



M I N D R O L L I N G   I N T E R N A T I O N A L



# *Dharma Dhriti*

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LINEAGE & TRANSMISSIONS

His Eminence Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche

## INTRODUCTION

Mindrolling International's Vajra Vidyadhara projects have been very active in the last 5 years. Vajra Vidyadhara sponsored the entire Minling Chökhör (the cycles of teachings of the Mindrolling tradition) bestowed by Kyabje Trulshik Rinpoche in 2007 at the Mindrolling Monastery in India. This was followed by the historic bestowal of the complete Rinchen Terdzö by Kyabje Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche in 2008-09 again at the Mindrolling Monastery. Most recently, Vajra Vidyadhara organized the Dzogchen Künzang Gongpa Zangthal cycle of teachings bestowed by Kyabje Tsetrul Rinpoche at the Lotus Garden Retreat Center in Stanley, Virginia in the United States with Minling Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche not only hosting the entire event but also translating the precious teachings into English as they were being transmitted by Kyabje Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche. The empowerments were attended by hundreds of students of Buddhadharma from all over the world, East and West alike.

Since abhishekas (empowerments) are pivotal and indispensable to Vajrayana practices, Dharma Dhrishti felt it important to help Western students better understand exactly what is an abhisheka, what does one mean by lineage of transmissions and why is it so important not only for the individual on the path but also for the flourishing of Buddhadharma.

Therefore, for our third issue of Dharma Dhrishti – The View of Dharma, we were most graciously honoured once again by His Eminence Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche agreeing to an interview of twenty questions regarding the nature and importance of *wangs* or abhishekas and lineage. It is our hope that this wonderful and deeply thought-provoking precious interview with His Eminence Kongtrul Rinpoche will not only answer some factual questions and give rise to a dialogue of inquiry but will also inspire countless practitioners to take on the path of Vajrayana practices with careful attention to detail.

## BIOGRAPHY



*His Eminence*  
**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche**

H.E. Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche was born in 1964 in Northern India as the son of the 3rd Neten Chokling Rinpoche, recognized as the emanation of Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye, the great master and scholar who was very active in establishing the Rime movement. From early age, Rinpoche studied with his root guru H.H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. Rinpoche was trained in the Longchen Nyingthig lineage as well as in the threefold lineage of Khyen Kong Chok sum (the lineages of Jamgön Kongtrul, Khyentse Wangpo and Chokgyur Lingpa). Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche also studied extensively under Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche and the great scholar Khenpo Rinchen.

In the year 1989, H.E. Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche moved to the United States with his family and in 1990 he began a five-year tenure as a professor of Buddhist philosophy at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. In the United States Rinpoche established the Mangala Shri Bhuti organization dedicated to further the practice of the Longchen Nyingthig and Khyen Kong Chok sum lineages. Rinpoche also established a mountain retreat centre Longchen Jigme Samten Ling in Southern Colorado, where he spends much of his time in retreat. When not in retreat, Rinpoche travels

widely throughout the world teaching and leading retreats.

Rinpoche currently presides and oversees the activities of Mangala Shri Bhuti's three practice and study centres (Phuntsok Choling in Boulder, Colorado, Pema Osel Do Ngak Choling in Vershire, Vermont, and the Guna Institute in Bir, India), and two retreat centres (Longchen Jigme Samten Ling in Creston Colorado and Guna Norling in Salvador da Bahia in Brazil). Rinpoche also spends time leading the newly established Guna translators academy in Bir, India.

H.E. Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche is also an abstract expressionist painter whose paintings bring inspiration and insight throughout the world. Rinpoche studied art and painting from Yahne Le Toumelin, herself a renowned expressionist painter who was introduced by Andre Breton in the 1960's as one of the few women painters to make a mark in her generation.

Dharma Dhrishti is honored and pleased to present to you the teachings of this brilliant teacher whose wisdom and presence inspires countless beings.

## INTERVIEW

# LINEAGE & TRANSMISSIONS

*An interview with His Eminence Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche*

A fundamental view of the Rime movement is that the teachings and practices of all schools of Tibetan Buddhism can lead to the same ultimate realization. Yet Jamgön Kongtrul the Great and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo went to great lengths to find, receive and propagate rare lineages of teachings that were in danger of dying out. What were they looking for in these lineages that wasn't already available in more mainstreamed lineages and why was it so important to them to preserve these lineages?

DKR: It is true that the eight different vajrayana lineages can all lead to the state of enlightenment or the state of vajradharahood. Nonetheless, those eight different lineages that came to Tibet from the noble land of India were brought to Tibet by great masters who had great aspirations to spread those lineages and the

teachings and practices of those lineages to benefit beings. If somehow they are not preserved distinctively, then some of those aspirations of the great masters, and even the aspirations of the Buddha himself, would be limited to one lineage, and to the specific teachings and practices of that one lineage. That would be a limitation.

In addition, beings have probably had various connections to the masters, as well as to the lineage and teachings and practices, according to their own previous karmic connections, and their own dispositions and aspirations. So limiting teachings to one or two lineages that were vibrant and flourishing and excluding the rest that weren't, at that time, means that then we would have forsaken them and those other lineages would be lost.

For that reason, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Jamgön Kongtrul Lodro Thaye made great efforts to search out those eight lineages, to then receive the transmissions and the teachings on the practices, and then to do the practices themselves, preserve them, and then spread them. From that we now have all the eight vibrant lineages. This can be great for one person to practice as a complete path of enlightenment, or for eight different people to practice eight different lineages as a complete path of enlightenment, or for eight different people to practice one lineage as a complete path of enlightenment.

So this gives us a great and important opportunity to preserve and fulfill the aspirations of the great masters of the past from all the different eight lineages, as well as the chance to fulfill the great aspirations of beings from their own side, with their own karmic connections and dispositions. Therefore, I think that the masters of the past have greatly revered the work that these two have done, and I, too, feel it was a great work for the buddhadharma.

*What are the characteristics of an authentic lineage of teachings?*

DKR: Authentic lineage of teachings has to be the authentic lineage of buddhadharma, which has to be based on the principles of three pitakas; vinaya, sutra, and abhidharma. Vinaya teachings emphasize the principle of transforming one's own body, speech and mind from the negative creation of negative karma to the positive creation of positive karma. All the vows and precepts are to really give some wisdom and skillful means for the person to have some transformation of those three doors, not just only in study and knowledge, but in that person's life.

Then the sutra teachings further emphasize the principle of liberation from the suffering of samsara with various types of concentration of

the mind that then leads the person to a greater level of understanding of one's own capacity and what this mind can achieve through meditative practices.

The abhidharma teachings emphasize the true understanding of the nature of the personal self, or the nature of phenomena, and how they are emptiness in the absolute. But in the relative, they are functional due to the interdependent originations.

This then gives a person a complete sense of the outer transformation to the medium level of transformation, then to the deep level of transformation. The outer transformation occurs

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by changing the three doors into positive activities as well as developing more samadhis to support that. Then one grows to understand how the universal truth, or the nature of all things, is from the beginning. As the Buddha has said, whether tathagathas come into this world or not is always nirvana, because it's always dharmata.

So, these three teachings and the principles of these three practices have to be in the sutrayana and in the mantrayana. Some people say the mantrayana has its own three; other people say that mantrayana is a more sophisticated form of abhidharma. However, this is then how the authenticity of the buddhadharma could be asserted.

*In Tibetan Buddhism, true transmission of teachings involves a lung, an empowerment and an explanation of the practice. What is the significance of each of these elements of an authentic transmission of the teachings? When and how did this method of transmission begin, and why should it be maintained and preserved?*

DKR: The empowerment has true symbolic qualities. First of all, the disposition of enlightenment is the being's mind itself possessing the enlightened nature. But because it's obscured, there has to be some process to purify the obscuration. In the vajrayana, this purification can take place very rapidly through the empowerment process.

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That enlightened state of mind that is the nature of beings' minds has many potential qualities of enlightenment that need to be ripened. So, in the beginning of the path of vajrayana practice, the empowerment has the power to ripen rapidly those potentials or seeds after having purified the obscuration.

In the case of a great master and a great disciple, with the qualities of the great masters being truly present, and with the qualities of a great disciple being truly present, a large aspect of the path could be accomplished for the person to attain enlightenment even in the short session of an empowerment. We have many stories like that.

But most of the time it is just an empowerment so that one can later actually engage fully in the practice that one has started with the permission of the guru and the lineage blessings at the time of the empowerment. So the empowerment is most needed. Without this, vajrayana teachings would lack the blessings to practice on your own. This is really the key to it.

Then second transmission or the reading transmission, is when great masters have written sadhanas and commentaries, with each word and each sentence they have energetically put mind of their own realizations, as well as the blessings that those realizations carry, into the writing. So when it's read to you, you have access to those blessings. Therefore, the reading transmissions are very important as a second part.

Then again, you don't become completely knowledgeable right away just with the reading transmissions. Because the practices have a very deep and profound meaning, you also need a commentary and for that you need to be guided step-by-step with precise education on the subject. That's why the tri is very important.

The first is more or less for the ripening of the buddhanature; the second two are more for the liberation of oneself from the state of ignorance and confusion. These three: wang, lung and tri, therefore have been a very important part of the vajrayana path.

***What are the differences between receiving a teaching, a wang, a tri, a lung and a pointing out instruction?***

DKR: During all of this time, what one is actually receiving is precisely the pointing out. But more poignantly, at the end of the abhishekas, at the fourth abhisheka, one receives pointing out to the nature of one's own

true nature of mind; that which is no different than the nature of all the tathagathas because suchness doesn't differentiate. At this time, it is called pointing out instruction.

*Authentic transmission of the teachings seems also to be inextricably linked to one's relationship with an authentic teacher, someone who embodies the qualities of wisdom and compassion and who is willing to work with the student on a personal basis. As many great masters age, transmission of the teachings often occurs in larger and larger settings, perhaps even virtually. What are the implications of large, impersonal transmissions where students might not have a personal relationship with the teacher? What advice would you give students who receive teachings through a public transmission and who wish to put those teachings into practice?*

DKR: There are many questions asked in this one question. I can just simply answer what is in relation to the dharma. Then the rest is personal and for that people have to make personal choices. But in the dharma, in the vajrayana dharma, a person must first of all be really well trained in the bodhichitta practice, and must have real signs of deep, careful liberation of others and benefitting others beyond ordinary care; beyond ordinary self-centeredness and enlisting the service of the teacher to meet one's own needs. That has to be very clear.

Then in addition to that, a person has to undertake the general studies of the dharma, of the sutrayana and the mantrayana. Particularly in the mantrayana, one must also have the empowerment, the transmission and the explanation. Not only that, one must have worked on the particular cycle of the practice personally with the guru and the pith instructions of the guru, and there has to be some real self-confidence. Not only self-confidence, but there must be some real blessing line that one feels

one can transmit to others and to cause others to have some significant transformation.

So, these are the qualities of the master. In general terms, in the tantra, they are mentioned as ten qualities. I think it could be included in this.

*It is said that Buddhism has adapted its expression to meet the needs of people in each new land in which it has taken root. Is it possible for the essence of the teachings of the Buddha to be lost in this adaptation process, and if so, what might that look like?*

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DKR: I can say yes, Buddhism has to adapt to some extent to the culture as well as to the preference of the people for it to be more accessible, as well as to be poignant to receive the benefits. But human beings' states of mind and sentient beings' overall states of mind primarily have not changed. The ignorance has not been different in different times or cultures.

*What are the core qualities of Buddhism that surpass local adaptation?*

DKR: The confusion of clinging to the self has not changed over time or in different cultures. Just as the tendency to cherish the self and to protect the self, and for activities of that cherishing to become the five negative poisons, and how the five negative poisons generate demeritorious work, and how that de-meritorious energy influences one's mind to wander off in samsara with the delusions - that has not changed.

So, Buddhism as a medicine or antidote for that - how much could it be adapted and changed? It has to remain true to the original authentication and authenticity to really be able to cause some poignant means of transformation of wisdom and skillful means in the teachings and the practice. If it were adapted too much for the preference of the people, it would most probably be adapted to the attachments of the people, rather than transforming the mind of the attachment itself.

If it's adapted with too much of a bias to particular teachings and rejecting other very important aspects of the teachings and practices that have great value for the transformation of mind, then that would be adaptation to aggression. The resulting confusion would be stupidity, so I don't think it will work.

My point is that it is not about adaptation or non-adaptation, but how Buddhism as a medicine works for the illness that needs to be cured, and can illness be cured if the medicine doesn't have the potency, or the wisdom or skillful means? I don't think so. I don't think it would, however incredibly popular it is.

*What do you feel are the different factors that must be present for a new lineage to be considered authentic?*

DKR: New lineage? I don't know what that would mean.

*How do we avoid being trapped in a fake transmission lineage? In other words, how do we distinguish authentic lineage and termas from fake termas that might exist simply to validate or promote one's own ego?*

DKR: Well, generally speaking, the terma lineage is mainly the lineage of the Nyingma tradition, though it's not strictly the Nyingma tradition. How it is authenticated is that usually the terton, when he discovers a terma, whether it's an earth terma or mind terma, almost always has an authentic lineage that is well known in the area or in the general world of the Buddhadharma. He then consults with his teacher, "I have this kind of premonition and I have this kind of discovery of ter - what do you think? Would it be a beneficial or helpful thing if it were made public and available?"

Then the teacher examines the situation with every personal means that he has. If there are really great and auspicious signs, the teacher gives the terton the "go-ahead." Then the terton practices it, and has to have the real blessing of Guru Padmasambhava or Yeshe Tsogyal who have supposedly concealed this previously for future generations.

After all of these steps and when it's made available, there has to again be a kind of authentication and approval by a great master who is quite well known in the area or the country, who knows this kind of terma cycle of practice. This master must say this is authentic terma. Only at this point, can flocks of students gather and receive that transmission. This has been the history with Chogyur Lingpa, or Dudjom Lingpa or any of them and this is how a perhaps unknown terton becomes a well-known terton.

When fake termas are discovered and when fake tertons come, there is none of this. When none of this process is taking place, people automatically kind of assume it to be a fake. Also, the kind intention or the bodhichitta of

Guru Rinpoche as well as Yeshe Tsogyal, and also the terton, are all really very much present in the blessings and in the signs of the blessings. With fake tertons, there are not many signs of those.

***What must be present in the lineage, the master, the teachings and the student for authentic transmission to occur?***

DKR: There must be a deep intention for liberation and trust in the process of how dharma or the practice of dharma can make that happen.

***What must occur for a lineage to be held in a land where such teachings are completely new and unknown?***

DKR: Buddhadharma was new and unknown when it first came to India and also to Tibet; it wouldn't be any different in America. The study, the practice and also the realization have to be there in order for the blessings to really continue.



***When a student receives many transmissions, how do they know which practices they are samaya-bound to complete either through length of time they practice, number of mantras to accumulate or showing signs of realization?***

DKR: I think more or less one has to consult with one's own root guru. But if you are dedicated in one particular practice of liberation from suffering of samsara to a state of enlightenment, and if there is the element of purifying one's own deluded state of mind to actualizing one's own true nature and the qualities of the enlightened nature, generally

speaking, all samayas could be included in that one wisdom tradition.

But some teachers very strictly emphasize that even if you are doing that, you must keep connection with the different forms of practice and different empowerments you have received with certain commitments. You have to consult with your own various different teachers to know what the commitment would be.

***What are the karmic consequences for the teacher, student and lineage when we fail to maintain pure samaya?***

DKR: The consequence is that we are already in samsara and we will remain in samsara continuously. By starting something significant like this and not being able to see it through; I think that would be a big loss.

***Who determines when a new lineage is not authentic and how is this worked with?***

DKR: Well, there's no specific person who actually determines that. The general consensus of what the Buddhadharma represents in the world, and all who know the meaning of the Buddhadharma, is that it has to be anti-ego versus pro-ego; anti-obscuration versus pro-obscuration. It has to be pro-bodhichitta versus anti-bodhichitta. It has to be a pro-emptiness view versus a view of dualism. In the vajrayana, it has to be a view more of pure perception versus impure perception.

***If wisdom is by nature inherent in all of us, what makes the wisdom taught from an***

**"authentic lineage" teacher more valuable than that of a western "inauthentic" teacher?**

DKR: Wisdom is in all beings. But whether somebody has actualized it or not, and has the blessing to transmit it or not, is the question here. It's not a question of race or gender at all.

**If Pema Chödron and Jack Kornfield are so accessible and easy to read, why should I struggle to read "Gems of Dharma" or "Words of My Perfect Teacher"?**

DKR: If your intention is just to read something accessible and just suit your mind, there's no reason to read anything other than what they offer. But if your intention is to follow a lineage and to study a tantra, and if your intention is to get on a path that is a path of vajrayana, mahayana and hinayana beyond what these two western, very influential, wonderful teachers offer, you need to be involved in studies of the dharma beyond that, and I'm sure they would tell you that as well.

**Where does the authorization of authenticity come from to establish authentic lineage?**

DKR: I think authenticity is established by where the source comes from. It cannot be authenticated by oneself; it has to be authenticated by the source as well as the nature of what you are trying to authenticate, whether it is, for example, lineage or dharma. To authenticate lineage, it does not start from you, it comes from beyond you, with your masters and their masters, so they have to authenticate this. They have to say, "Okay, this person holds my transmissions, and therefore this person is an authentic teacher of my lineage, and I want this person to be respected in that way."

If it has to do with dharma, again it has to have all that we were discussing earlier; the element of the dharma that can really transform the mind, the aspects of the medicine that can really

transform and cure the illness or the ignorance and the confusions of mind. Otherwise, even the basis for lineage masters to authenticate anyone would not be present.

**How is that authenticity more valid than that of a teacher who has gained their status by general or popular acclaim?**

DKR: Popular or general acclaim comes with the teacher's magnetism and the teacher's sort of, more or less, creative writing. Actually being able to inspire people is a great skill, but someone who has that kind of skill might still not have the full education of the dharma as well as the transmission and the practice experience, and might not have the kind of bodhichitta as well.

We have many, many great writers, like the one who wrote Harry Potter; a great author. So just being able to inspire people and make people interested in what you are writing doesn't necessarily mean that it has all the elements of the dharma that it should have; that it has to have.

**Does one need to understand all the symbolism in the transmissions to gain benefit of receiving the transmissions?**

DKR: If you could, that would be the best. It would be wonderful to understand all of that, so that the imprint on the mind is strengthened by the awareness that it creates. But if not, where devotion and some kind of pure perception are maintained, knowing that there is some kind of great significance could also supplement that.

**How can we teach appreciation for our own lineage without any hint of sectarianism creeping in? How do we avoid the tendency to compare other lineages less favorably with our own? How do we avoid the tendency to regard our own lineage as the "highest"?**

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***Sectarianism starts from one's own ego and ego-attachment. When it's in relation to the dharma and in relation to the lineage appreciation comes from one's own understanding of what it does to you in deep and significant ways to transform one's mind.***

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DKR: Sectarianism starts from one's own ego and ego-attachment. When it's in relation to the dharma and in relation to the lineage appreciation comes from one's own understanding of what it does to you in deep and significant ways to transform one's mind. Therefore, although one can have deep appreciation, if it is in relation to the dharma and in relation to the lineage, it cannot be sectarianism.

Because sectarianism starts from ego, even if it is in relation to your own lineage, and teachings or practice are held in high esteem with much appreciation, it lacks the depth of what it is supposed to be, or represent, the way it is supposed to work - as a medicine for the cure of ego.

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# Dharma Dhrishti Journal

The *Dharma Dhrishti Journal - View of Dharma*, has been conceived with the aspiration to convey introspective viewpoints and information on various relevant and important topics on the Buddhadharma and its practices from some of the great contemporary Tibetan Buddhist teachers. Our team of translators has also provided translations in nine major languages.

The inaugural issue of the *Dharma Dhrishti Journal* was launched in June 2009 with the second issue following in November. We invite you to read our first two issues:

*Dharma Dhrishti - Issue 1*

*Dharma Dhrishti - Issue 2*

#### WE ASPIRE TO BRING CLARIFICATION & ANSWERS

*Dharma Dhrishti* aspires to bring answers to some of the frequently asked and debated questions relating to various aspects of Tibetan Buddhism as well as to assist students of Buddhism in gaining insight into the wisdom of the timeless teachings of the Buddha. We also hope that some of the issues arising from misconceptions and incorrect information regarding the Dharma, may be clarified and or refuted by the learned masters of our day.

#### OUR PANEL OF EMINENT TEACHERS

We are deeply grateful for the kindness and generosity of many teachers who have graciously agreed to be on the panel of teachers for *Dharma Dhrishti*. Our sincere gratitude and devotion to the following -

*His Holiness Sakya Trizin*

*H.E. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche*

*His Holiness the Gyalwang Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje*

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