

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF THE VENERABLE GESHE THUBTEN LODEN

dGe.bshes (Geshe) Ācārya Thub.bstan blo.lidan (Loden) was born in January 1924, in the town of 'Brom.bu in the sGa.pa district of Khams province, East Tibet. His family name was rGya.tsang. His father was Thab.rje; his mother was Ngag.dbang lha.mo. When he was born the great Geshe'Jam.dpal dri.med visited his home and wrote DHĪH, the seed syllable of Mañjuśrī, on Geshe.la's tongue with Dhe.dbang.¹ He was given the name of bLo.gros bstan.pa. (Sanskrit: Sthiramati, the name of Vasubandhu's famous disciple).

Even when Geshe was young he had great compassion for all people, especially beggars. His mother complained about the amount of food and clothing he would give to beggars coming to their home saying, "It's better you don't live in the same house with us. Better that you go to the monastery before you give the whole house away to the beggars!" If his mother refused food, milk or yoghurt to those who came to the door, Geshe.la became unhappy and cried loudly.

Geshe frequently left his house to sit on rocks or in caves to meditate and say sPyan.ras.gzigs (Chenrezig) mantra. This upset his mother and she threatened to send him to the nearby monastery. However, his father was happy whenever Geshe gave to beggars or said Chenrezig's mantra.

One time when a neighbour was preparing to slaughter a yak, Geshe pleaded persistently with him not to kill the animal. The neighbour was so impressed by the young boy's compassion that he did not kill the yak; instead he set it free.

Once a beggar came to the house. His son had no clothes so Geshe gave the boy his own clothes and went back inside the house naked. His mother was so angry that she beat him and said she wanted to kick him out of the house.

When he was six, Geshe's parents invited the great bLa.ma (Lama) Lab.mkhan.chen Rin.po.che, (Rinpoche) a manifestation of rDo.rje 'jig.byed (Blue Yamāntaka) to their house. This lama predicted that if Geshe became a monk he would benefit many sentient beings and directly aid the spread of the Lord Buddha's teachings. He warned that

¹ Dhe.dbang is a Tibetan medicine yellow in colour that is made from an elephant's liver.

otherwise his life would be short. Geshe then took ordination as dGe.tsul with the Rinpoche as preceptor.

From 1930 to 1937, Geshe studied at 'Brom.bu thub.bstan dar.rgyas.gling. He memorized Yamāntaka, Heruka and Guhyasamāja *sādhana*s and maṇḍala *pūjā*s; Sarvavid, Amitāyus and Hayagrīva *sādhana*s; Mahākāla, Dharmarāja, Kālīdevī, Kuvera and A'che Dharmapāla protection prayers, and memorized the Eight Great Prayers.

Geshe was not satisfied to only memorize the prayers. He thought it was more important to practice purification methods. He asked his teacher, Don.grub dpal.lan, for advice. His teacher said that if he wanted to quickly purify negative karma, he should make prostrations for six and a half months, each day taking the Eight Mahāyāna Precepts.

From Lab.mkhan.chen Rinpoche he received Heruka, Yamāntaka, Guhyasamāja, and Sarvavid initiations and did a 1,000,000 dMigs.brtze.ma retreat.

He then heard about the great monastic universities of Se.ra, dGa.lan and 'Bras.spungs and he often prayed to go there to study and practice meditation. In 1937, Lab.mkhan.chen Rinpoche visited 'Brom.bu thub.bstan dar.rgyas.gling monastery. He confirmed that only memorizing prayers wasn't enough and he suggested that Geshe learn the sByor.chos *pūjā* and meditate on Lam.rim. Geshe studied Lam.rim for two years with the great Geshe 'Jam.dpal dri.med in 'Brom.bu thub.bstan dar.rgyas.gling. Each day he received Lam.rim teachings, meditated and answered his teacher's questions. Geshe Dri.med said he should learn Pramāṇavārttika, Prajñāpāramitā, Mādhyamika philosophy, Abhidharma and Vinaya. Geshe Dri.med taught many times the value of taking refuge and said if one did not learn the great philosophical treatises, then one did not know how to practice Lord Buddha's Dharma. Geshe Loden felt much devotion to his guru and wanted to study the great philosophical texts. He realized the best learning institution for him would be Se.ra monastery.

Geshe no longer considered it important to remain at 'Brom.bu thub.bstan dar.rgyas.gling and asked his kind and holy teacher what he should do. Geshe Dri.med said he should study the great philosophies at either Se.ra, dGa.lan or 'Bras.spungs; but Geshe's parents objected to his going to Lha.sa. Geshe Dri.med told him to run away to Ser.shus dgon.pa where there were 900 monks in order to further his studies. Geshe Loden asked if it weren't negative karma to leave without his parent's consent, but Geshe Dri.med replied that Guru Śākyamuni had done the same thing in order to help sentient beings by practising the Dharma. Geshe Loden then decided to go to Ser.shus dgon.pa to study

and went home to see his parents before he left. He did not, however, tell his parents of his intentions because of the objections they would raise and the unhappiness it would cause them. He was very sad to leave his family and his kind guru and 'Brom.bu thub.bstan dar.rgyas.gling and made many prayers before he set out.

Carrying one text with him, Geshe Loden went to Ser.shus dgon.pa on foot. On the way across the wide and desolate grasslands Geshe went many days without food and saw only wild mules in the distance. He became very tired as he walked through the pouring rain. On his long journey, Geshe met a pack of Tibetan wolves who tried to attack him. The wolves snarled viciously as they prepared to attack, but Geshe was not afraid and recited his Dharma Protectors' prayers. The wolves immediately became pacified and gentle, and Geshe continued on his way unhurt.

On reaching Ser.shus dgon.pa Geshe visited the abbot, sMan.shus Rinpoche and asked to be allowed to study and meditate there. sMan.shus Rinpoche kindly gave him a house, food and clothing and arranged for his tuition in the monastery with two famous teachers.

From Geshe dKar.tse he received teachings on Pramāṇavārttika and Prajñāpāramitā and from Geshe bSod.dpol he received Lam.rim and Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra teachings. Geshe sat up during the night to do meditation and mantra and remained sitting for the couple of hours of sleep he required.

After studying for two years at Ser.shus dgon.pa Geshe Le.thang khre.pa Rinpoche, who had great psychic powers and clairvoyance, told Geshe Loden that if he remained at Ser.shus he would not succeed at meditation and the Protectors of the dgon.pa would become annoyed on account of his wasting his time. If, however, he went to Se.ra monastic university he would undoubtedly be able to benefit many sentient beings. Geshe Loden decided to go to Se.ra to study and meditate.

One night Geshe Loden had an auspicious dream in which A'che Chos.rje sgtol.ma appeared to him riding a white horse and promised him protection on his long journey to Se.ra. Later he dreamt that he was travelling south and that in front of him, stretching to infinity were many beautiful lotus flowers. While Geshe walked on the lotus flowers, brilliant light exploded above him and rained down all around him. A giant orange sun disc appeared in the sky, and on this appeared the terrifying form of mGon.po phyug.drug (Six-armed Mahākāla), playing the *ḍamaru* he held and rotating his fierce bloodshot eyes. Intense light emanated from mGon.po phyug.drug' body and streamed in rays toward Geshe, absorbing into his body and illuminating the lotus at his feet. mGon.po phyug.drug then promised to help Geshe.la

in his Dharma practice and to eliminate any external or internal hinderances that might arise. When Geshe reached his home and went inside, mGon.po phyug.drug disappeared. On waking, Geshe was happy and determined to go to Se.ra as soon as possible.

Lab.mkhan.chen Rinpoche advised Geshe.la to do 100,000 long Praises to Mahākāla (Hūm.myur.mdzad. Chenrezig.lags.phyag.‘d-zal.lo) which he completed in retreat before returning to his parents. He told them he wanted to study at Se.ra until he became a Geshe. His parents finally agreed to his plans, and Geshe ‘Jam.dpal dri.med authorised him to go to Se.ra, a journey which took him two months on foot.

On reaching Se.ra in 1939, he was accepted as a student of the great teachers, Geshe Byams.pa chos.‘phel, Geshe sKal.bzang and Geshe Thub.bstan dbang.rgyal. From 1939 to 1942, he studied Prāmāṇavārttika by Dharmakīrti under the guidance of Geshe Byams.pa chos.‘phel. He received teachings on the Sūtras and Prajñāpāramitā in 100,000, 20,000 and 8,000 verses with the commentary by Tzong.kha.pa. He then took dGe.slong ordination from the holy lama ‘Jam.mgon Rinpoche.

From His Holiness Yongs. ‘dzin Khri.byang rdo.rje.‘chang, Geshe Loden received the complete teachings on Lama mChod.pa using the practice of Guhyasamāja. He also received the complete cycle of rDo.rje rnal.‘byor.ma and commentaries, as well as Heruka, Yamāntaka, Sarvavid and Guhyasamāja initiations. He later received the cycle of the one hundred initiations of the Rin.‘byung brgya.rtza, teachings on the Second Pan.chen Rinpoche’s Lam.rim bde.lam, and the Third Pan.chen Rinpoche’s Lam.rim myur.lam.

From sKyab.rje lha.btzun Rinpoche he received teachings on the Thirteen Golden Dharmas of the Sa.skya.pas, (Sa.skya.gser.chos.b-cu.gsum), Prāmāṇavārttika, Prajñāpāramitā, Abhidharma and Vinaya as well as the set of Twenty-one Tārās initiations.

From Brag.ri Rinpoche he received transmissions of the three great Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras and Pa.bong.kha’s complete works on Sūtra and Tantra and Mahākāla, Dharmarāja, Kālīdevī and Kuvera initiations.

Geshe Byams.pa chos.‘phel taught Geshe.la that the paths of Renunciation, Bodhicitta and Śūnyatā were the essence of Lord Buddha’s teachings. Having learned the techniques of meditation on these essentials, Geshe continued his Lam.rim meditations.

From 1948 to 1954, Geshe Loden learned the Madhyamakāvātāra with the commentaries by Tzong.kha.pa and Candrakīrti. He also received teachings on the Six Logical Treatises by Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva’s Mādhyamika text and Śāntideva’s Bodhisattva-

caryāvātāra. The first two years he did analytical meditations; the second two years he studied debating and debated during the night; the last two years he studied the Mādhyamika root text.

From 1954 to 1956, Geshe studied the Vinaya Sūtras and Guṇaprabha's Vinaya commentary detailing the 253 precepts of a fully ordained monk.

From 1956 to 1959, he studied Abhidharma and commentary by Vasubandhu and mChims. 'Jams.dpal.yang.

After the communist invasion of Lha.sa in 1959, Geshe escaped to India by foot.

From 1960 to 1967, he studied Abhidharma and Vinaya in Buxa with the high lamas from the three great dGe.lugs.pa monastic universities of Se.ra dGa.ldan and 'Bras.spungs. As in Tibet, Geshe had many students including three sPrul.sku-s, to whom he taught Pramānavārttika, Prajñāpāramitā, Mādhyamika philosophy, Abhidharma and Vinaya. He did a one-month Yamāntaka retreat and a one-month Vajra Yoginī retreat.

From 1968 to 1970, he learned Pramānavārttika, Prajñāpāramitā, Mādhyamika philosophy, Abhidharma, Vinaya and Sanskrit at the Sanskrit University in Varanasi. He received an honours Ācārya (Masters) degree.

In 1971, Geshe Loden went to Dharamsala to debate in front of his Holiness the Dalai Lama. By the authority of the Dalai Lama, he went to rGyud.smad Tantric College in Dalhousie where he learned and practiced the profound Tantras.

In 1972, Geshe went to South India to the monasteries of Se.ra dGa.ldan and 'Bras.spungs to give his Geshe examination. He then went to Dharamsala to do his final examination and was awarded an honours Geshe Lha.rams.pa degree from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He continued his studies of the four levels of Tantra at rGyud.smad Tantric College.

Geshe studied Mother Tantra of 'Khor.lo bDe.mchog using the root text and commentaries by Tzong.kha.pa. He studied and memorized the Śrī Guhyasamājamahātantrarāja (Guhyasamāja root text) and practiced bsKyed.rim. de.nyed.zhe.dgu including the five branches of Guhyasamāja Tantra with the Vajramālā. He also studied the great commentary on Guhyasamāja practice by rJe.btzun Shes.rab sangs.rgyas who was the founder of rGyud.smad Tantric College.

In addition to the five levels of Guhyasamāja practice of bsKyed.rim (De.nyed.zhe.dgu; rNal.'byor.bzhi.mchan; rNal.'byor.drug.chen; rDo.rje.bzhi.mchan; bsNyen.sgrub.yen.lag.bzhi.mchan), Geshe Loden practices the six levels of Guhyasamāja rDzogs.rim as well as Ye.shes.zha bs.lugs.kyi.thig.le.bzhi; Pyag.rdor. 'khor.lo.

chen.po.byin.lab.bzhi; dMar.nag. 'jig.gsum.gyi.rnal. 'byor.bzhi; Lui.pai. rnal. 'byor.chen.po; Dril.bu.pa.rim.pa.lnga; Nā.ro.chos.drug; Dus.khor.yan.lag.drug.

Geshe Loden took his Tantric Examinations at rGyud.smad College in 1975 and was awarded an honours degree.

The scope of Geshe Loden's practice includes not only the comprehensive practices of Guhyasamāja, but also the other major Tantric dieties. Geshe Loden has received Guhyasamāja 'Grel.ba.bzhi.sgrug from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and His Holiness Yongs.'dzin.gLing Rinpoche. He has received teachings on the root text of Guhyasamāja and its comprehensive commentaries from His Holiness Yongs.'dzin.gLing Rinpoche. From His Holiness Yongs.'dzin.Khri.chen.rdo.rje.'chang he has received thirteen initiations of Mahākāla as well as the complete teachings on Yamāntaka, Guhyasamāja and Heruka.

In India, Geshe has many young Rinpoches and students from the rNying.ma, Sa.skya, bKa.'brgyud and dGe.lugs traditions.

In 1976, the Venerable Lama Thub.bstan Ye.shes asked His Holiness the Dalai Lama to send a teacher to become abbot of a new Buddhist Monastery and Meditation centre in Australia, The Chenrezig Institute for Wisdom Culture. At the request of His Holiness, the Venerable Geshe Thub.bstan Loden assumed this position in December, 1976, for a period of three years. He is assisted by the Venerable rDza.srib sPrul.sku Rinpoche.

Upon arrival at the institute, Geshe Loden began a graded program of regular instruction on the following texts:

1977 — Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra (Śāntideva)

Abhidharmakośa (Vasubandhu)

Bodhipathapradīpa (Atīśa)

1978 — Prajñāpāramitā using Abhisamayālamkāra (Maitreya)

Madhyamaka-avatāra (Candrakīrti)

1979 — Pramāṇavārttika, Chapter 2 (Dharmakīrti)

Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra (Maitreya)

Mahayānottaratantra (Maitreya)

sLob.spring and Suḥṛllekha (Nāgārjuna)

The program allows interruption for Lam.rim teachings in the form of meditation courses, to students at Chenrezig Institute twice annually and on tour in other centres. Geshe Loden also conducts seminars and courses for certain special groups of students, and at all times maintains his own meditational practises within the teaching schedule.

In the first eight months of his term of office, Geshe Loden gave Upāsaka ordination to over fifty students, Eight vows to five students and novice monk vows to seven students. With his blessing, a new

centre was opened in Brisbane and named Bodhicitta House. In Sydney the initial work of developing an independent centre of Tibetan Buddhism, the Loden Mahāyāna Centre, progressed smoothly under his supervision as Spiritual Head.

In the midst of numerous distractions and difficulties, Geshe Loden works continuously and enthusiastically towards the understanding of Buddhadharma by all beings. His clear teachings and personal example are a source of great encouragement in this time when it is difficult to practise.