



SATDHARMA

EXTENSIVE SPIRITUAL BIOGRAPHY OF VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN

In August of 1976, the Vidyadhara formally empowered Thomas F. Rich as his Vajra Regent (Tib.: Dorje Gyaltsap), proclaiming him dharma heir and successor. As such, he was the first Western dharma student to become a lineage holder in the Karma Kagyü and Nyingma traditions. The Vidyadhara bestowed upon him the name Karma, Moon of Dharma, Excellent Intellect, Radiant Holder of the Teachings, Victorious in All Directions (Tib.: Karma Chökyi Dawa Legpai Lodrö Ösel Tendzin Chögle Namgyal).

Birth

The Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin was born Thomas Frederick Rich, Jr. in a working-class family of Passaic, New Jersey, on June 28, 1943. He was considered to be an exceptionally beautiful child.

His Youth

His mother said that as a young child, he would drape her chenille house robe over his shoulders as a cape and pretend to be a king. His playmates vied for roles in his retinue of princes and princesses.

At the age of eight, he had an experience of dharmakaya, enlightened mind. While the other children were playing games, he found himself standing motionless. Looking out into open space, duality dissolved into an experience of resting in the nature of mind. The moment seemed timeless.

As a teenager, his house was often a gathering place for his many friends. In school he was elected to be a class officer each year. An excellent dancer, he was selected to appear on "Dick Clark's American Bandstand," the favorite teenage television show of the 1950's and 60's.

He distinguished himself academically, with a special facility for languages. He attended Fordham University in New York City.

Searching for Meaning

After college he found himself drifting, searching for the meaning of life. Having nothing better to do one Friday night, he went with a friend to a talk by the Hindu Yoga master Swami Satchitananda. He began practicing yoga and soon became one of his main disciples. Swami Satchitananda gave him the name "Narayana," and made him the director of the Integral Yoga Institute in New York, and later the director of his center in Los Angeles. He and other students continued to explore different approaches to spirituality. During an "Enlightenment Weekend" at Charles Berner's Institute of Abilitism, Narayana met his future wife, Lila, who was the program director.

Meeting the Vidyadhara

In the "Epilogue" to Born in Tibet, the Vidyadhara wrote, "One California disciple of Swami Satchitananda, a young American of Italian background, came to me with an invitation to attend a 'World Enlightenment Festival.' He was known as Narayana, a colorful personality with lots of smiles, possessing the charm of American Hindu diplomacy. From the first, I felt some definite sense of connection with him."

In the "Letter From the Vajra Regent" read at the 1980 Vajradhatu Seminary, the Vajra Regent describes their meeting:

"When I met the vajra master, (in February 1971) I was ushered into the sitting room, where I was confronted by a person much younger than I expected ... With a piercing gaze, which seemed to comprehend my entire history, he greeted me courteously. ... We had a conversation in the company of his students which lasted perhaps twenty minutes. ... I departed in a quizzical mood that concretized in the form of a question, which itself described the experience of meeting the Vidyadhara and described my first taste of Buddhism as well. I had met many teachers, but none had ever evoked this question. I thought to myself over and over: 'How could anybody be solidly there like a rock, like a monument, and yet be empty at the same time?'

I returned to Boulder in March of 1971 ... I was seated in the breakfast area off the kitchen and told to wait. ... the Vidyadhara appeared. He walked slowly but directly to the table and sat down next to me. 'Hello. So you're here,' he said, after which he said nothing for what seemed to be fifteen minutes. He had an eight-ounce glass of scotch in his hand. When it had been refilled, he turned to me, lifted it, and said, 'Here.'

I had not had a drink of liquor in five years, and I said to him, 'Is this *prasad*?' which, loosely translated, means 'the guru's grace.'

'Yes,' he said. 'That means you have to take three big sips'—which I did.

After a while he said, "Three more." And then, still later, 'Three more.' Years later, he remarked that the incident was like the first meeting of Gampopa and Milarepa."

Meditation

Following the Vidyadhara's instructions, Narayana did his first shamatha retreat, for two weeks in a tent in Kirby, Vermont, near Tail of the Tiger (now Karmê Chöling). During this retreat, he saw that everything produced by conditioned mind was ego, and he had a direct experience of the true nature of mind as dharmakaya. Shortly after the retreat, as he was walking down a hallway at Tail of the Tiger, he encountered the Vidyadhara, who looked at him and said, "Whoa. Powerful."

Chosen as Dharma Heir

In the fall of 1971, the Vidyadhara asked Narayana to be his dharma heir. In the "Letter From the Vajra Regent" read at the 1980 Vajradhatu Seminary, the Vajra Regent describes this event:

" 'I have something to ask you,' he said. 'Do you know what it is?' ... 'This is slightly embarrassing, somewhat like proposing marriage. Can you guess?'

'My mind was blank. 'No,' I said.

'Then I'll tell you. I want you to be my Gampopa, my successor.'

I was utterly shocked. 'Me? Are you sure?'

‘Quite sure. Do you accept?’

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘Just like that?’ he said.

‘Just like that,’ I said.

‘Good. From now on there is no turning back. If you do, you will be destroyed by the dakas, dakinis, and dharmapalas.’

The Vidyadhara talked about his eventual death. I made some feeble remarks about how awful that would be, and he laughed. ‘For me that is no problem at all,’ he said.

When I was about to leave, he beckoned me closer and gave me a copy of Gampopa’s Jewel Ornament of Liberation, in which he inscribed, ‘To my son, with love for Kagyü family.’ He placed the traditional white scarf around my neck and told me not to take it off until I got home. He cautioned me to keep what he had said secret, except for my wife and Ken and Helen Green. Then he said, ‘Come back tomorrow and tell me your dreams,’ and I left. ...

That night I could hardly sleep. Each time I fell asleep, I dreamed I was dreaming and woke up. This continued well into the early morning, when I fell into a deep sleep. At that time I dreamed that I awoke in the same house in Kirby and heard the voices of my friends and relatives of the past and present all congregated in the kitchen downstairs. I walked down the stairs and said that I was hungry and wanted an egg. At that point all my friends and relatives protested, saying I couldn’t have an egg. And I said, ‘Of course I can,’ and proceeded to swallow an egg whole. Then I woke up from my dream.

The next day I told the Vidyadhara my dream, and he said, ‘That is good. The egg symbolizes the unborn wisdom within, like the garuda’s egg. When it hatches, the garuda is fully formed.’ “

Training

The "Letter From the Vajra Regent" continues:

“After that day, the Vidyadhara made no reference to what had happened between us for nearly six months. ... In the summer of 1972, I had become a member of the executive committee. ... In the middle of a discussion, the Vidyadhara turned to me and said, ‘What do you think?’ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘I think you should do whatever you want to do, and that would be best.’

That night, as the Vidyadhara was lying in bed about to go to sleep, he called me to his side and said, ‘What you said today at the meeting was not good enough. You should always remember who you are.’ ...”

In late 1972, the Vidyadhara asked Narayana to direct the Maitri Project for Buddhist Psychology. As such, he organized a two-day conference of interested sangha and avant-garde practitioners of western psychology. Later, the Vajra Regent commented that the Vidyadhara occasionally directed distressed students to him, and that working with the Maitri Project helped prepare him to work with them.

The "Letter From the Vajra Regent" continues:

“During the first seminary, in 1973, the Vidyadhara and I discussed the possibility of my wife and me [and our two-year-old son Vajra] moving to Boulder. He thought it

would be a good idea, and he invited us to be his guests at the Four Mile Canyon house when we arrived. ...

We had been in Boulder [several week] when he called me in and said, 'I've decided that you should work for Vajradhatu.' ...

Working as a Vajradhatu director was extremely confusing at first. The Vidyadhara had given me no definite guidelines. ... People started asking, 'What does he do?' ... Finally I decided that instead of complaining, I was just going to sit at my desk, without apology and without waiting for something to happen. After that, people began to talk to me and ask my opinions about things, and I slowly became involved in all the workings of Vajradhatu."

Announced as Dharma Heir

At a Vajradhatu/Nalanda staff party in March 1976, the Vidyadhara made an announcement: Narayana was his choice as dharma heir and successor. The Vidyadhara threw a crystal glass up to the vaulted ceiling. It hit one of the large wooden beams and shattered into a million pieces, but amazingly none of the glass hit anyone in the crowded room.

Shortly afterwards, the Vidyadhara composed a poem to his future Vajra Regent at the Alden Hotel in New York City. Entitled "The Alden and Thomas Frederick," it expressed their relationship as teacher and main student. The Vidyadhara added a commentary just before the empowerment ceremony that took place on August 22, 1976. (The poem and commentary are published in First Thought, Best Thought)

Empowerment

In the "Epilogue" to Born in Tibet, the Vidyadhara wrote about the empowerment:

"In order to impart this wealth [of wisdom] to so many people, and to ensure that everything will not stop at my death, it is necessary to have one person as an inheritor, someone whom I can train and observe over a period of many years. For a long time it was in my mind to appoint Narayana to this role, and in the summer of 1976 I did so, empowering him as Vajra Regent (Tib.: Dorje Gyaltsap). Assuming the refuge name which I had given him several years before of Ösel Tendzin, 'Radiant Holder of the Teachings,' he took on this heavy responsibility, feeling burdened by it but tremendously inspired. Six hundred people attended the ceremony of his empowerment. There was a wide range of reactions; mostly, people were deeply moved that a future holder of the lineage could be an American.

Ösel Tendzin himself is arrogant and humble, resourceful and impatient, and always willing to regard his position as a further training process. Working with him takes no struggle, and he is quick to apply what he has learned. My training of him is primarily through close and critical observation. My approach to administration and the community in general has been to give more and more responsibility to people but to hold the nerve center in my control, and I am teaching Ösel Tendzin to do likewise."

In the "Letter From the Vajra Regent":

"After my empowerment, the Vidyadhara gave me instructions as to how to proceed. The most important one was this: 'In our lineage, it is said that the grandchildren are more accomplished than the grandfathers. But there is one thing you should always remember:

you have to earn it. My confirmation of you will only go so far. The rest you will have to do yourself. If that were not the case, we would have been corrupted a long time ago.”

The night of the empowerment, the Vidyadhara said, "There is an interesting little nirmanakaya speech I would like to make concerning Ösel Tendzin, whose empowerment took place this evening. [For Vajradhatu and the future of American Buddhism] this gentleman is the saving grace. ... His work is giving, all the time letting go and giving, giving out territory and pushing people and sharing sympathy. ... To individuals who would like to have any kind of consultation, I would say that I think at this point his vision is grown-up enough to answer your questions as much as the old-hat Vajracarya can. I am very confident about the whole thing." (from "The Ear-Whispering Lineage" talk in "The Three Lineages" Vajra Assembly, pp. 82-83 in Collected Vajra Assemblies, Vol. I)

Teaching

Within a few weeks of his empowerment, the Vajra Regent went to Karmê Chöling to teach his first Intensive Training Session (ITS), entitled "Feast of Devotion." At that time, he also did a meditation retreat, during which he wrote a devotional poem to the Vidyadhara. In it he replies to a line in the Vidyadhara's poem to him ("The Alden and Thomas Frederick"), about their father-son relationship:

"... You asked If I knew
That you were my father
And rightly so!
What is a father's duty?
Only a father can teach his son.
Only a father can be worthy of trust.
Only a father can, with extreme care,
Bring his son to maturity.
A son is ignorant,
Has no tongue to speak with,
No skill.
He fumbles, trips, cries, feels foolish
But the father can correct his path,
Point out the right way.
Because of such tenderness
I see who my father is.
With the wisdom and compassion of a father's touch
You take my hand.
Knowing my fears, my frailty
You display the Buddha's courage toward your son.
Of this there is no doubt. ...

Everywhere there are tears
and useless maneuvers.
Who is there to give up the struggle?
The truth is quite plain

Memories, hopes, fanciful thoughts
Have no place to rest.

My father's house has many doors
But only one key.

The Devotion Talk

In November of 1976, the Vajra Regent visited the Vajradhatu Seminary in Wisconsin. The Vidyadhara requested him to give a talk on devotion to all the students. In his talk the Vajra Regent explained, "The point is that in the feeling of devotion you have vast space because there is literally no concern for yourself. When that occurs there is a complete environment of precision. In my relationship with the Vidyadhara, that's how it works. Because of intense longing for him, there's nothing in my mind when I'm there. So whatever he says or does is teaching: the words of, the feeling of, the act of wisdom. That's how you should be."

This would become one of the Vajra Regent's special teaching assignments: to give a talk on devotion during the Vajrayana teaching period of every Vajradhatu Seminary that the Vidyadhara taught.

With the Karmapa

In early 1977, His Holiness the XVI Gyalwa Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyü school of Tibetan Buddhism, made his second visit to the west. During this visit, the Vidyadhara explained to His Holiness that he had empowered the Vajra Regent as a lineage holder. His Holiness pinched the Vajra Regent's cheek, then gently slapped it, and said, "Ösel Tendzin, yah, good!" (This was a gesture he repeated often during this and subsequent visits). His Holiness made a formal confirmation of the Vajra Regent's empowerment, which was written onto the original proclamation and sealed by His Holiness.

The Vajra Regent's confirmation accentuated a long-standing question: can Westerners truly understand and accomplish the esoteric teachings of the vajrayana tradition? During the Karmapa's visit, the Vidyadhara brought the Vajra Regent to meet Tarthang Tulku, a prominent teacher in San Francisco. He had arranged for Tarthang Tulku to challenge or test the Vajra Regent. Tarthang Tulku asked the Vajra Regent questions and brought things to a crescendo, at which point he slapped the Vajra Regent across the face and said, "This is real, you know!" The Vajra Regent didn't move. He just quietly replied, "I know."

During the Vidyadhara's Retreat

During the Vidyadhara's year-long retreat in 1977, the Vajra Regent was in charge of Vajradhatu, supervising all the practice centers and Dharmadhatus. Within the Board of Directors of Vajradhatu, the Vidyadhara and the Vajra Regent were the only Directors of the First Class; all others were Directors of the Second Class. During the retreat, the Vajra Regent gave Refuge Vows and Bodhisattva Vows, and taught the President's Class during the summer session of Naropa Institute. The class was a commentary on Gampopa's The Jewel Ornament of Liberation, the book the Vidyadhara gave him the day he asked him to be his successor.

Shambhala Training and Arts

The Vidyadhara and his Vajra Regent were the co-founders of Shambhala Training. The Vidyadhara set out the vision and described the Shambhala principles. The Vajra Regent developed the format (levels) and the logic for each level. He taught the first Level One in 1977, and many Shambhala Training programs throughout his life.

After the Vidyadhara returned from his 1977 retreat, and during the next few years, both he and the Vajra Regent went on lengthy teaching tours. Visiting many Dharma centers in the US, Canada and Europe, they often co-taught seminars. When they taught together, many students found the continuity between them extremely powerful. There was a beautiful synchronicity in their talks and their artistic creations.

The Vajra Regent often gave particularly clear and useful instruction in various Shambhala Arts. In composing poetry, he said that there were three approaches. The best is when the whole poem arises in your mind at once. Next best is when you know the three-fold logic, and each section arises in sequence. Third best is having a general image, and each line arises one by one. In any case, poetry should be the expression of your mind of the moment.

In calligraphy, he gave a lesson to a group of students one evening in Boulder. He said, "Place the brush with no intention – no uptightness, no self-consciousness – but with precision. Finish with no hesitation – no deliberateness – but accuracy." He demonstrated, and the quality of his strokes were natural and uninhibited. They were a combination of one-pointedness and relaxation: freedom from self-consciousness in placing the brush with a plop onto the paper, then freedom from distraction in drawing out the stroke perfectly straight, and finally freedom from tension or hesitation in completing the stroke with a 'whoosh' of the wrist."

On flower arranging, he said, "First I visualize the finished arrangement, flowers and space. Then I just remove any flowers, branches or leaves in places where I'd visualized space."

The Vidyadhara invited the Vajra Regent to live with him at the Kalapa Court in Boulder, Colorado. From the winter of 1976 until the summer of 1980, they and their families shared elegant homes that were a living manifestation of Shambhala vision. Students were invited to serve at the Court, as a way to enable them to experience the powerful environment created by the Vidyadhara. At first the Vajra Regent was somewhat uncomfortable being served and having kasung constantly present in the environment. The Vidyadhara told him that this was all part of his job, and gave him his own kasung division. Following the Vidyadhara's request to expand in the vision of Shambhala, the Vajra Regent, Lady Rich and their four children moved to a home of their own, given the name Kalapa House by the Vidyadhara.

Once the Vajra Regent was talking to several kasung (kasung that serve as personal attendants), and said, "You know, I was the first kasung: I put on the boots, I helped him get dressed. I always approached service in a particular way, and it is the one guiding

principle you need to remember as a kusung. If you always take the attitude, 'His world, not mine,' you can't make a mistake."

The Vajra Regent demonstrated a presence of mind about both the details and the environment around them in every situation. He appreciated the process of whatever he did. Ordinary activities became imbued with extraordinary wakefulness, relaxation and humor. He particularly enjoyed shopping for ties. The Vidyadhara had given him instructions to always choose ties possessing a vibrant quality, with distinct patterns defined by clear lines. Certain ties were selected for special functions. Ties for dharma talks had larger patterns which people could see and connect with from a distance.

The Vajra Regent loved to cook, and appreciated the subtleties of the presentations and flavors of various cuisines. There was always a gathering of students and friends at meals. He used the experience of dining as an opportunity to create environments that expressed the brilliance and dignity of Shambhala culture.

Shambhala Golf

One of the Vajra Regent's favorite pastimes that became a Shambhala practice was golf. Although his father was an avid golfer and at times worked at golf courses, the Vajra Regent only took up the sport in 1978 at the age of 35. He quickly became extremely enamored of it, and played as often as his busy schedule allowed. Many times he would go out to golf with groups of students, and afterwards teach dharma over refreshments, often explaining how golf can be a vehicle for practicing meditation in action. With the Vidyadhara's blessing, the Vajra Regent and this group of students formed the Shambhala Golfers' Association. The Vajra Regent's talks after golf were organized into a charter containing four guiding principles for the practice of Shambhala Golf:

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Shambhala Golfers' Association is to foster the flowering of an enlightened society, in which individuals relate in an open and compassionate way to themselves and others. The means to realize this purpose is the cultivation of four basic principles in playing the game of golf, and applying these principles to all aspects of life.

Virtue

Virtue is the expression of basic goodness in action. Basic goodness is the fundamental worthiness of every individual. In playing golf, what matters most is experience without the reference point of results. Ultimately, the game is neither important nor unimportant. The real point is that it is good to be mutually engaged in our world, joining body, mind and heart in the vividness of the moment. This is the ground for discovering unconditional confidence.

Discipline

Discipline means proper conduct. Because of virtue, we understand proper conduct as that which overcomes pettiness. In golf, we make a relationship to the form of the game and our interactions with others. When frustration arises, it becomes the working basis for developing discipline. By applying generosity, ethics, patience, exertion, mindfulness

and wisdom, pettiness and irritation can be transcended. Therefore, discipline is the antidote to the negativity that can arise in playing the game of golf, and the means to cultivate a confident and uplifted attitude.

Humor

Humor is the absence of self-importance. It is a quality of lightness, an atmosphere of enjoyment. This does not mean frivolous comments or a good time at someone else's expense; rather it is a simple and genuine delight in participating in the game. Because of discipline, we recognize the need for humor in overcoming the way in which we take ourselves so seriously. Over emphasis on results becomes self-defeating; with humor we can relax and trust ourselves, and be able to help others do the same.

Friendship

Playing the game of golf is one way of engaging in our world. With virtue, discipline and humor, the simplicity of the game becomes the steppingstone for believing in oneself and opening one's heart to others. An open heart is the basis of true friendship: accepting all the qualities we experience in ourselves and our fellow human beings. This is the foundation for expanding a vision of openness and compassion throughout the world.

Vajrayana Teaching

In 1979, the Vajra Regent met with the Vidyadhara to receive instructions on how to do transmissions for ngöndro, the vajrayana practices done as preliminaries to receiving abhisheka. They discussed the Vajra Regent's own ngöndro practice, which he had barely begun. The Vidyadhara said, "You don't have to do it, because you were born partially enlightened. However it would probably be beneficial for students if you did so as an example."

Based on this meeting, the Vajra Regent made plans to spend as much of 1980 as necessary to complete his ngöndro. He did most of his retreats at Pema Choling, an almond farm near Paso Robles, California, from which he wrote his "Letter from the Vajra Regent" to the 1980 Seminary in place of his traditional talk on devotion.

In 1980 the Vidyadhara was completing a major translation project with the Nalanda Translation Committee, the entire text of the Kagyü Gyurto, under the English title Rain of Wisdom. The Vajra Regent was asked to write a preface to follow the Vidyadhara's foreword. The Vajra Regent wrote about the path of devotion, how the lineage was transmitted from teacher to student, and his own devotion to and appreciation of the Vidyadhara, concluding with a poem:

"Meeting my guru
I heard the dharma.
Recognizing the dharma as true
I had faith in him.
Realizing the path to awakening depended on his instructions
I did not hesitate."

Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand

At the same time, the Vajra Regent was working on his book, "Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand," which was published in 1982. In the "Foreword," the Vidyadhara wrote, "As a student and child of mine, Ösel Tendzin has developed his natural ability to respond to the teachings of egolessness. He not only intellectually comprehends these teachings, but he has actually practiced and trained himself in this way. ... He has been able to commit himself and learn thoroughly the teachings of vajrayana. I have worked arduously in training him as my best student and foremost leader, and His Holiness Karmapa has confirmed his Regency. With His Holiness' blessing, Ösel Tendzin should hold his title and the sanity of the enlightened lineage. He is absolutely capable of imparting the message of buddhadharma to the rest of the world."

In the Vajra Regent's "Introduction," he conveys his devotion to the Vidyadhara and the lineage in this four-line poem:

"When I met my guru, I saw the rugged power of a clear mind.
I fell effortlessly into the open path.
Living under the white umbrella of the compassionate ones,
I remain continually grateful."

Experiences with the Vidyadhara

A major point in the Vajra Regent's training by the Vidyadhara was on New Year's Eve, 1979. There had been a sequence of miscommunications, and a building energy on the part of the Vidyadhara toward something he saw in the Vajra Regent's demeanor. It exploded in the Vidyadhara wrathfully smashing a telephone onto a coffee table and directly confronting the Vajra Regent, saying, "NO! No to ego!" The Vidyadhara called this moment 'the Big No.' He wrote a poem entitled "How to Know No," and did a calligraphy of NO with the inscription: "If you know 'Not' and have discipline, then the ultimate 'No' is attained, patience will arise along with exertion, and you are victorious over the maras of the setting sun." (The poem and a copy of the calligraphy are published in First Thought, Best Thought.)

Once the Vidyadhara was taking a course of medicine every evening. He delighted in pretending that he was a samurai who was taking a suicide pill in front of his daimyo (liege lord). He took a very long time pretending to die, complete with gestures and moans. The Vajra Regent was required to witness the whole scene sitting on a chair as the daimyo, completely motionless. One night he decided that the Vajra Regent should be in costume. Putting a broomstick across his shoulders and draping a cloth over each side created the look of samurai armor. Then he took an empty wastebasket and put it upside down on the Vajra Regent's head as a crown. The Vidyadhara pressed it down very hard, to the Vajra Regent's obvious discomfort, then harder still. The Vajra Regent had to sit motionless through the Vidyadhara's entire samurai melodrama with his head painfully squeezed. As it ended, the Vidyadhara looked at him and said, "Sometimes it's painful to rule."

One year for his birthday, the Vajra Regent received two presents from the Vidyadhara. One was a pair of sunglasses, the other was a cylindrical cloth bag with a strap, a feedbag

from which horses are fed. With the glasses came a note, "So you can share my vision." On the feedbag was written, "No Feedbacks."

Meditation Instruction

In February 1978, the Vidyadhara wrote a poem on the occasion of the first formal oath given to meditation instructors, called "Vajra Vanguard," in which the Vajra Regent is presented as a model for them:

The Vajra Regent is so lonely without vajra vanguards
Thunder would be dead without black clouds
Tongue would be dead without saliva
In this vajra world we need sanity with vision
Sanity is the tongue
Vision is the saliva
Let us push a genuine cause
Tiger would be dead without claws
Snow lion would be dead without snow
Garuda would be desecrated without immense space to fly
Dragon would be worm without thunder
In this wretched and good world we proclaim our kingdom
Where Vajradhatu sanity can preside
All you teachers should develop good nipples
With an infinite milk supply
All you teachers should learn how to dress in glorious brocade robes
All you teachers should behave like my Regent
Who is good and gentle, bad and powerful.
Welcome to our family.
(February 21, 1978, Boulder, Colorado)

In a talk at an ITS, the Vajra Regent gave a beautiful image of how to hold oneself in meditation:

"Fix your posture, align it with heaven and earth. You are a lightning rod between them. Relax everything. Let your past dissolve into the earth, let your future dissolve into space, let the present dissolve into your breath. And then forget everything you just did. Stare directly into space and relax your mind. Whatever happens, don't be concerned. The absence of deliberate action is the real message. We make too big a deal of our practice.
Relax. If something occurs, fine. If nothing occurs, fine. This moment is empty."

In a talk at Ojai, California, the Vajra Regent said, "Do not be afraid of what arises and do not be particular about what does not arise. Leave yourself open to evaluation, but do not evaluate what you are open to. Make your world a seeming paradise while you feel the pain of habitual patterns. This is a teaching that has no beginning or end. This existence is impermanent, therefore the Buddha taught that all dharmas are without blame."

A student asked for meditation instruction, telling the Vajra Regent that he had a problem with sitting still. The Vajra Regent had him sit down in meditation posture and said, "Let's see you meditate." After a half a minute, he said, "Looks pretty good to me." The student said, "Yes, for a little while. But then I move." The Vajra Regent responded, "Look at the nature of your mind when it's still; look at the nature of your mind when it's moving. If there's no difference, why move?" In four short lines, he had summarized the mahamudra investigations of the ninth Karmapa.

Passing on the Lineage Transmission

When the Vidyadhara empowered the Vajra Regent as his dharma heir, he gave him particular responsibility to pass the transmission on to another individual. The first step in that process occurred in early 1985. The Vajra Regent went to Karmê Chöling to teach an ITS, and met a young man from Chicago named Patrick Sweeney. Patrick was twenty-six years old; he had briefly been a member of the Chicago Dharmadhatu when he was inspired to go and live at Karmê Chöling. The day after they met, the Vajra Regent performed the Refuge Vow ceremony, and gave Patrick the name Immaculate Divine Lord (Tib.: Trime Lhawang). Less than three years later, the Vajra Regent asked Patrick to be his dharma heir and successor, giving him a copy of The Life and Teachings of Naropa, signed with the same inscription as the Vidyadhara had written for the Vajra Regent: "For my son, with love from Kagyü family."

To Nova Scotia

The Vidyadhara requested that the Vajra Regent lead the transition of Vajradhatu International's headquarters to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Therefore, the Vajra Regent and his family immigrated there in August of 1985. His first main teaching in Nova Scotia began in the fall of 1985: fifteen talks on Gampopa's Jewel Ornament of Liberation, given each week through March 1986.

Before moving, the Vajra Regent fundraised to purchase a new Kalapa House for his family and staff. He and his family moved in when the renovations were completed in late spring of 1986. In the summer, the Vidyadhara took everyone by surprise when he abruptly left Vajradhatu Seminary to move to Nova Scotia. As no residence had been prepared for him, he informed the Vajra Regent that he would be taking the Kalapa House as his residence. Finding himself suddenly homeless was somewhat shocking, and the Vajra Regent felt regret that he had not offered the house to the Vidyadhara as soon as his teacher made his plans known.

Re-enacting the Empowerment

A few weeks after arriving in Halifax, the Vidyadhara wanted to see his Vajra Regent. He kept saying, "I want to do it again. I want to do it all over again." He went with his attendant in the car to bring him over to the court. On returning, the Vidyadhara went upstairs to his bedroom, followed by the Vajra Regent. The Vidyadhara got into bed and the Vajra Regent sat in a chair. The Vidyadhara promptly fell asleep. The Vajra Regent waited a few minutes, then quietly got up, left the room and went downstairs. A minute later a loud shout came from the bedroom: "REGENT! REGENT!" He ran back upstairs, into the bedroom and sat down. The Vidyadhara promptly leaned back and fell asleep

again. After waiting for a long time, with the Vidyadhara sleeping soundly, the Vajra Regent again quietly got up, left the room and went downstairs. A minute later an even louder shout came from the bedroom: "REGENT! REGENT!" Again he ran back upstairs, into the bedroom and sat down. The Vidyadhara said, "Why are you always leaving?!" The Vajra Regent apologized. Then the Vidyadhara motioned for him to sit on the edge of the bed. He leaned forward, and said, "Power, authority, lineage. OK?" His eyes opened wide. "OK?" The Vajra Regent said, "OK." The Vidyadhara's eyes got bigger, and he said even louder, "GOT IT?!" The Vajra Regent said: "Yes, I got it." Whereupon the Vidyadhara relaxed, said quietly, "Ok," and leaned back. The Vajra Regent sat there for a long time. Then he asked if the Vidyadhara wanted him to stay or should he go now. The Vidyadhara said, "It's ok. You can go now."

The Vidyadhara's Parinirvana

In late March of 1987, the Vajra Regent was called out of Chakrasamvara retreat in California when it appeared that the Vidyadhara was dying. He said that although he longed to be with his guru, he did not want to be in a plane at the moment of the parinirvana. Instead, he thought it would be good to practice. He called together the Los Angeles sangha and conducted a Vajrayogini Feast with the Dorje Loppon who was teaching in Los Angeles at the time. The Vajra Regent practiced in tears all night. The next day the Vidyadhara's condition stabilized and the Vajra Regent flew to Halifax. The Vidyadhara passed into parinirvana a few days later.

The evening of the Vidyadhara's passing into parinirvana, the Vajra Regent wrote a letter addressed to all sangha members:

“The supreme Vidyadhara, Karma Ngawang Chökyi Gyatso Kunga Sangpo, the Eleventh Trungpa Tulku, passed peacefully into parinirvana at 8:05 p.m. today in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The glorious dharmaraja, sovereign of Vajradhatu, caused light rays of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion to spread throughout the world. Like Lord Padmakara, he planted firmly the victory banner of the incomparable vajrayana in the West.

As the Dorje Dradul, the ultimate warrior, he revealed the splendour of the Great Eastern Sun, the glory of Shambhala. Holding the sceptre of the Rigden kings, he conquered the evils of the setting sun, ripened aspiring warriors, and created enlightened society right here on this earth.

We, his students, are eternally grateful.

The blazing fire of Chandali consumes the kleshas
As the lord of mahasukha reigns primordially in splendour.
The razor knife of Ashe cuts the aorta of setting sun cowards
As the warrior of warriors displays the brilliant dance of sanity.

We prostrate to the only father guru.
Please guide us and protect us.
Throughout all our lives, may we never be separated
from your body, speech, and mind.

We vow to perpetuate your world.

KI KI SO SO ASHE LHA GYEL LO
TAK SENG KHYUNG DRUK DI YAR KYE

In accordance with the Vidyadhara's wishes, upon his passing into parinirvana, his body was bathed in saffron water. The seed syllables of the armor devas were placed on the appropriate parts of his body, and it was clothed in a formal brocade chuba. The body will remain at the Kalapa Court as long as the samadhi lasts, and then it will be taken to Karmê Chöling for cremation.

During the samadhi, the sangha should chant The Guru Yoga for the Four Sessions, and then they should practice either shamatha-vipashyana or mahamudra, depending on the individuals' level of practice. If time permits, the sadhakas should perform the Vajrayogini Sadhana.

Further communications will be issued concerning the details of the cremation ceremony itself.

Although this is a time of great sadness for us, we should remember the Vidyadhara's instructions and keep him constantly in our minds, not wavering in your discipline and devotion. My thoughts are with you."

Yours in the Dharma,

The Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin

The Cremation

The Vidyadhara's cremation was to be held at Karmê Chöling in May of 1987. The Vajra Regent took up residence nearby to oversee preparations. His household during that time was constantly pervaded by an atmosphere of pure and powerful devotion. Just before the cremation, the Vajra Regent wrote a devotional supplication to the Vidyadhara called "Rain Clouds of Wisdom:"

From the ungraspable realm of space, the dharmakaya,
The wondrous appearance of translucent joy emerges as
the splendid sambhogakaya.
With proclamations of victory, the golden rain of compassion,
the nirmanakaya, benefits all beings.
I prostrate to the root of blessings, the king of illusion,
the father guru, Chökyi Gyatso.
May our minds be inseparable like water poured into water.

Pervading all of this visible world,
You turned the desert of samsara into the celestial realm.
Making life enjoyable for all is your great teaching.
Never abandoning the pristine awareness of buddha mind,
You wielded the sword of ultimate ashe.
I prostrate to the nirmanakaya, the warrior of warriors.
May our minds be inseparable like water poured into water.

The treacherous mountain pass is filled with danger.
However, the highest point is the best possible route.
Although for us now it seems monumental and incomprehensible,
Your teaching provides the most accurate description of the way.
I prostrate to the true guide, the kalyanamitra.
May our minds be inseparable like water poured into water.

The tantrikas, those who practice virtue,
Meditators who begin at the beginning, and all the devotees of dharma.
The beings of the six realms high and low,
The supremely intelligent, the mediocre and the stupid,
Those who are fortunate and those who are not,
All of these you have taught without exception.
This is the true vajrayana.
I prostrate to the master of dharma, the king of language.
May our minds be inseparable like water poured into water.

The sun in the morning sky,
The billions of stars that form a canopy at night,
The moon of awareness that reflects the true meaning,
All the elements together with space,
This is your kingdom.
For just a moment we meditate on unobstructed, pure dharmata.
This experience is vividly real but truly nonexistent,
Like waking from a dream.
To the guru of gurus,
Uninterrupted consciousness without a reference point,
I prostrate.
To the mind itself, nothing but your smiling face,
I prostrate again and again.
May our minds be inseparable like water poured into water.

His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche presided over the Vidyadhara's cremation.
Afterward, he gave teachings for a month, beginning in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He met
with the Vajra Regent and told him, "The Vidyadhara's work and mine are inseparable.
Since you are the holder of his teachings, you also have to be a holder of mine." He then
empowered the Vajra Regent with the highest Maha Ati abhisheka and gave him the
name "Lord of Yogins, Co-emergent Accomplishment Vajra" (Tib.: Naljor Wangchuk
Lhenkye Drupe Dorje).

The Vajra Regent asked His Holiness who should now give the Vajrayana abhishekas to
the Vidyadhara's students. He replied, "Although other lamas could give them the
abhisheka, you received the particular lineage mind transmission from him and so you are
the one who can convey that to the students. Therefore, you should give them the
abhishekas."

During the stay in Halifax, a kusung had an interview with His Holiness and asked, "How should I serve the Vajra Regent?" His Holiness replied, "The Vajra Regent was like the Vidyadhara's right arm. Without him, the Vidyadhara would not have been able to accomplish all that he did. So you should serve the Vajra Regent as if you were serving the Vidyadhara."

The Vajra Regent concludes his book Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand with a song and a message to dharma students:

INFANT SONG OF A SON OF THE KAGYÜ GURU

From the all-encompassing vajradhatu, indestructible
nonthought beyond description,
From the vast dharmadhatu, the unceasing play
of energy and light,
The dharmakaya Vajradhara takes form as the incomparable
root guru, Chökyi Gyatso.
The five poisons and the eight worldly dharmas are transformed
into wisdom and skillful means.
Look! The aspirations and desires of sentient beings are fulfilled.

With unceasing devotion I prostrate to the only father guru
I offer all that is worthwhile and pleasing – the wealth of all the universes
I confess to lingering in the grip of samsara
I rejoice in your boundless generosity.

Please continue to turn the wheel of dharma
Remain with us in your undefiled splendor
May all sentient beings attain enlightenment
And may I never rest until samsara is thoroughly emptied.

Dharma brothers and sisters entering the immutable path,
Feeble as we are, we still have eyes and ears
Fickle as we are, we still have an empty heart
Arrogant as we are, we still have intrinsic awareness.

My friends, but for a flash of lightning there could be perpetual darkness
Look at the precious gem, the guru, and see the Buddha himself
In the brilliant mandala of suchness,
Receive his instructions with discipline and delight.

May all beings attain unsurpassable joy
May all beings be prosperous
May the victorious guru ignite the blazing fire of ultimate wisdom.

In order to be a good student, it is necessary to forget about your self-importance.
How to proceed is to consider everything that emanates from the guru as definite

instruction, whether it seems mundane or profound. How to continue is to act on instruction immediately, without self-conscious deliberation or analysis. How to sustain your effort is to have undiminished faith in the power of the lineage as the real expression of truth. This is my advice according to my own experience. I wish you all great success.

Ösel Tendzin

21 March 1980

Presidency of Vajradhatu

As Director of the First Class, when the Vidyadhara passed into Parinirvana the Vajra Regent became the President of Vajradhatu. He traveled from Halifax to visit many Dharmadhatus around the US and Canada, and presided over the 1988 Vajradhatu Seminary.

Shortly after that Seminary, the Vajra Regent became gravely ill with HIV virus and there was dissension in the community regarding his sexual activity, the leadership of the organization and the issue of succession. He entered into retreat in Ojai, California for the remainder of his life. During that retreat, he formally empowered Patrick Sweeney, Trime Lhawang, as his dharma heir and lineage successor, and continued the process of training Patrick as long as he was able, and gave him instruction as to how to proceed after his death, and to continue his practice and study with the group of students who had gathered in Ojai during that time. The Vajra Regent gave his final teaching, a question and answer session with students on the practice of Vajrayogini, in late August 1990. On August 25, 1990, he passed into Parinirvana in a hospital in San Francisco, California.

His body rested in samadhi for three days in the main shrine room of San Francisco Dharmadhatu. During the samadhi, traditional signs of realization appeared, such as the body not decomposing despite summer weather. Warmth at the heart center but not elsewhere in the body was felt by several students. A Tibetan Buddhist teacher from the area felt that the samadhi was so powerful that he brought all his students to practice in the shrine room with the body.

After three days, the Vajra Regent's body was taken to Rocky Mountain Dharma Center (now Shambhala Mountain Center) for a cremation ceremony. At the moment the hearth was lit, a violent thunderstorm broke. As it passed, a dramatic double rainbow spanned the sky.

The Vajra Regent was both the model of a devoted student and an inspiring teacher. His example was powerful as well as provocative. Through his inspiration, joyful energy, and hard work, he was a bridge for many students, enabling them to encounter the teachings of Buddhism and Shambhala Training and embark upon the practice of meditation. He played a vital role in the task of planting these profound spiritual teachings firmly in the Western world.

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