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### The Thuksey Rinpoche I will always remember



**Thuksey Rinpoche with his mother who is still living**

**22 April, 2010** - The day before Thuksey Rinpoche came to Thimphu to amputate his legs earlier this month, we had the good fortune to spend some precious time with him. He was critically ill and in great pain, but he received us with his characteristic grace and humility. The only difference this time was that, because he was too ill, he could not get out of bed and physically prevent us from prostrating to him. He was always uncomfortable when people prostrated to him.

Even in his brutally weakened physical state, Thuksey Rinpoche's face lit up with that familiar shy, all-embracing smile that seemed to come from deep within him. For the next hour we were immersed in the tranquility of his calming presence and blessed by the sanctity of centuries of

cumulative compassion of this spiritual son of Pema Lingpa.

I first met Thuksey Rinpoche in 1960, when he escaped from Tibet as a nine year-old and stayed with my family for awhile in Bumthang. Thuksey Rinpoche is a few years older than I am. At that time, even in the eyes of children his own age, he appeared shy, quiet and dignified. His monk-attendants kept him away from other children, so we watched him from a distance, with respect and guarded curiosity. Moreover, our curiosity and respect for this reincarnate child grew as we heard and repeated anecdotes about him. One story that made a lasting impression was about his miraculous footprint on a rock in Tibet. According to this story, some children in his village were playing a game of making footprints on a dry rock surface. They would dip their feet in water and make wet impressions on the rock. Little Thuksey Rinpoche joined the game - and without first dipping his foot in water, he made a clear, dented foot impression in the hard surface. For days after hearing this story, we all tried our own game of making foot impressions on rocks, but none of us had any miraculous power!

Thuksey Rinpoche was not recognized by coincidence; he had to prove himself. Several other claimants said they were the reincarnation of the 9th Thuksey Rinpoche, who had been a Bhutanese. As a first test, all the claimants - all about 5 or 6 years old - were brought to the Lhalung monastery and let loose in the monastery's compound. While the other children wandered off in different directions, Thuksey Rinpoche is said to have gone straight to the throne of the previous Rinpoche and sat on it. Many other signs favored recognizing him as well.

Over the years, we would often play outside the house where he was staying when he visited us, hoping for a glimpse and an idea of how a small reincarnate lama would spend his days. But the house was always quiet, and the only evidence of his presence were some remarkable drawings he made that our parents sometimes showed us. As time passed, while we continued to enjoy play and fun -- our entitlements as children -- Thuksey Rinpoche was already taking on the responsibility of the reincarnate lama; giving empowerments and blessings, performing rituals and traveling all over Bumthang, Zhemgang, Trongsa and Lhuentse at the behest of his ever-increasing numbers of devotees.

I can still picture the gentle Rinpoche during his travels: He carried a shoulder bag, his robes would be hitched up to mid-calf, and his feet would be muddied as he walked beside his handsomely caparisoned riding horse. Although riding horses were always provided to him, he always walked, reasoning that the poor animal should not have to suffer for his sake. Sometimes he simply said, "The horse can carry me now, but I will not be able to carry the horse." As an adult Rinpoche chose not have any permanent attendants who accompanied him or effectively alienated him from his devotees. "Whoever comes and is willing to be with me, it is all right with me," he would say.

In fact, Thuksey Rinpoche's basic philosophy of life seemed to be guided by the phrase, "It is all right." Rinpoche accepted every kind of situation and ate everything offered to him. He made no demands on anybody. The only critique people had for Rinpoche was that he was too unassuming and too humble. But Thuksey Rinpoche was the epitome of compassionate humility.

Later, as horse travel gave way to travel by vehicles, Thuksey Rinpoche could often be seen sitting sedately on the back of a power tiller, smiling to people on the roadside and passengers in cars that sped past his ride. It was "all right" with him to use any mode of travel to be with his devotees. Indeed, while his followers eventually included members of the Royal Family, and the powerful and the rich, many of his earliest and most loyal devotees were the humblest members of society. Thuksey Rinpoche was always accessible and available to all, treating everyone the same. In fact, he was actually a little constrained and often uncomfortable with "big" people, but always at ease with the common people. Once a powerful family in Thimphu needed his presence at a death ceremony, but Thuksey Rinpoche could not be contacted. After inquiries, they traced him to a village in Zhemgang. The search team found him sitting in a humble hut, performing prayers for a family there. He declined to come immediately to Thimphu because he had already committed his time to the family in the village.

Thuksey Rinpoche's followers grew steadily over the years, not because he changed to keep abreast with the changing times, but because he remained steadfast and faithful to all. In the last few days of his life, even as he lay physically helpless, he was deeply concerned that he could not meet with his devotees. His family and well-wishers restricted visitors because they were concerned that visitors were stressful to Rinpoche. However, his concern was, "They will be disappointed, and think that I am arrogant." During one of this last dialysis sessions in the hospital in Bumthang, although Thuksey Rinpoche was barely able to sit up in bed, he joyfully blessed all who came to him.

As diabetes, the disease that gradually but mercilessly ravaged his body, became more advanced, he often said, "I have this chi ni nad" ("sugar disease") and that he was dealing with his karma. Why does Thuksey Rinpoche have to suffer such pain? I wondered out loud during our last meeting. Immediately, he answered, "It is his karma," without a trace of regret or self-pity and with a teasing, playful look on his face.

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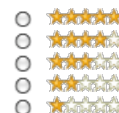
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At the same time, it was comforting to hear him say, "I need to change this body" – a prophetic statement of a true Bodhisattva, but with the ubiquitous humility of Thuksey Thegchog Tenpay Gyaltshen. As his followers know well, Thuksey Rinpoche would never articulate that he would be reincarnated. But from his simple statement about changing his body, he leaves us with the hope that his reincarnation will come soon.

**Contributed by Kunzang Choden, Tang, Bumthang**

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