

Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche (1924-2011)



The Precious Destroyer of Delusion

Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche was one of the most highly revered figures of Tibetan Buddhism in recent times. An exemplary holder of the Vinaya tradition, he was cherished as a heart-son by both Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche and Kyabjé Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and became a beloved teacher of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many others, including Sogyal Rinpoche. As Adam Pearcey explains, Trulshik Rinpoche was a precious guide and source of refuge for the Rigpa sangha, who connected us with the great masters of the past by granting the most important empowerments and transmissions.

Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche, Ngawang Chökyi Lodrö, was born in Nakartsé near Yardrok Taklung in Central Tibet on the tenth day of the ninth month of the Wood Rat year (6 November 1924). Based on a number of remarkable signs and indications, such as recounting episodes from his previous life, he was recognized in early childhood as the reincarnation of Tertön Dongak Lingpa Kunzang Tongdrol Dorje, the discoverer of the renowned *Yangti Nakpo* collection of Dzogchen teachings, who had passed away in 1922.

Dongak Lingpa was, in fact, the latest in a long line of illustrious masters, thirty in total, counted among Trulshik Rinpoche's previous incarnations. These include the Buddha's cousin and close disciple, Ananda; the learned Madhyamika scholar, Aryadeva; Thönmi Sambhota, inventor of the Tibetan script; the great abbot-scholar Shantarakshita; the peerless translator Vairotsana; and Milarepa's renowned student, Rechung Dorje Drak.

Rinpoche's early education was supervised by his predecessor's foremost disciple, Ngawang Tenzin Norbu, a charismatic teacher who lived in a tiny secluded monastery at Dza Rongpu, high up on the northern slopes of Mount Everest, and taught throughout the region, especially

on the practice of *lojong*. Ngawang Tenzin Norbu's influence among the people there, and in the Sherpa communities of nearby Nepal, was so profound that they knew him simply as 'the Buddha of Dza Rongpu'.

After Ngawang Tenzin Norbu passed away in 1942, Trulshik Rinpoche, aged just nineteen, took charge of the monastic community as its *khenpo*, while continuing his own studies. Later, following the tragic events of 1959, he escaped, together with many of his followers, to safe haven in the valleys to the south of the Everest region, taking the precious body of his teacher with him. He first stayed in the monasteries of Tangmé and Chiwong in north-eastern Nepal and taught extensively, before moving to the hillside in Shorong, or Solu Khumbu, where he established his own community of practitioners. In 1968, he founded the monastery of Thubten Do Ngak Chöling, the 'Dharma Sanctuary for the Sutra and Mantra Teachings of the Buddha'. This eventually grew to become one of the most important centres of the monastic tradition within the Nyingma school, and home to more than nine hundred monks and nuns.

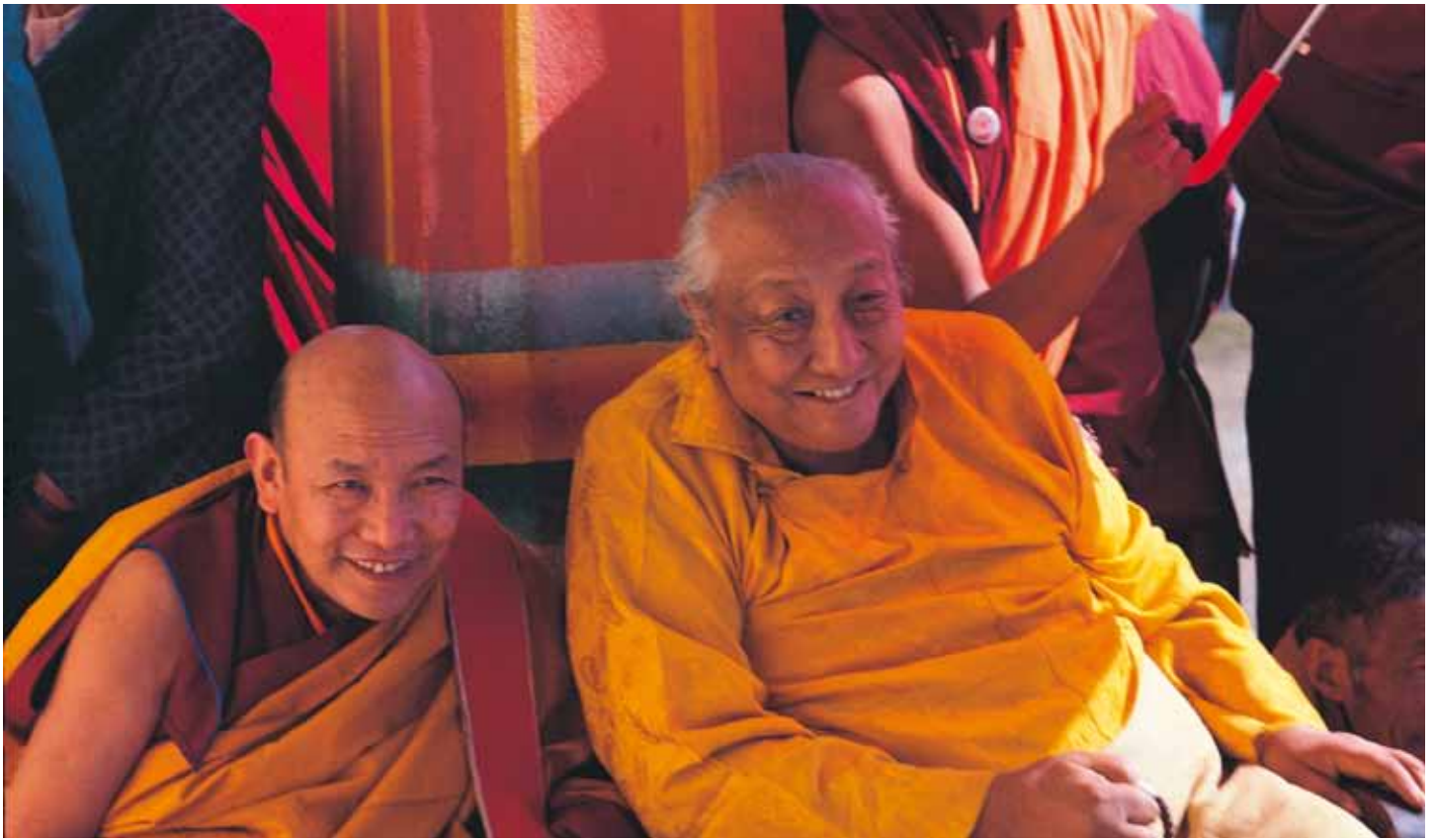
Besides his first root teacher, Trulshik Rinpoche studied with some fifty masters representing all the major lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. These included Minling Chung Rinpoche and Dordzin Rinpoche,



Opposite page: Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche, photographed by Ven. Matthieu Ricard.

Above: Thubten Do Ngak Chöling, founded by Trulshik Rinpoche in 1968 at Solu Khumbu in north-eastern Nepal, and reconstructed between 2001 and 2006.

Photograph courtesy of Michael Schmitz and Helen Cawley



Above: Trulshik Rinpoche with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and (below) in Nepal in 1983.

Photographs courtesy of Ven. Matthieu Ricard.

Opposite page: (Top) Trulshik Rinpoche and His Holiness the Dalai Lama during the teachings at Lerab Gar in 2000; (centre) offering an empowerment to the Dalai Lama; and (below) with, from left to right, Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, Sogyal Rinpoche and Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche at the sacred Maratika Cave in Nepal. Trulshik Rinpoche would regularly do retreats at the Maratika Cave dedicated to the long life of the great masters, such as HH the Dalai Lama.

Centre photograph courtesy of Ven. Matthieu Ricard.



from whom he received the vows of full ordination at the great Nyingma monastery of Mindrolling. Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö was also his teacher. At their first meeting, Jamyang Khyentse remarked on the auspicious coincidence of their sharing the name Chökyi Lodrö, meaning 'Intelligent Understanding of the Dharma'. Another of his teachers was the great female master Shuksep Jetsünma Lochen Chönyi Zangmo, from whom he received Dzogchen teachings and transmissions, including the *Nyingtik Yabshyi*, and rare instructions from the lineage of the great yogi Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol. Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen gave him a number of teachings on mind training and other topics, and instructed him to transmit the mantra and practice of Buddha Shakyamuni whenever he taught a large assembly.

In exile, Trulshik Rinpoche became very close to both Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche and Kyabjé Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. From Dudjom Rinpoche he received several major transmissions, such as the *Nyingma Kama* and *Rinchen Terdzö*, as well as Dudjom Rinpoche's own *termas* (spiritual treasures). Sogyal Rinpoche and other lamas later observed that Trulshik Rinpoche came increasingly to resemble Dudjom Rinpoche, especially in his voice and mannerisms.

Trulshik Rinpoche also received a number of major transmissions, such as the *Treasury of*

Spiritual Instructions (Damngak Dzö) from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, when Khyentse Rinpoche stayed at Thubten Chöling for several months in 1977. In time, Trulshik Rinpoche became the principal lineage holder of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's teachings and terma revelations. Although Khyentse Rinpoche would sometimes tease Rinpoche affectionately, he would always emphasize to his students just how great a master Trulshik Rinpoche was, and encourage them to visit him and receive teachings whenever possible. Sogyal Rinpoche often recalls one such occasion in America: "One day when I was visiting Khyentse Rinpoche at the Vajradhatu centre in Boulder in 1987, I was sitting alone with him in his room. As Trulshik Rinpoche walked past, Khyentse Rinpoche gestured towards him and said, 'Now he really is what I call an authentic spiritual teacher'. I will never forget the way he said it, because there was so much respect and tenderness—devotion, you could say—in his voice."

After Khyentse Rinpoche passed away in 1991, Trulshik Rinpoche, his Dharma heir and successor, was the natural choice to continue offering Nyingma and Dzogchen teachings to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. These transmissions took place mainly in India, but would continue whenever there was an opportunity, as happened in 2000 at Lerab Ling in France. His Holiness's momentous teachings at nearby Lerab Gar that year were

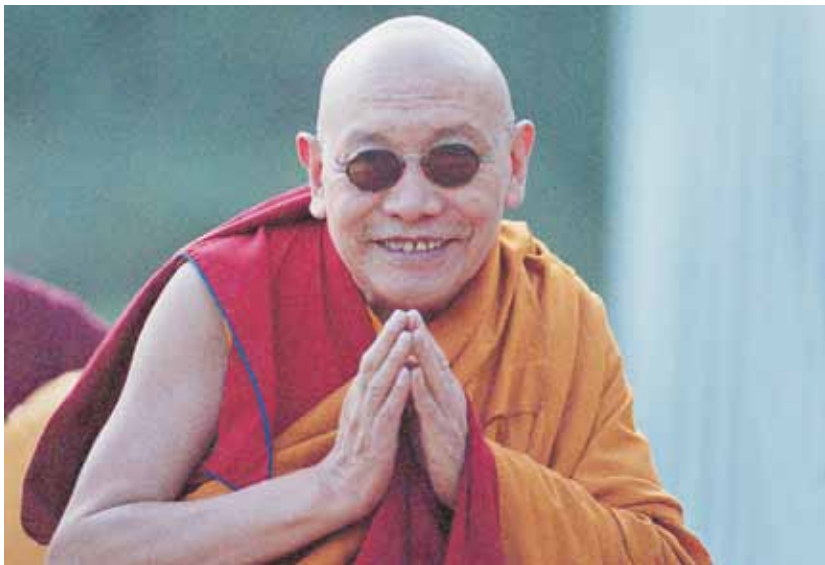
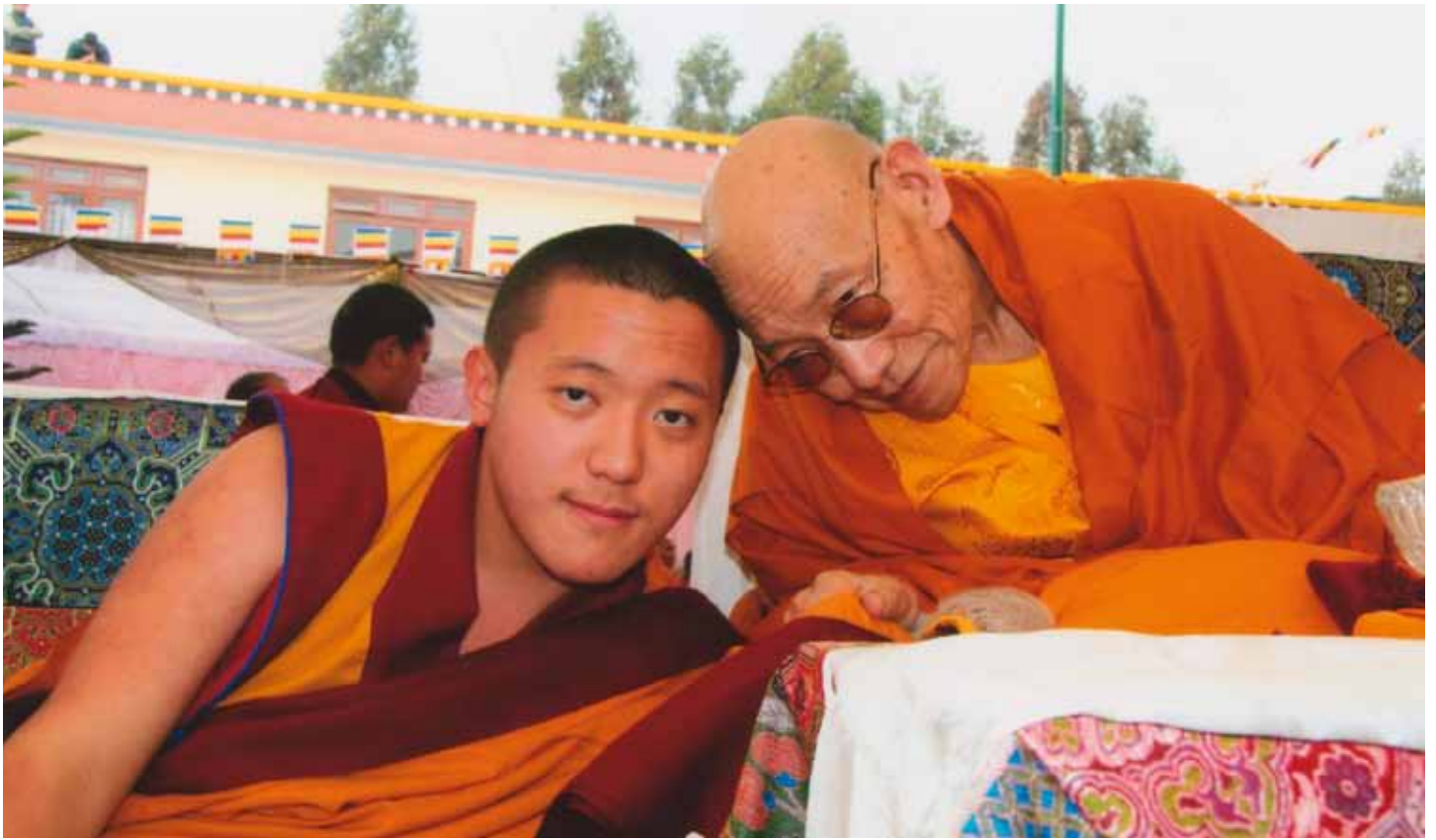


in fact based on the very instructions he was receiving from Trulshik Rinpoche at the time. His Holiness regarded Rinpoche with a special fondness and respect; and Rinpoche, in turn, counted His Holiness among his main teachers, and regularly undertook retreats directed towards his long life and the flourishing of his enlightened activity.

Every year, Rinpoche would preside over a series of major practices in Nepal, including the famous *Mani Rimdu*—a *drupchen* (intensive group practice) of Avalokiteshvara *Deshek Kundü*, during which sacred pills (*rimdu*) are produced and offered to the local population—at Chiwong Monastery. The *Mani Rimdu*, which was popularized by Ngawang Tenzin Norbu and is performed in several monasteries throughout the Khumbu region, was the subject of the 1986 documentary, *Lord of the Dance, Destroyer of Illusion*, the title of which derives partly from Trulshik Rinpoche's name, which means literally 'the Precious Destroyer of Delusion'. Among the practices held at his own monastery every year was a *drupchö* of *Tendrel Nyesel*, which was attended and recorded by Rigpa students in 2005 and 2007.

In 2010, Rinpoche became the fifth head of the Nyingma school, succeeding Kyabjé Minling Trichen Rinpoche, who had passed away two years earlier. Throughout his life, Trulshik Rinpoche made an immense





contribution to the Ngagyur Nyingma tradition, especially in its monastic form. It is said, for example, that he ordained more than ten thousand monks and nuns in the years after coming into exile. He was also a model practitioner, who spent an astounding sixty years of his life in retreat.

Beginning in 2001, Rinpoche oversaw the reconstruction of his monastery at Thubten Chöling, which had originally been built as a temporary structure in the hope of a swift return to Tibet. And in 2002, work began on a new monastery, Dzarong Mindrol Thubten Dongak Chöling, on a hilltop in Sitapaila, near Swayambhunath in Kathmandu. Rinpoche also worked tirelessly to transmit the most important teachings and empowerments to a new generation of *tulkus*, including the young incarnation of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, whom he had recognized in 1995 following a series of dreams and visions, and the incarnation of Dudjom Rinpoche.

During his final years, Rinpoche remained in semi-retreat at his new residence at Sitapaila, seeing only a few close disciples and his doctors, and cared for, as always, by his own nephew and devoted attendant, Ngawang Tsepel. Finally, at the age of eighty-seven, on 2 September 2011, the very day that the *dung chö* ceremonies for Khandro Tsering Chödrön were performed in France (see pages 28–33), Rinpoche passed away at



his residence in Sitapaila and remained in *tukdam* (the state of meditation after death) for three days. As soon as news reached Dharamsala, a special prayer service was held and the offices of the Tibetan government-in-exile remained closed for the day as a sign of homage and respect. Ceremonies were performed at Trulshik Rinpoche's own monasteries in Nepal and throughout the Himalayan region for the traditional forty-nine-day period, culminating in a special practice before his *kudung* (sacred body) on 21 October, attended by many of his most senior students, including the incarnations of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Dudjom Rinpoche, Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche, Sogyal Rinpoche and other lamas, and as many as fifty thousand devotees from around the world.

Rinpoche's writings, currently being compiled by his senior students, offer a wealth of advice and inspiration in the form of commentaries, *sadhanas*, praises and instructions, all written in a clear, accessible, and often poetic style. Over the years, Rinpoche kindly composed a number of prayers and practices at our request, including long-life prayers for Sogyal Rinpoche, Alak Zenkar Rinpoche and Mayum Tsering Wangmo, as well as a Guru Yoga practice that includes Sogyal Rinpoche.

Rinpoche taught at Rigpa centres and events on numerous occasions, in San

Francisco, New York, Paris, London and Kirchheim, but it was his three visits to Lerab Ling in 1999, 2003 and 2005, during which he bestowed the most important Nyingma and Dzogchen empowerments and transmissions, that stand out as the most significant and historic for us all.

In 1999, more than five hundred people came together for five full days of teachings and empowerments as Kyabjé Rinpoche made his first visit to Lerab Ling. In spite of the wintry weather, with strong winds and torrential rain battering the shrine tent, the atmosphere was one of celebration and joy. The empowerments included Guru Chöwang's revelation of *Lama Sangdü*; Dudjom Rinpoche's Vajrakilaya practice of *Pudri Rehpung*; the Longchen Nyingtik practices of *Rigdzin Düpa*, *Dukngal Rangdrol*, *Takhyung Barwa*, *Yumka Dechen Gyalmo* and *Tiklel Gyachen*; Tertön Sogyal's terms *Yang Nying Pudri* and *Tendrel Nyesel*; and Jamyang Khyentse's revelation *Chimé Phakmé Nyingtik*. Many older students were especially moved by the occasion, as Kyabjé Rinpoche's presence brought back memories of similar events with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche or Dudjom Rinpoche.

In the summer of 2003, Trulshik Rinpoche spent two weeks at Lerab Ling, bestowing another major series of empowerments as hundreds of people packed, once again, into the old teaching tent. In addition to the *sadhanas* practised regularly by the Rigpa

Opposite page: (Top) Trulshik Rinpoche with Dilgo Khyentse Yangsi Rinpoche at Shechen Monastery in Nepal; (centre) at Lerab Ling in 2000; and (below) a photograph of Thubten Chöling from above, taken about a year before work to reconstruct the monastery was completed in 2006.

Top photograph courtesy of Raphaelle Demandre. Photograph of Thubten Chöling courtesy of Matteo Pistono.

Above: Trulshik Rinpoche with the many masters who attended the celebrations in Nepal in 2010 to mark the centenary of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's birth.

Below: Sogyal Rinpoche shows Trulshik Rinpoche the plans for the Lerab Ling temple during his visit in 2003.





Whatever is subject to causes and conditions must change with each passing moment. If we can understand this, it will be of tremendous benefit.

KYABJÉ TRULSHIK RINPOCHE

Left: Trulshik Rinpoche bestows an empowerment during his visit to Lerab Ling in 2005.

Opposite page: (Top) Trulshik Rinpoche offers a *tenshyuk* (long life ceremony) to Sogyal Rinpoche during the first event in the newly completed Lerab Ling temple in 2005; (centre) Trulshik Rinpoche and Sogyal Rinpoche at Lerab Ling; (below) Trulshik Rinpoche receives a warm welcome on his arrival at Lerab Ling in 2003.

sangha, this time he also conferred the empowerments of the *Gyutrul Shyitro*, *Lama Yangtik* and *Khandro Yangtik*, as well as the *Dōjo Bumzang* (*The Excellent Wish-Granting Vase*), a collection of revelations compiled by Minling Terchen Gyurme Dorje and his brother Lochen Dharmashri. The event was attended by a number of lamas, including Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, who said he felt as if he was receiving the empowerments directly from Dudjom Rinpoche himself. Trulshik Rinpoche's departure by helicopter on the final day, to make a hastily arranged, unscheduled visit to another Dharma centre, was a typical example of his boundless diligence and tireless dedication in the service of others.

Rinpoche's final visit to Lerab Ling came in December 2005 and was the first major event to take place in the newly completed temple—fittingly, as he had offered so much invaluable advice at every stage of its construction. Even though Rinpoche's residence in the temple, which would later become the quarters of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, already housed a number of exceptionally sacred images, it was Kyabjé Rinpoche's arrival and his presence there that truly brought everything to life and made it complete.

In many ways, this event was a preliminary to the three-year retreat, which would begin at Lerab Ling just ten months later. Almost a thousand people journeyed to France, and

hundreds more connected via the internet, to receive all the necessary empowerments and transmissions, including the *Lama Yangtik*, *Khandro Yangtik* and the rare *Chetsün Nyingtik*, which had never been given to Rigpa students before. As he blessed the temple, with its various shrines and images, Trulshik Rinpoche named it *Palri Pema Ösel Dargyé Ling*—a reference to the distinctive copper roofs, reminiscent of Guru Rinpoche's paradise of *Zangdok Palri*, and to its status as an important centre for the teachings of Clear Light (*Ösel*) Dzogpachenpo.

On 5 December, the day after Ian Maxwell, one of Rigpa's most senior students and instructors, passed away, Kyabjé Rinpoche gave a teaching on the meaning of retreat, during which he spoke movingly about impermanence. His message, already poignant at the time, now conveys an even greater sense of urgency:

"There was once a student who went to see his teacher in order to request instruction. The lama was about to leave and was in a hurry but he accepted the request. He took the student's hand and held it, saying, 'I am going to die... you are going to die. I am going to die... you are going to die. I am going to die... you are going to die. I have nothing more to give you than this.' It is said that the student took this instruction to heart, practised intensively and eventually became a *great siddha*.

"Let's consider impermanence for a moment. We can think about how the sun rose this morning and how it has already set. With the passing of this day, we have come one day closer to the end of our lives.

"All compounded things are subject to impermanence. Uncompounded things could never change, but whatever is subject to causes and conditions must change with each passing moment. If we can understand this, it will be of tremendous benefit.

"If we think about Ian, who was one of Sogyal Rinpoche's main students, first we heard that he was sick, then for a few days he was sick but still alive, and finally he passed away. Now his body is just a corpse. The person we all knew has gone and his body has been left behind. This is the meaning of the Tibetan word for body, *lū*. A body is only alive as long as the mind and the eight consciousnesses are present, but once they have gone, the body is just a corpse. You might remember him as he was, but the Ian that you all knew is no more. That is impermanence.

"We can also think about all of us gathered in this temple. There might be one thousand of us here, but one hundred years from now, not a single one of us will still be alive. If we really meditate on impermanence, it is said that in the beginning it can be the cause of us taking up the Dharma; in the



middle it can provide the conditions for us progressing along the path; and at the end it can cause us to achieve the result of complete and perfect awakening. So impermanence is of the utmost importance."

Trulshik Rinpoche offered guidance on almost every aspect of Rigpa's work. To cite just a few examples: he provided crucial instructions on almost every one of our sadhana practices; he ordained the majority of our monks and nuns; he performed divinations for each and every one of the hundreds of applicants for the three-year retreat; and he supervised the design of our *thangkas* of *Tendrel Nyesel* and *Yang Nying Pudri*.

All of us who had the immense good fortune to meet Rinpoche and receive teachings, oral transmissions and empowerments from him will never forget his kindness and generosity. His captivating presence and the atmosphere of warmth, peace and lightness that surrounded him left a deep and lasting impression on all he encountered.

Shortly after Rinpoche passed away, Sogyal Rinpoche told a group of students in Berlin: "Trulshik Rinpoche was one of our root lamas—a jewel in the crown of the Rigpa sangha. Although his passing is sad news, we must remember that such great masters are never separate from us and from the nature of our minds."



For a collection of texts about and by Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche, visit:
www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/nyingma-masters/trulshik-rinpoche