sorts of miracles. And also the Bon religion, some practitioners, they had some competitions of magical abilities. And so these remainders of those magical displays can still be seen up to the present day. So in the present day for those sentient beings that are highly deluded and don't have a lot of trust and devotion, when they see such a place directly then trust will arise in them. So therefore this place is very precious. And so for this reason also I went to Lapchi.

Before I always wanted to go to Lapchi, but then I never, of course, would never use the money that is meant for the monastery, the money that I have in the account for the monasteries, so I personally don't have much money. And also I can't walk up to Lapchi, so a sponsor, an old mother, helped me with the money to go up to Lapchi, and that was the condition that helped me to make that trip. So when I went to Lapchi, I went together with a few people, like Abo Lama, and Christina [Lundberg] who made the movie, and also Megan [Howard] who helped with the movie [For the Benefit of All Beings]. Then also Drupa Lodro also came and helped with the preparation of foods, and many other things. And so this movie that Christina is making is for the sake of sentient beings to see that in the future, which then also becomes a liberation through sight, and the liberation through hearing. So

that was the intention of going to Lapchi. The intention was that in the future, even after I have died, and my students still have love for me when they see that sacred place, then devotion will arise in them, love will arise, renunciation for samsara, and compassion. And especially devotion and pure view for Milarepa will arise within their mind streams. So that was the purpose - my goal - of going to Lapchi. It was for the movie. And also my own sake, to purify obscurations and negativities. And so that my disciples give rise to devotion and pure view.

[GaR 8:56] ...So then Rinpoche says, so at the time when Rinpoche went to Lapchi, also HH Chetsang Rinpoche was staying there, and there were many other retreatants, and also Chinese people who were there, who were very happy. And the place where I stayed was a cave of Milarepa called the Demons Subduing Cave - that's where I stayed. And at the time when I stayed there, although I didn't see Milarepa directly with my eyes, with my mind I had a very strong feeling that Milarepa actually is in the cave. And so I felt the very special blessings of Milarepa in this cave. Then at the present day, there is a very special Drupon, a retreat master living in Lapchi, called Dondrup Palden – Drupon Dondrup Palden – and he really is a master that has perfected the practices of listening, pondering, and meditation, and I have also received from him, requested from him, some instructions on the blessing lineage.

[GaR12:13] So then when I met His Holiness Chetsang Rinpoche in Lapchi, an exceptional devotion arose in my mind. And although there are many Lamas elsewhere who uphold the Buddha's teachings, His Holiness the Drikung Chetsang Rinpoche truly moved me within because he endured so many hardships and has great courage to go to such a place and engage in retreat practice. And so I found that really especially amazing. And so a feeling that such an effort must be made arose in my mind. So a very special devotion and a pure view for him arose in my mind. And so especially that he engaged in these hardships to engage in retreat practice in such a place is truly unequalled, and also His Holiness the Dalai Lama

wrote words of praise in a Long Life Prayer for His Holiness Chetsang Rinpoche where he points out his great qualities of listening, pondering, and meditation on the mastering of these practices. So really it shows that his qualities are actually authentic and genuine. So when I saw his qualities, true trust and devotion arose in my mind.

[GaR 14:35] So also some time ago His Holiness engaged in many hardships... Where I was just prostrating One Hundred Thousand prostrations and already experienced great difficulty doing that, he prostrated Five Hundred Thousand prostrations. So when I saw his special qualities and also the hardships that he engaged in the cave in practice, I really saw that he really is Milarepa. So a very special feeling arose.

[Interruption]

[Sue Sue 16:03] Can Rinpoche describe a little bit about the condition of the cave and the place, especially the cave. And also when Rinpoche first came back here he was telling us a story, he said that when he was doing meditation in the cave, he felt like Milarepa came and blew blessings into his eyes. And so I am not sure whether that was what he wishes to also share with us.

[GaR 19:10] Yes, so then, Rinpoche said the cave that he was staying at The Demons Subduing Cave, it was a cave that goes down into a deep, like a pit, sort of.. like a deep cave you go inside. So when you go down into the cave, it is very cold. And so he tried to stay there... He tried very hard with great effort. But then actually his back and his knees were very cold and started to hurt, and then there was nothing to see because it was very dark in there, but it was that time where a very strong feeling arose in my mind, that Milarepa actually is there, and also sorts of other sensations arose. And in this cave, we also performed a Tsok offering, and His Holiness Chetsang Rinpoche also came for that. And the top of this cave there is a

small temple, and that's where I stayed most of the time. Because down in the cave, it was very cold and it hurt the knees and it hurt the back very much. And that cave actually is the only place where I really stayed - I didn't go to many other places, as I also cannot walk to many other places.

[Sue Sue 20:26] So how long did Rinpoche actually stay in Lapchi to do meditation?

[GaR 20:40] So... 1 month and 20 days...

[Correction]

... so it was about 1 month and maybe 15 days or so. And so then, also Abo Lama did a pilgrimage and went to different places. So there is like a sacred place, from one place to another place where Milarepa flew in the sky – there is a pilgrimage – and that pilgrimage Abo Lama did, and maybe he can tell you more about that because I didn't go.

[Abo Lama 21:48] *Laughter...*

[Sue Sue 22:29] Anything else you would like to share with us?

[Abo Lama and Garchen Rinpoche 24:41] So then... in Tibet there is the royal seat of Phagmodrupa, and His Holiness Chetsang Rinpoche is rebuilding the monastery... that place there, because the Chinese have destroyed everything. And there is a... there also arose... they built a Jigten Sumgon statue there. And so the life tree that goes within the statue was cut in Lapchi – the tree was taken from Lapchi. And so according to Chetsang Rinpoche's command, there is a mantra that has to be written on the life tree. So the mantra Om Ah Hung... and His Holiness Chetsang Rinpoche wrote the syllable Om, and then Nubpa Rinpoche wrote Ah, and Garchen

Rinpoche wrote the syllable Hung on that life tree. So that is then supposed to be sent to Tibet.

[Abo Lama and Garchen Rinpoche 28:22] So... and the His Holiness Chetsang Rinpoche also offered an old Milarepa statue to Rinpoche. And it is... so Rinpoche says you should maybe make a picture later when it comes. Drupa Lodro... Lama Drupa Lodro will come here and then bring the statue in next [...] February, maybe you can make a picture of that statue. It's a very old Milarepa statue.. and so it was offered by Chetsang Rinpoche to Gar Gon. And Drupa Lama will bring it here in February. And so, generally, they don't remember now what kind of statue it is.. but there is different Milarepa statues. In some statues, Milarepa is holding a long life vase... in others he is holding a Kapala.. in others he is holding a jewel... there is different statues. So that was one offering. And then in the Treasury of Lapchi – like in the Lapchi administration – they offered also to Rinpoche a stupa, and this stupa is now in Rinpoche's room just next door. And so you can also make a picture of that.

[Abo Lama and Garchen Rinpoche 32:8] So then they also saw.. like from the Treasury of Lapchi, he also showed them.. presented them.. precious relics and substances. And then Rinpoche also received little parts of them.. For example, there were.. many different.. but some of them were.. Marpa's shoes.. Then.. [...] King Tsongtsen Gampo's spine bone that formed a relic in the form of the Thousand Armed, Thousand Eyed Chenrezig. Then there is relics of.. he's called Dom-lap-chi-wa Namkya Gyaltzen – a Drikung retreat master in old days.. So of him, there are remainders of his robes... his clothing. And also there is a stupa of him that contains some of his relics of his body. So that is of Namkha Gyaltzen. And then.. there are shoes of Naropa. Then... Milarepa's meditation belt.. and so forth.. there are many others. And so from these precious relics and remainders, Rinpoche received little parts of it as a blessing.

[Sue Sue 34:15] What is the name of the great master... the Drikung...?

[Ina 34:18] Namkha Gyaltsen.

[Rinpoche and Lama Abo 34:29] He is a very profound lama and a highly realized master, and also it is said that he is an emanation of Milarepa.

Translated from Tibetan into English by Ina Bieler at the Southwest Buddhafield, Garchen Buddhist Institute, Arizona, USA in 2008.

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