

GUIDE TO CHARI MONASTERY- A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHARI VAJRAYA MONASTERY

*His Holiness Nawang Tenzin**

OM! I pay obeisance to the invincible Guru of Palden Drukpa.

I will now relate:

- How the Chari monastery has begun and established;
- The accounts of religious activities undertaken by Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo and the invincible Ngawang Namgyal;
- How their successive incarnations meditated there and performed miraculous activities; and
- How the sacred properties of the monastery were acquired.

How the Chari Monastery was begun and established

At Dodenang, at the confluence of three rivers, there is a ferocious mandala which sprang up on its own. Here, at the mouth of the river, there is a little rock. Above the rock there lies a chorten whose wall-paintings, which were miraculously created by Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo, can be seen till today.

At the nose of the bridge there is a two-legged chorten, under which people pass to obtain blessings. The Lhakhang or temple above was constructed by Pandita Tenzin Chogyal. On this or the Chari monastery side of the bridge, in the area of the small chorten, Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo's son Lama, when he was the head of the Drupdey (meditational class),

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constructed a monastery with five doors. He also constructed more than 30 drupkhangs or houses of solitary retreat. Meditational practices flourished greatly at the Drupdey during the time, and the remains of the aforementioned structures can be seen till today, though now hidden amidst dense forest.

A little further up, by the side of the path, there are the remains of a circular wall which was Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo's drupkhang (retreating apartment). It is mentioned in the namthar (biography) that this fact was revealed by Pandita Tenzin Chogyal, reincarnation of Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo, during the consecration ceremony of the chorten.

In front of the wall, on the other side of the streams, can be seen the remains of a garden where sheela-puspa (a kind of fragrant flower) bloom even today. The garden is said to have belonged to Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo's consort Sonam Paldon.

Further up, beside the rock above the road, there is a sign which is believed to be that of the tongue of the riding yak of Zhabdrung. Then there is a duedul (taming of mara) chorten. A little further up, just below the road, there is a drupkhang of the great abbot Khenchen Sonam 'Odzer. At the edge of the road, there is a rock where Gyaltse Tenzin Rabgye and his horse fell down, and which still carries the body impressions and footprints of Gyaltse Tenzin Rabgye. Though the horse died at the site, Gyaltse Tenzin was left unharmed.

Since Guru Padmasambhava both personally and through his manifestations blessed the rugged valley of Bhutan, one can find here the wonderful door of hidden treasures.

Near the Dzong, there is a big lump of stone carrying an impression of *tersha* of conchshell, which symbolizes the source of the propagation of the dharma.

The shape of the iron hill (Chari) is like that of the heart of Mahakala's palace. This is said in the Tandra of Gyonpo or Mahakala. Hence the Chari is logically an ideal place for meditation. In particular, there is a prophecy of Guru Rinpoche in which it is said that the life-valley of the Drukpas is established between the two rivers.

Besides this, the funeral pyramid containing the mortal remains of Zhabdrung Rinpoche's father Tenpai Nyima are also preserved here in the chorten, and constitute the main sacred object of Chari monastery. It is said that the Kharsapani predicted three times that the death of Tenpai Nyima should be kept at Chari as relics.

Religious Activities undertaken by Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo and the invincible Ngawang Namgyal

Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo's arrival in Bhutan was in consequence of his visualization that the religion of Buddha (Buddhism) would not endure in Tibet but would flourish in the country of the medicinal herbs in the form of Palden Drukpa.

The coming of Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo to Bhutan was in accordance with a prophecy made by Tsangpa Jharey, who also predicted that he would come to Bhutan in the form of Ngawang Namgyal. The Prediction, which was made to Sangye Onray at the time of his passing away, is as follows:

"In future, the Buddhist doctrine will disappear from the Ue and Tsang valleys of Tibet, but it will flourish and be everlasting in the southern valley. One boy from Kham will come to you. Give him my dharma upedesha. After this, send him to the south valley. Generally, it will serve like a tonic on the Drukpa Kargyudpa, and the sun of peace and happiness will shine on the southern valley. In future, I shall also be coming there, where I will introduce the system of spiritual and temporal rulership. Tell him that he should pray that we will meet at the time".

Accordingly, Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo came to Bhutan around 1208 A.D., where he married Sonam Paldon. He begot a daughter, along with 7 sons contained in a flesh-bag. Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo lay the new-born sons in line on a wooden plank and flung them into the river, having prayed thus, 'if any of these sons will prove useful to the Dharma, then may the Devas, Gurus, dakinis and Dharmapalas protect them; but may those who will not serve the cause of Dharma be carried away by the water and die!'

It is said that his wife could not tolerate this and with heartbroken, went in search of sons. She found four: Gartoen, Wangchuck, Nyima and Lama. The other three, who were manifestations of evil, had been carried away by the water.

Zhabdrung Rinpoche was born in 1594 A.D. At the age of 23, that is, in the Fire Dragon Year, he was received by Lama Hoptshopa of Gyon and his troops, and came with them to Bhutan.

At the age of 27, that is the Iron Monkey Year, on completion of the silver funeral pyramid containing the relics of his father, Zhabdrung Rinpoche established the monastic body with 30 monks initially. This was the beginning of the order of the Palden Drukpa in the country.

At the age of 30, that is the Water Hog Year, Zhabdrung stayed in solitary retreat for 3 years, living on the essence of flowers. After that he decided to retire to the mountains for further retreat, in the same fashion of Milarepa and Gyalwa Lorepa. However, the statue of his father Tenpai Nyima started speaking and forbade him to undertake the journey, saying, "You shall look after the doctrine through temporal and spiritual systems."

Besides that, the Devas and Gurus had predicted over and over again that the time had come for Zhabdrung to serve the sentient beings. Therefore, at the age of 34 or the Fire Rabbit

Year, Zhabdrung undertook the responsibility of turning the Golden Wheel of Spiritual and Temporal Laws. He then began issuing his commandments to all the deities of Bhutan. At the Gyonkhang at Chari monastery the wings of crow headed Mahakala sounded like thunder, and the fresh heart of Zhabdrung's enemies was offered to him. To celebrate the happy occasion, Zhabdrung introduced the Guonpoi Zorcham or the mask dance of Mahakala. Thus the dance originated at the Chari monastery.

When Zhabdrung was 38 years, or in the Iron Sheep Year, his son Jampel Dorji was born at Chari. At the age of 40, Zhabdrung received injunctions on the Vinaya from the scholar-saint Lhawang Lodroe, who subsequently ordained him.

Desi Umdzey Tenzin Drugyal, while leading the congregation during the performance of a ceremony, passed away suddenly without any sickness. The site where he was cremated can be seen clearly even today at the rock.

Meditation of Successive Incarnations at the Temple and the Performance of their Miraculous Activities

Lhawang Lodroe came to Dzongchung and practiced meditation at a small cave between the rocks. One day as he was calculating on the wooden tablet used for prognostication, he caused fire to issue out from the tablet. Lhawang Lodroe passed away at the age of 84.

Gyaltse Tenzin Rabgye joined the monastery at the age of eight. At the age of 27, he passed quite some time in meditating on Dechog (Sambhara) and Guru Dragpo (Wrathful Guru).

Pandita Jamyang Pladen Jamtsho of Tsang in Tibet also stayed at Chari. So did Khenchen Sonam 'Odzer, who studied here under Lhawang Lodroe from the age of 10. Gyaltse Kunga Gyaltshen mediated here on Lhadrup (propitiation of a

deity), Dechog (sambhara), Gyonpo (mahakala), and Lhamo (devi or mahakali). He attained the vision of Lhamo and her retinue, and also witnessed their dance. The dance, known as Tsomoi Garcham, which is originated here is performed annually at the Thimphu Dromchoe festival.

Gyaltse Kunga Gyaltshen composed a book for the propitiation of Lhamo.

Khenchen Damchoe Pekar mediated at Chari for three years, and the scholar-saint Tenzin Dendup also spent a considerable time here.

The second Zhabdrung Sungtuel Chogle Namgyel mediated at Chari on Lhandrup, Dechog, Gyonpo and Lhamo. Zhabdrung Thugtuel Jigme Dragpa also mediated here for three years. Gyaltse Jigme Norbu did five years of meditation here, while Khenchen Zoepa Thinley and Ngawang Yonten Thaye also stayed here for quite a long time for the same purpose. Their experiences in religious practice are vividly described in their Namthars (biographies).

How the Sacred Properties of the Monastery were Acquired

The main sacred object of the monastery is the silver funeral pyramid containing the relics of Zhabdrung's father. Inside the chorten there is also the statue of Tenpai Nyima which was made by Zhabdrung himself, and which had miraculously spoken to him.

Zhabdrung's personal belongings were also kept in the monastery. Besides, there is also a sacred oven, which Zhabdrung lifted with one hand during the performance of the homa ceremony after the completion of his retreat. In the chapel of Mahakala, the Tibetan commander Gula's heart and hands have been preserved as secret objects.

The golden statue of Zhabdrung Rinpoche in the Duedulphug temple was made by the ninth Desi/Depa Geshey alias Chogyal Ngawang Jamtsho.

The golden statues of the Buddha, Tshepagme (Amitayus), Trulpai Chogyal, Thonmisambhota, and Lyonpo Gara were the main objects of the 13th Desi Sherub Wangchuck in his chamber, Kuensel Phodrang.

The golden statues of Guru Rinpoche and Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo in the Lama Lhakhang and the golden statue of Namse in the treasure-room were all presented by Kuzho Tashi Dorji.

The burnt down Sheydra apartments and the room in which Gyalse Kunga Gyaltsen saw his vision of Lhamo were fully renovated through the gracious patronage of Ashi Chuni Wangmo and her family. The Sangha Community here continues to receive support and flourishes as in the time of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. Every year, it performs following rituals out of the capital investment of Nu. 100,000 granted to the monastery for religious service:

- Tshethro (wrathful amitayus) from the 1st to 3rd of the first month;
- Mithrugpa (akshobhaya) from the 8th to 10th of the same month;
- Neten Chudrug (16 Sthaviras) on the 15th day of the first month;
- Zhabdrung Kuchoe from the 8th to 10th of the third month;
- Neten Chudrug on the 15th day of the fourth month;
- Neten Chudrug on the 4th day of the sixth month; and
- Neten Chudrug on the 22nd day of the ninth month.

In total, 13 days of ceremonies are performed annually for the well-being of all sentient beings.

Mayum Chuni Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Kesang Wangchuck graciously renovated the main and Duedul temples. The congregation hall of the Sangha community was greatly beautified by the paintings of the Buddha and the six ornaments of the Jambudvipa. In addition eight new apartments of Thuenkhang (prayer halls) and drupkhangs were constructed. Thanks to this great work that the drupdey could be revived.

Other contemporary royal endowments to the monastery include internal objects necessary for the performance of ceremony, namely silver oil-burner 110, silver khoryug, silver bumpa, thankas of Neten Chudrug and decorations made of costly Chinese silk/brocade like Ladrey, Chodzey, Tenkhep and Chenzig.

Thus the sheydras and drupdeys are now both internally and externally well equipped. For this, all credit goes to Ashi Chuni Wangmo and Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Kesang Wangchuck, to whom we humbly express our sincere and wholehearted gratitude. Their generous and devoted contributions will be engraved in the religious annals of the country.

When we read the namthars of our saints, we find that this is the particular place where the greatness of the Palden Drukpa tradition flourished without decline. This is the sacred place where the Golden Wheel of Spiritual and Temporal laws were first turned, which brought glory to our country.

Whatever is here recorded, though brief, has been written at the command of Her Majesty the Queen Mother. It is not a work of imagination, but has been scrupulously compiled by referring to authentic historical sources. To speak for myself, however, I know nothing but what has been passed down through the histories and biographies of our revered scholars and saints.