

VEN. CHOGYAM TRUNGPA, RINPOCHE INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST LEADER DIES IN NOVA SCOTIA



The Vidyadhara (a Sanskrit title meaning "holder of great insight"), the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, an international Buddhist leader whose teaching attracted thousands of Western students, died in Halifax, Nova Scotia on April 4. He was 47 years old. He had moved to Halifax last year to establish a new international headquarters for his work, previously based in Boulder, CO.

Thousands of people attended the cremation ceremony held at Karma-Choling on May 26. It was the first time that the traditional Tibetan funeral rites for a high Tibetan lama were performed in North America. The rites were presided over by His Holiness Dingo Khyentse Rinpoche, His Holiness Shamar Rinpoche and other major teachers of the Kagyu Order of Tibetan Buddhism, including the Vajra Regent Osel Tendzin, the American student empowered in 1976 to be Ven. Trungpa Rinpoche's dharma heir, or spiritual successor.

Among those attending were religious leaders and diplomats, United Nations ambassadors, and Buddhists from around the world, including many members of Vajradhatu. The traditional ceremonies were held in a large meadow on the Karma-Choling land and featured a processional to the cremation site accompanied by monks playing Tibetan horns, reed instruments and drums.

The Ven. Trungpa Rinpoche was noted for his intense energy and creativity. He founded Vajradhatu, an international association of more than 100 Buddhist meditation and study centers in North America

and Europe, and Naropa Institute in Boulder, CO, an innovative accredited liberal arts college combining Eastern and Western fields of study. His work at Naropa attracted major intellectual and artistic figures and became the focus for an annual conference on Christian and Buddhist contemplation. He founded Shambhala Training, the United States Committee of the United Nations Lumbini Project, and was a founder of the American Buddhist Congress.

Born in 1940 in eastern Tibet, he was recognized at 18 months, in accordance with Tibetan tradition, as the eleventh rebirth of the historically important Trungpa lineage, and enthroned at the age of five as Supreme Abbot of the Surmang monasteries and governor of the district. Years of intensive training in the Tibetan monastic tradition followed. In 1959, during the Communist Chinese invasion of Tibet, he escaped to India, eventually studying at Oxford and founding a meditation center in Scotland. He gave up his monastic vows in 1968 and subsequently married an English woman. In 1970 he moved to Boulder, CO, and established Karma Dzong Meditation Center (currently one of the largest Buddhist communities in America) and Karma-Choling, a contemplative center in Barnet, VT.

A prolific author whose work has been translated into 11 languages, Ven. Trungpa Rinpoche wrote 11 books, including the widely read "Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism" and "The Myth of Freedom," an autobiography called "Born in Tibet" and most recently, "Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior." □

A great teacher has died.
Not one to compromise his teaching
in order to avoid controversy,
he inspired many to pursue
the way of clarity and compassion.
As we mourn his death—
where did he go?

Heaven?
Hell?
Earth?
Sky?
Where? Where?

KATZ!

With folded hands, facing to North.
Jacob T. Perl
Abbot, Kwan Um Zen School



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deeply, I do not know. As I start maturing in my practice, I realize that I don't know a lot of things. Somehow I was gifted with these four sons, and when I started practicing, it was because I went to Suzuki Roshi and asked him how to take care of my children, and what being a mother was. I didn't know how and I was scared.

Somehow I realized that if that was the place where I was so frightened of losing the self, then that was the place I ought to be. For many years I used that as my practice, and didn't care what it looked like from the outside. If somebody says, "Oh, are you practicing?", I know I'm practicing something and not just taking care of children. It's relative and absolute: are you really taking care of children, or are you taking care of the Buddha?

I rather look at it as though I am giving my whole heart to the Buddha, and it comes in the form of children, my children. (laughter) So that very specific situation was a catalyst for me and a place where I started with a lot of devotion. I used that situation, I cornered myself in that situation in the same sense as you would if you were sitting in zazen: no exit.

"Are you really taking care of children, or are you taking care of the Buddha?"

Q. If somebody came to you and said, "I want to start a Zen Center," what would you tell them?

Kwong Roshi: It depends who the person was.

Q. Oh, a very clear Zen Master.

Kwong Roshi: A very clear Zen Master? Then why ask me? (laughter) What's the problem?

Q. Because he doesn't know anything about America and you've been in America most of your life, so....

Kwong Roshi: Maybe it's better not to say anything. That person has beginner's mind, it's open....In the Zen climate in America, a lot of monks want to open up temples,

not sitting groups, and it's not that simple.

Q. There have been a lot of problems.

Kwong Roshi: Yes, it's a very deep thing and I myself asked Suzuki Roshi [if I could] do the very same thing. But actually I wasn't ready. It's a very deep thing, because you sit with people, and later on they'll be asking you questions. If you can handle all that, it's fine. But it should be done in a very thorough way for American Zen students or disciples.

Q. Recently we have heard about difficult times at the San Francisco Zen Center with teacher-student relationships. Is there anything in this experience that's a lesson for us as Zen students or in terms of being correct students?

Kwong Roshi: It's a hard question, how to be correct students. In one way, we should definitely be able to talk to each other and mirror each other, regardless of whether we become very big or small. To have that kind of channel open is very important. It's also a very good time when these things happen. The puritanical way of looking at things is very strong in this country. That's our karma reflecting. That is coming out so we can take a look at it. It's a very good time, and also it's a painful time, a lot of "pulling the [dead] grass."

Q. How was it for you when Suzuki Roshi died?

Kwong Roshi: It was awful because I relied on him. I believed in him more than I believed in myself. It was more awful than I think I would admit. At least my idea then was to be a strong Zen student, to go straight [practicing] or be strong. But actually it was a very sad and big loss. For myself, my own karmic life, to [be] cut off from Roshi, was a teaching. It was the last teaching. You cannot be attached. I think after he died, I began understanding more and feeling closer than when he was alive. For the first ten years I didn't know him that well. It was only afterward, because I was trying somewhat to do what he was

doing. Knowing why he was doing these things, I become very close in that way. Your teacher Soen Sa Nim is still alive; please appreciate this.

Kwong Roshi: When Soen Sa Nim says, "cut thinking" (like when you're sitting zazen), there are only two things in operation: your awareness and perception. The other three skandhas have dropped off (form, sensation, discrimination). The only thing left is perception and awareness. When you join them, then I know someone



Photo By Ruth Klein

just walked in with a gray robe on and that's Richard. But when they're not quite joined yet, you have the awareness of only "someone," a real subtle awareness of just one thought, but no sequentialness. That's "not-thinking." If it goes to thinking or sleeping, that's the scenery of zazen. There's no judgment of "this is better than that." This is what I would call "no thought," the vastness of no thought.....

By becoming aware of whatever exactly is happening in your zazen, your spiritual practice will mature. That's a very peaceful place. Your body feels like a mountain, immovable, and there's hardly any thinking because body and mind are one. Sometimes there are many thoughts, sometimes there is

sleepiness, but neither one is better than the other. They're all just scenery of zazen. Because if "this" is better, you become more attached to "this."

This is what is happening in the present, this is genjo. When you acknowledge what is happening in the present, you are awake. You have to be there! Even before being, that's Zen!!!

Q. You encourage people to take that sitting mind into action, like going to work or being with their families, but how do you take that from sitting to your everyday life? How do you teach that?

Kwong Roshi: That's the most difficult. There's the possibility that if it exists here in this one room, then it could also exist outside. So you just find yourself in action (which is the most difficult thing), within everyday life, doing things wholeheartedly. You're not thinking about breathing or posture—it's just happening wholeheartedly. It's an attitude. It can take a long time, or it can even happen within an instant; that's prajna. [wisdom]

Q. You've been practicing for 24 years or so. Could you comment on whether you see any difference between the motivation that started you practicing, and the motivation that keeps you practicing now, years later?

Kwong Roshi: I don't think there's much improvement. (laughter) It's basically the same thing. For me in particular, it [the motivation] is suffering. It's just the same thing as the Scotty dog. It happens very early [in our life]. We don't change that much, you know. I see it, not only in the Scotty dog, but now in other people's faces and my own. It keeps me going. There's something about "improvement" which is also puritanical. "When we study, we're really going to become this being"...

But actually you don't improve that much. At the bottom line, suffering is still the same. You have to deal with it, but maybe you can deal with it in a more wholehearted way. That's what we call compassion; without suffering there is no compassion. □