

Great Sakya Women

Great Khön Jetsunmas as told by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

“There have been very great female Sakya practitioners ever since the very early days of the lineage. Jetsun Kunga Tenpey Nyingma, for example. She lived some 300 years ago. She’s actually one of the Vajrayogini lineage gurus. She was an outstanding master, and was the guru of many masters – mostly Sakya, but from other schools as well. She was the teacher of many Khön Dungeys and of many great khenpos.

A little more recently, there was a very great female master called Damzhin Wangmo. She was extremely important, because not only was she very learned, but she was also a great practitioner. She travelled in Kham for some time. Because Kham is very far away from Sakya, it was very difficult and very rare for people there to come to Sakya and receive blessings of the Khön lineage. So when she went there, people felt very great devotion, especially the Sakyapas in Kham.

During her travels there, she went to Tri Hor, east of Derge. Nowadays, Tri Hor is in Sichuan. There was a local governor who was in charge of the area. He was not a good man, because he was a womaniser,

always chasing beautiful women. And when he heard that Kanding Wangmo was attracting so many people, he decided that he wanted to meet her. She was very holy, but also very beautiful. And so Kanding Wangmo received a message that the governor wanted to meet her, and that she should set a time for him to come. Her attendant was alarmed and told Kanding Wangmo that they should leave, as he was a bad man and might harm her. But Jetsunma said: “No, it doesn’t matter. You can make an appointment. He can come to see me. It’s all right, there won’t be any problem.” And so they made an appointment.

On that day, he appeared and entered Jetsunma’s room to offer her a khata. But he quickly offered it and rushed out of the room, shaking like a leaf. His attendant asked him: “Why did you do this? Why did you leave so quickly? Yesterday you were so eager to meet Jetsunma, and now you just left straight away. Why did you do this?” And the governor said: “Oh, she was so terrifying! She had a human body, but she had the face of a pig, with long tusks!” He was so scared that he ran out. This shows that she was a real Vajrayogini.

And another time, while she was travelling in the Kham area, her party came to a place where there were many bandits. Some of them stole all the horses and mules that carried their luggage. And so everyone in the party wanted to go and get the animals back. But she said: “No, no. This won’t be necessary.” And she did a Mahakala puja. And suddenly black dogs and black birds appeared from everywhere and surrounded the bandits’ tents, threatening them and frightening them. They were so terrified that they immediately brought all the stolen horses and mules back to Jetsunma.

There’s actually quite a lot of information regarding Kanding Wangmo in the Sakya lineage history – a full chapter. Because she was also a guru. She was my grandfather’s main guru, his main guru, one of the most important gurus from whom he received Lamdre Lobshey and the Vajrayogini circle of teachings and the Vajramala circle of empowerments. He received all these from her. So my grandfather always used to refer to her as Vajrayogini in person.

And even more recently, there was Jetsunma Pema Trinley. She was my grandfather’s sister. I know she was born in 1874. I remember the year, because when I checked it in my grandfather’s biography, I noticed that it was exactly 100 years before my son Ratna Vajra’s birth. She was also a very great practitioner.

She also went to Kham and travelled in the same area as Kanding Wangmo had. There were very powerful monasteries from other traditions in that area, and they ruled the region. Our Sakya monasteries were small and scattered.

And so, Jetsunma was giving initiations in one of the Sakya monasteries. When the other monasteries heard about this, they were very critical, first of all because other traditions could not perform initiations

without permission. Secondly, because they said that it was very inauspicious for a woman to give initiations. So they sent tob tobs to beat her (tob tobs were a sort of monk police - they were very big and very harsh!). And so the tob tobs came and she was giving an initiation in the temple. As they could not enter straight away, they peeked through the curtains, and Jetsunma saw them. Then she placed her vase in the space before her, arranged her zen, and then again took hold of the vase. They were so astonished that they went in, and instead of beating her, they did prostrations and received blessings from her. So I was told.

My sister remembers her very well. She told me many things about her, but I don’t remember her. I vaguely remember her funeral – vaguely – like in a dream.

And then there was my aunt, Jetsun Kunga Tenpei Nyima. She wasn’t a Khön, but she was my father’s first wife. My father first married her, but she didn’t bear him children, and so he had to remarry. He married her sister, my mother, but my mother passed away soon after my birth. So my aunt was like my mother. Although she didn’t give birth to me, she was the one who brought my sister and myself up. She also was a very good practitioner. She didn’t sleep at night – only one or two hours. She never lay down. She sat in a box. She was a very great practitioner – she did about 600,000 prostrations and she made about 1,000,000 mandala offerings. She also did 20,000,000 guru yoga. I’m not certain about the exact numbers, but it was around that. Plus, she prayed and did sadhanas day and night. She was very, very kind, just like a mother.

Of course, there were many more female Sakya practitioners. These three are only a few of them.”

Jetsün Kushok Chimey Luding

Her Eminence Jetsün Kushok Chimey Luding is the elder sister of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin, and one of the greatest female Buddhist masters alive today. She began her religious education when she was five, was ordained as a novice at seven, and did her first retreat when she was ten. When His Holiness the Sakya Trizin began his training, Jetsunma was at His side and together they received teachings and empowerments from the greatest teachers of the time, notably Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, Dampa Rinpoche and Dezhung Rinpoche, to name but a few. Considered to be an emanation of Vajrayogini, she is one of the three Sakya women to ever have transmitted the Holy Lamdre, which she did for the first time at the age of seventeen.

Throughout her life, Jetsunma has had to face many hardships, beginning with the loss of both parents and two siblings when she was still a young child. Exile to India as a nun without the support of a monastery was such a challenge that Jetsunma had no choice but to abandon her robes. When she was twenty-six, she married Rinchen Sey Kushok, brother to Luding Khenchen Rinpoche, head of the Ngor branch of the Sakya School. When they emigrated to Canada a few years later, they faced the challenge of providing for their young family, and saw themselves forced to work as manual labourers. But Jetsunma remained steadfast, acquitting herself of a strenuous job, raising her children, and spending entire nights doing her spiritual practice. She slept very little, and yet never felt tired.

Their son Luding Khen Rinpoche succeeded his



uncle Luding Khenchen Rinpoche as 76th abbot of the Ngor Monastery in Manduwala, and as head of the Ngor Sakya lineage.

As her children grew, Jetsunma began to teach again, and took on the added responsibility of tending to the spiritual needs of her followers. In addition, Jetsunma saw herself founding several Dharma centres, which she visited regularly.

Jetsunma is loved and revered by her large numbers of followers worldwide, for whom her maternal yet powerful presence is a haven of strength and protection, and her example as an accomplished lay practitioner a beacon of inspiration.

Her Eminence Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter Sakya

Dharma Heir of the Great Lineage of the Khön Sakyapa



Her Eminence Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter was auspiciously born into this world on January 2, 2007, the first-born grandchild of His Holiness Sakya Trizin, and the first-born child of Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche and Her Eminence Dagmo Kalden Dunkyi.

Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter is heir to a long and glorious tradition of daughters of the Khön family who were highly trained and accomplished women masters. She received her name after two of His Holiness' aunts who were highly accomplished practitioners. One was Jetsun Kunga Tenpei Nyima,

and the other Jetsun Pema Trinley.

From her earliest years, Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter has demonstrated her special good qualities and great potential. Naturally displaying the dignity and personality of a member of the noble Khön lineage, she has great compassion, intelligence, and a strong affinity to Dharma. She is ever respectful to her holy grandfather His Holiness Sakya Trizin, and of her holy father Khöndung Ratna Vajra Rinpoche. She naturally delights in Dharma activities such as pujas and offerings, and is dignified and comfortable in large Dharma gatherings. All who know Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter are delighted by her presence, and the knowledge that in the future, she will uphold the great lineage of the Khön Sakyapa throughout the world.



Jetsunma receiving a mandala offering from her grandmother, H.E. Gyalyum Chenmo

H.E. Dagmo Kalden Dunkyi speaks of her daughter:

“Since Jetsunma was born on the Parinirvana Anniversary of Sakya Pandita, four and a half years

ago, she has brought so much joy into the lives of so many people in so short a time. Most of all, she has brought love and joy into my life that I did not think possible.

As a baby she was quiet, contemplative and so, so observant. Today as a 4 ½ year old elder sister, those qualities have metamorphosed and created an extremely articulate, mature and thoughtful little girl.

Fond of books, little children and the Sangha, there is no doubt she was destined to be born in this family and lead the life of religious study and practice her future holds for her. This short article is not only about her but also about my aspirations for her—

that she grow to be a wise woman,
a kind and compassionate practitioner of the Dharma,
a fair and honest leader,
a responsible and thoughtful adult,
a Guru, a Guide and a Spiritual Friend to Buddhists everywhere,
and that she benefit sentient beings throughout her life.

Under the shining light of our Sakya Gurus, I believe she will grow to be all of these and more. I pray for her long life and that she bring happiness and light into all our lives at some point or another. I know she has brought immeasurable joy into mine. ”

See more photos of Jetsunma on Kalden D. Sakya's Facebook page.



Aspiration for My Daughter

By Dagmo Kalden Dunkyi Sakya

“We supplicate the long life of Jetsun Sakyapa,
Emanation of Rigsum Gonpo and possessor of learning, discipline and realization,
Who with her activity of skillful means makes all beings happy,
And grants glory so that the benefit and happiness of all in existence and nirvana may bloom.

May you live steadfastly for ocean like eons!
Adorned with the glory of the nine pure ways,
May your activity of benefiting others spread as vast as space and;
May auspiciousness come to the fulfillment of your great purpose for the dharma and all sentient beings!”

Extract from the Long Life Prayer for Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter, composed by His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin, and entitled “**Showers of Immortal Nectar**”.