

GUIDE TO CHANG GANGKHA MONASTERY

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Obeisance to Drukgom Zhigpo, Forerunner of the Glorious Palden Drukpa tradition, manifestation of Avalokitesvara, and essence of compassion of all the Buddhas, who appeared in person in the land of the Glorious Drukpa to benefit sentient beings.

Obeisance to the Zhigpo, manifestation of Buddha Samantabhadra or Kuntu Zangmo's embodiment Macik Lapdroen, who appeared in this land of Ten Accomplished Virtues and left this earthly existence for her heavenly abode without losing her human form.

Obeisance to Nyima (Surya) who excelled in both means and wisdom and continued both the religious and family lineages.

Having paid my deep respects to the Father, Mother and the sons who introduced the spiritual and temporal traditions of the peerless Palden Drukpa, I shall now write down a brief history of the Chang Gangkha monastery in Thimphu Valley.

Before writing about the monastery, we have to trace back its history to the father of its founder.

Father of the Founder

Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo, who was the incarnation of Avalokitesvara, was born in Tashigang Dokham (Eastern Tibet). After having taught him all the teachings of the Glorious Drukpa, Oenrey Dharma Sengye spoke to him thus: "Before passing away, my teacher Tsangpa Gyarey gave me

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the following instruction: "After my death a boy from Kham will come to meet me. Since I cannot meet him, send him to the Southern Valley blessed by Padmasambhava. He will benefit the Doctrine of the Buddha. However, I did not tell you about this until now, as I was afraid that it might make you arrogant".

Oenrey Dharma Sengye then took a portion of the skull of a hero who had practised religion extensively. He filled it with nectar, dropped into it a hundred and eight nectar pills, and handed it over to Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo. He also gave him books like mani Kabum, Ronyom Kordrung and the rosary of Boddhichitta. Finally, he said, "These are my gifts on the auspicious occasion of your departure. The last teaching I gave you as a present is: recognize your mind as Dharmakaya (Chos-sku)".

He continued, "Go to the valley called Thimphu. At the confluence of three rivers, construct a hut for meditation on the throne of the immutable Vajrasana, and raise the victory banner of realization. In future, the tutelary deity will appear to you in person. Act according to his instruction. That is all I, Oenrey, have to say."

Having finished speaking, he blessed Drukgom Zhigpo with his feet. While wishing him farewell, he remarked, "Any act which benefits sentient beings should be done even if it looks like a sin. Any act, which harms sentient beings, should not be committed even if it appears to be a virtuous deed on the face of it." Drukgom Zhigpo thus arrived in Bhutan in 1219 A.D.

Mother of the Founder

It is said in the book of Soedep: "Listen to the story of my successive lives. I, Macik, am called Sangwai Yeshey (Gyhya-Jnana = divine wisdom of the mystics) in the realm of Dharma; Yigye Drukma (the six-syllable prayer = OM-MA-NI-PAD-ME-HUM) in the sphere of compassion; Sukhasiddhi in

India; Bhero Zangmo in Nepal; Macik Labdroen in Tibet; and Khandro Zhigmo in Bhutan. Thus I am the incarnate illusory dancer of both in appearance and in emptiness." Sonam Paldon, incarnation of Macid Labdroen, was born around 1199 A.D. at Wang-Sinmo in Thimphu district.

Founder of the Monastery

Drukgom Zhigpo begot seven children through Sonam Paldon. He placed them all on a slab of wood, and upturned them into the rushing river. While three of them were carried away by the river, the remaining four sons were miraculously saved. Among them was one who was found sitting in the serene posture of meditation on a hill, with the sun as his mat; and from the sky, a voice spoke thus:

"The Protector of sentient beings, Essence of Compassion, is in the state of tranquility. The sun shines for the glory of all sentient beings. Nyima, the Incarnate One, is here."

The place where he was found was previously known as Gangri, but after his appearance there, the name was changed to Boelgang (Hill of Tranquility).

This was the son Nyima, where supernatural powers prevented him from drowning.

When Drukgom Zhigpo was 65 to 66 years old, he appointed his sons as lamas and chieftains in different areas. Nyima was given to rule the two districts of Gung and Chang in addition to the border areas.

Gyenyen Domtshangpa who, having been subjugated by Padmasambhava, took an oath of becoming the protector of the religion guards Chang Gangkha. It is the place where Drukgom Zhigpo and members of his family were protected.

In the book of Karchag it is said: "Thed (Punakha) and Thimphu are extraordinary places. The auspicious wealthy village (of Chang Gangkha) is like a statue. If we look up at it from below, it is like a country of gods that has descended to the earth. If we look down at it from above, it is like a country that has sprung up from the Naga's world, where horses and cattle abound. If we view it from the side, it looks like a smooth plain where peace and happiness are assembled. At its middle, it is like a king's palace where boys and girls romp around and play. In the forest of fruit trees in the upper valley, live animals like the tiger, leopard, and the monkey. In the lower valley, the water is possessed of eight attributes, and water-birds and fishes abound. In the middle valley, the land is extensively cultivated, and harvests of rice are good and plentiful. Oh, what a wonderful place it is."

Because of Nyima's miraculous escape from death when he was thrown into the river, he first constructed his temple in the valley where this experience took place.

When his father (Drukgom Zhigpo) was about to pass away, he sang a song to his sons to this effect:

"Excellent sons, you incarnate ones who appeared in this world to benefit sentient beings, you are all practicing the Buddha's teaching with perfects understanding. You four, who are like lions and wish-fulfilling gems, listen to me. Thanks to the good karma of the past, I, Drukgom Zhigpo of Kham, entered into religious life and practised the essence of Great Perfection. Thanks to the power of prayer, I came to the central valley and met the master Oenrey Dharma Sengye. Under him, I practised the real essence of Sutras, Tantras, and Mahamudra. Dharma Sengye told me, "Manifestation of Avalokitesvara, Protector of sentient beings, do not stay here. Go to the south. Go to the country situated between India and Tibet and rich in incense and medicinal plants. Go to the upper valley of Thimphu, to the throne of the immutable Vajrasana where dakinis and dharmapalas gather like a cloud, and the wrathful tutelary deities reside in person.

Meditate there, and guide the sentient beings to the path of bliss. You, the lamp of religion, follow in the footsteps of other Bodhisattvas. Work diligently like a hero, and extend your activities everywhere. You, incarnate of the sons of the Buddhas, continue the work of your father."

At dawn on the 5th day of the 1st month when Drukgom Zhigpo was 68 years old, four groups of dakinis appeared in the sky with white rainbows to receive Sonam Paldon, who ascended to heaven in her physical body.

On the 15th day of the 8th month of the same year, Drukgom Zhigpo also passed away. To commemorate the death of his parents, Nyima undertook the task of enlarging the temple. Inside, he constructed a sitting statue of 11-faced Avalokitesvara. This life-size cast statue, made of either dzikshim or bronze, is quite unusual in so far as Drukgom Zhigpo had once manifested himself in this very sitting form, and the sculpture is said to be a faithful representation of this supernatural revelation.

Nyima also made a statue of Hayafriva, which is the wrathful form of Avalokitesvara, tutelary deity of Drukgom Zhigpo. The Compassionate One manifests Himself in this form in order to subjugate the sentient beings whom it is difficult to convert by peaceful means. The statue is generally believed to be made of chuzang (copper), but the biography of Ngawang Pekar has it that the statue is made of dzikshim. The statue of Sonam Paldon was also made of the same material.

He also made a slightly larger-than-life-size bronze statue of the Buddha, a life-size bronze statue of Manjusri, a gilded copper statue of Avalokitesvara in Nepalese style, a life-size clay statue of Vajrapani, clay statues of Avalokitesvara and Guru Rinpoche, and a life-size clay statue of Drukgom Zhigpo.

The holy scriptures of the monastery like the Boom Gye-Dring-Due-Sum the three i.e the detailed, the middling and the abridged compilations of both Satasahasrika and Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutras (comprising 16 volumes of Satasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra: Nyingthri - 20,000 slokas in four volumes and 8,000 slokas in one volume respectively), and the Sangye Tshenbum (1,00,000 names of the Buddha) preserve the characteristics of the old Tibetan manuscripts, and are the original manuscripts of the 13th century A.D. In addition to these scriptures, the temple possesses a set of Narthang Kanjur in 100 volumes.

The Temple was looked after by Successive Descendants of Nyima

During the arrival of Jamyang Kunga Sengye in the 14th century A.D., he stayed at Chang Gangkha at the invitation of Lama Sonam Gyaltsen and gave religious teachings.

In the 15th century, Ngawang Chogyal performed the consecration ceremony for the renovation work in the monastery. Also in the same century, Drukpa Kuenley came to Bhutan. He was invited to Chang Gangkha by Lama Penjor, who received from him many religious teachings.

On the arrival of Ngagi Wangpo, elder son of Ngawang Chogyal, Kunga Zangpo, the Lama of Chang Gangkha offered religious services to him.

Likewise, descendent upon descendent of Nyima took devoted care of the Monastery.

In the 17th century, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal arrived in Bhutan and took as his spouse the young Damchoe Tenzin, sister of Choeje Kunga Pekar of Chang Gangkha. A daughter is said to have been born to them. Later, Damchoe Tenzin was married to Tshewang Tenzin. To them was born Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye, incarnation of Gyalpo Trisong Drutsan. Around this time, Druk Tshering was the Choeje of Chang

Gangkha. His son Ngawang Pekar entered the Monk Body, received the novitiate's vow (getshuel) from the 3rd rJe Khenpo Pekar Lhundup, and the full ordination (nyendzog = upasampada) from the 4th rJe Khenpo Damchoe Pekar. Having received from them numerous initiations, injunctions, etc. he subsequently became the tutor of Zhabdrung Choglay Namgyal and Choglay Sakya Tenzin.

In the 18th century, during the reign of Gongsa Jigme Sangye and Lama Sherab Lhundrup, Choeje of Chang Gangkha at the time renovated the temple and made medicinal-clay statues of Amitayus, Drubchen Thangtong Gyalpo, and the incarnate son Nyima.

This is the very same temple that survives today in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, where it remains one of the main centres for people's worship.

I, Pema Tshewang, have collected the material for this account in consultation with various namthars and on the basis of interviews with sources knowledgeable on the matter. This history has been written under the command of Her Majesty The Queen Mother, Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck.