



PHUNTSHO COLLECTION FAVORITES

Photographs of Early Tibetan Buddhism in Seattle

April 22, 2017

His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya and his wife, Her Eminence Jamyang Dagmo Kusho (Dagmola) Sakya married Mariam and me in Seattle on November 26, 1977. Their ceremony not only marked the beginning of our marriage but also the start of the [Phuntsho Collection](#), a nearly 40-year collection of photographs taken of Rinpoche, Dagmola, the Sakya Family, our Sangha and Tibetan Buddhism in the Pacific Northwest, named after the first part of the Dharma name given to me by Dagchen and Dezhung Rinpoches. Last year, I uploaded 29 albums of the collection to Flickr.com to help celebrate Tibet Fest and to help mark the recent passings of Dagchen Rinpoche, Ani Chime, Dhongthog Rinpoche and his wife, Tsewang. To help mark the first anniversary of Dagchen Rinpoche's passing, the Northwest Dharma News invited me to prepare an article featuring a few favorite photographs and accompanying comments.



1 - Tsering Yuthok at Sakya Tegchen Chöling, Seattle - July 1978

An accidental photograph that embodies many precious symbols. Tsering Yuthok carrying Topgyal during Sakya Tegchen Chöling's celebration of His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso the 14th Dalai Lama's birthday. A faithful Tibetan mother soon to give birth with a Dharmachakra rising from her outstretched hand and Buddha rising from her mind.



2 - His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya receiving His Holiness the Dalai Lama
Seattle, October 4, 1979

His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya, Tibet's second highest lama and living emanation of Manjushri, Bodhisattva of Wisdom receiving His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tibet's highest lama and living emanation of Chenrezi, Bodhisattva of Compassion at Seattle's Sakya Tegchen Chöling during the Dalai Lama's first visit to the United States.



3, 4, 5 & 6 - Rinpoche teaching Frieda how to paint walls ~1984

The sequence begins with Rinpoche showing our eldest daughter, Phuntsho Wangmo (Frieda), how to paint one of Sakya Monastery's walls. At first, Frieda is afraid and doesn't want any part of it, but with Rinpoche's gentle help and encouragement, Frieda discovers that she can do it and likes doing it.



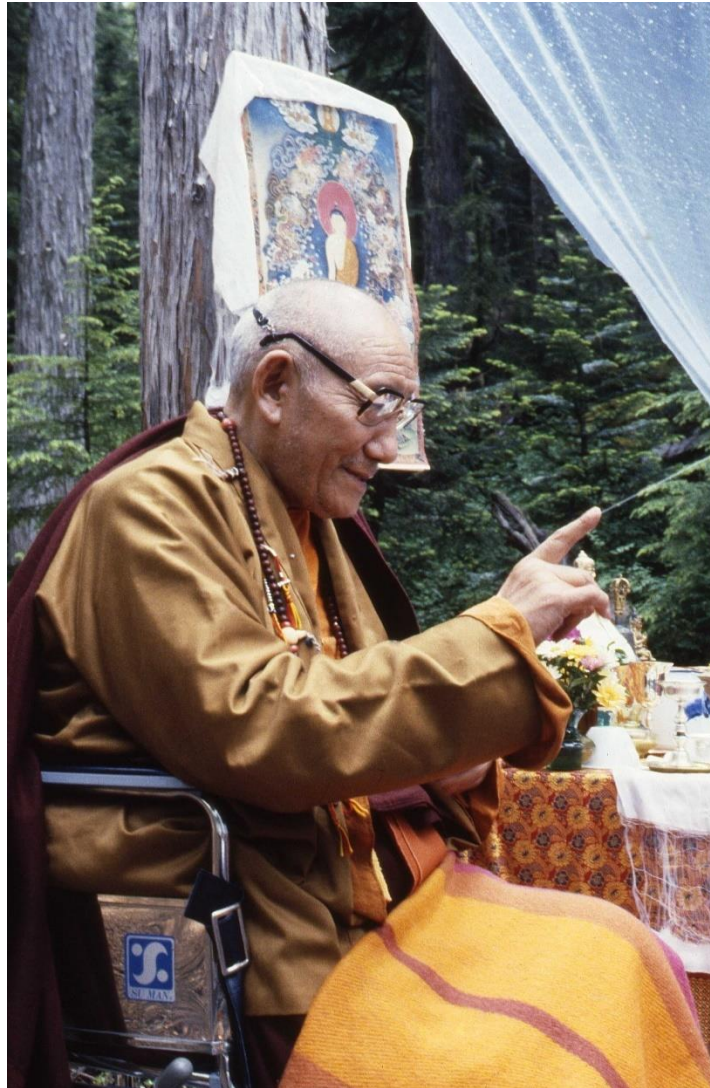
7 - Sakya Monastery's first teachers and students - 1984



1921 – 2015

8 - Ani Chime at Sakya Monastery - 1989

Ani Chime was a simple nun, Dagmola's aunt and His Eminence Dezhung Rinpoche's and Dr. Nyima's sister. The power of Ani Chime's faith, compassion and humility was so strong, pure and self-evident that she would inevitably awaken and fortify the courage and devotion of those privileged to be in her presence. Young children were drawn to her instinctively and many people trusted and found renewed hope in her loving kindness, courage and boundless faith in the three jewels.



1906 - 1987

9 - His Eminence Dezhung Rinpoche teaching in Mount Rainier National Park ~ 1985

According to David Jackson's book, "A Saint in Seattle", Ani Chime rescued her very learned, highly realized and widely revered older brother, His Eminence Dezhung Rinpoche, from the Communist Chinese soon after fighting broke out in East Tibet. Her account of their escape from Tibet is even more awe inspiring. Ani Chime was normally very quiet and didn't say much but one morning while sitting alone with her and Dagchen Rinpoche in Rinpoche's kitchen, she recounted their escape.

Dezhung Rinpoche was tall and stood out but unlike many monks and nuns trying to escape the violent onslaught, Rinpoche never took off his robes. Whenever he traveled, he wore a reliquary to keep anything from penetrating his skin, given to him by his lama, the highly-realized Lama Legpa Rinpoche. Dezhung Rinpoche never discouraged anyone from seeking his protection and his followers grew sizable in number. By listening to two crows who flew overhead, Rinpoche was usually able to direct his group away from the search parties determined to find and kill them. Eventually the Chinese got wise, took off their uniforms and dressed up like Tibetans to sneak into Rinpoche's camp unnoticed. Once in they surrounded Rinpoche, pulled out their guns and started firing. Ani Chime saw several bullets make the hair on his head jump and when he untied his belt, many bullets fell to the ground. At that moment, Dagchen Rinpoche concluded the precious teaching with the words, "That's Faith".



1933 - 2015



1954 - 2015

10 & 11 - Venerable T. G. Dhongthog Rinpoche teaching at Seattle's Sakya Tegchen Chöling - 1979
Tsewang Dhongthog, Rinpoche's wife and their family's mother & grandmother – 2014

Venerable T. G. Dhongthog Rinpoche was one of the most respected Tibetan Buddhist scholars of his time who Dagchen Rinpoche chose to help teach his five sons and grow Tibetan Buddhism in The United States. Historian, lexicographer, calligrapher and astrologer, Dhongthog Rinpoche was an exceptionally learned and prolific author who was trusted to convey the complete and detailed meaning of many ancient and sacred texts. Tsewang was his loving wife and working mother for their three children and servant monk, grandmother to their two grandchildren and regular Tibetan resettlement volunteer. Before leaving Tibet in 1957, Rinpoche was Head Lama of Dhongthog Rigdrol Phuntsog Ling Monastery in Kardze.



12 - His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama's rainbow arrival - Seattle, June 27, 1993

My camera was in the shop for repairs so Dagchen Rinpoche lent me his and told me not to shoot too much "but if you see something special, shoot it". The next morning, a double rainbow greeted our motorcade as we turned onto Boeing Field. The Dalai Lama's helijet from Victoria was late and the heavenly sight merged into a single rainbow that lasted for nearly half an hour. Since the local news media either didn't understand or pretended to ignore its significance, all turned their backs to it and this was probably the only photograph taken of the spectacle. I sent a copy to His Holiness and his personal secretary responded with a short thank you note. When I placed it on our altar, a small rainbow appeared on the envelope.



13 – His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya ~ Dorje Chang

1929 – 2016

Rinpoche's 80th birthday celebration at Sakya Monastery of Tibetan Buddhism - Seattle 2007

The former [Kalu Rinpoche](#), who was in his eighties and beloved and revered throughout much of the world as one of the Kagyü lineage's most learned and realized lamas, gave a public teaching at Sakya Monastery for a couple hundred people in ~1985. During the question and answer period that followed, there were many questions about Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the Oxford educated Tulku, Terton, meditation master, and fellow Kagyü whose lucid writings and important gatherings and teachings introduced much of the West to Tibetan Buddhism. At one point, Kalu Rinpoche became a little disturbed by the line of questioning and spoke accordingly.

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche is indeed a very high lama who has greatly benefited many Westerners. It should also be understood that just as most Tibetans consider His Holiness The Dalai Lama, Tibet's highest lama, both temporally and spiritually, they also consider His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya their second highest lama. I had heard this before from some Sakyas and thought it might be sectarian bias. Coming from such a highly venerated Kagyü lama made the revelation far more profound.

As an American who didn't travel with Rinpoche on any of his pilgrimages to Tibet, India, Nepal and Bhutan and had never seen him in the eyes of his many followers there, Kalu Rinpoche's revelation awakened a much clearer understanding and appreciation. I knew Dagchen Rinpoche was considered a high lama by the deference shown by all of the many other high and often older lamas that visited but I had never fully accepted and thought of him before as Tibet's second highest.

Fulfilling part of [Padmasambhava](#)'s eighth century prophesy, His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya, senior lineage holder of the sacred Khön family lineage, still unbroken for over 1,000 years, led a family of very high Tibetan Lamas who were among the first to emigrate (1960) and become citizens of The United States, where he, his younger brother, His Holiness Trinley Sakyapa, his wife, Her Eminence Jamyang Dagmo Kusho Sakya and his wife's uncle, His Eminence Dezhung Rinpoche cofounded Seattle's [Sakya Monastery](#), one of the nation's first monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism. Like many of his predecessors, Dagchen Rinpoche possessed miraculous powers witnessed by many. Two of his predecessors, revered as Godan and Kublai Kahn's supreme teachers, introduced the Mongol empire and much of China to Tantric Buddhism.

Now, for causes beyond our imaginings, Rinpoche was here with us ... young and old, rich and poor, strong and weak, fast and slow, wise and foolish ... offering all an opportunity to join him and travel through our lives with him and his ancient family's holy teachings.

The small, inclusive and slowly growing size of his following in the West helped Rinpoche establish a firm, secure and broadly based foundation to grow the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism. Being less famous in the West gave him more time for us and throughout Sakya Monastery's construction, he was usually in the middle of it, guiding us along and actually doing much of the most difficult, dangerous and demanding work and making it fun, safe and interesting for anyone who wanted to help. He was also a demanding taskmaster who sometimes staged tasks to test students and teach lessons as much as to complete tasks. And, just as Manjushri's sword flames bright, Rinpoche also relished the many opportunities we gave him to poke, reveal and help us dissolve our many doubts and self delusions obstructing the deepening of our trust, faith and understanding ... he became our hallowed and profoundly wise but never distant luminary ... our refuge, trusted teacher and beloved guide.

In grateful remembrance of Dagchen Rinpoche, his family and ancient teachings and the many other Rinpoches, lamas, monks, nuns and lay Tibetans that followed him here to be safe and to preserve and provide access to their ancient culture, knowledge and wisdom, a new, internationally revered monument and memorial park is being envisioned along the north coast of Edmonds, Washington ... [Rinpoche's Park](#).

To commemorate the first anniversary of His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya ~ Dorje Chang's passing and give us all an opportunity to share an afternoon and evening together enjoying what could become Rinpoche's Park, Mariam and I plan to host a pot luck open house, noon to midnight at 16202 - 72nd Avenue West, Edmonds, Washington 98026 on Saturday, April 29. Email your name c/o Rinpoche's Park to plehn@lehndesign.com and I'll send you an update on our progress and plans.

Phuntsho Thundrup ~ Ngawang Yeshe ~ Phillip Lehn



GREEN TARA incorporated

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

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