Crystal Dewdrops from the Lotus Petal: a Brief Biography of H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya and the Importance of the Six Syllable Mantra

by Asanga Vajra Sakya
I was recently asked to give a talk about the late Vajradhara His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Dorjechang Rinpoche’s biography. I actually feel very fortunate to be able to have this opportunity to talk about my Guru’s life story because it is said that by talking about one’s Guru’s great qualities one can accumulate vast merit and so I am thankful for being asked to give a short account of the life of His Holiness Dagchen Dorjechang Rinpoche. I would like to thank you for giving me the chance to accumulate lots of good merit.

To talk about Dagchen Rinpoche’s life story, it is good to know a little bit about his family history. His family is the Khön family. It started from three brothers who came from the realm of Clear Light which is the God Realm also known as Woser Lha’i Dhung Gyud. It can therefore be understood as the “Lineage or Family of the Gods”. To keep it short, the three brother’s names were Chiring, Yuring and Yusey. For several generations since the origin of the first three brothers, the descendants of the Khön lineage were believed to be pure gods. Then there came a descendent named Yapang Kye, who defeated what we could call a bloodless being (female raksha) and married her. They had a son named Khön Bhar kye. This was the first descendant who bore the name Khön. The word Khön actually means ‘conflict’. So it was a conflict between a divine God and a bloodless being. The son born from this union was called Khön Bhar kye which means born from conflict. So this was the first
descendant that was half God and half bloodless being. From a religious perspective, Khön can also mean a conflict against ignorance. It removes ignorance. So it can be understood that from a religious sense the Khön family is far removed from ignorance. This is one of the main qualities of the Khön family line. Several generations after Khön Bhar kye there were two brothers named Khön Lui Wangpo Sungwa (Khön Nagendrarakshita) and Khön Dorje Rinchen. Khön Lui Wangpo Sungwa (Khön Nagendrarakshita) was one of the first seven Tibetans to become ordained as a monk. He was a disciple of both Bodhisattva Khenpo Shantarakshita as well as a disciple of Guru Rinpoche also known as Guru Padmasambhava. His younger brother Khön Dorje Rinchen continued the family lineage since his elder brother was an ordained monk. Several generations from then there came Khön Kunchog Gyalpo. He was the first Sakya Trizin (throne holder), and he established the Sarma or new Sakya School because until then the main or oldest Tibetan religion was the Nyingmapa tradition. Until Khön Konchog Gyalpo, all the descendants of the Khön lineage were Nyingmapa practitioners. But then Khön Konchog Gyalpo seeing the need to establish a new school for the benefit of sentient beings, established the Sakyapa School. In Tibetan Buddhist tradition, we say Nga gyur Nyingma which means the old tradition Nyingmapa and Chi gyur Sarma which means the later or new tradition Sarma. At present there are mainly three
schools that fall under the Sarma or new tradition. The three schools are Sakya, Gelug and Kagyu. In the past there were Sakya, Kagyu, Kadam and Gelug but Kadam no longer exists and so Sakya, Kagyu and Gelug are the remaining schools of the new tradition. Khön Konchog Gyalpo had one son named Sachen Kunga Nyingpo. He was the main founder of the five forefathers of the Sakya School whom we collectively call Sakya Gongma Nam Nga. They appear a lot in thangka paintings and so the five founding fathers or Gongma Nam Nga are: Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, his second son Sonam Tsemo and third son Drakpa Gyaltsen and Sachen Kunga Nyingpo’s fourth son’s first son Sakya Pandita and Sachen Kunga Nyingpo’s fourth son’s second son’s first son Drogon Choegyal Phagpa who became the first monk king of Tibet. During the five forefathers’ time, these five great masters propagated the Sakya teachings and greatly benefited a vast number of sentient beings and showed them the path and delivered numerous beings to the state of enlightenment in their very lifetime. Later on, the Khön lineage
was divided into four palaces: *Rinchen Ghang Ladrang, Lhakhang ladrang, Dhuchoe Ladrang* and *Shithog Ladrang*. Many great *Khön* lineage masters came from each of these four great palaces but I don’t think it would be necessary to go into too much detail on that right now. Anyway, the *Rinchen Ghang Ladrang*, the *Lhakhang Ladrang* and the *Shithog Ladrang* became extinct, their family line got cut off for some reason. We are not really sure exactly why. Maybe because of the *karma* of sentient beings that they could no longer continue to benefit sentient being. However the *Dhuchoe Ladrang* continued the lineage as the last remaining palace. The *Dhuchoe Ladrang* further split into two palaces: *Dolma Phodrang* and *Phuntsok Phodrang*. So although the *Dolma Phodrang* and *Phuntsok Phodrang* have two different names, basically these two palaces came from one source or one palace. So of course we actually come from the same *Khön* family and not only that, these two palaces came from one palace so we actually have a very strong and close connection.

Now to talk about Dagchen Dorjechang Rinpoche’s life story, Rinpoche was born into the *Phuntsok Palace* in 1929. His father was the 40th *Sakya Trichen Ngawang Thutop Wangchuk* and his mother’s name was *Gyalyum Dechen Dolma*. To speak in Rinpoche’s own
words: Rinpoche says that he was born in 1929, and one year after he was born, there was a great birthday celebration. It must have been October 13th, 1930.

During that great celebration, his father Trichen Ngawang Thutop Wangchuk and his mother as well as many great abbots, scholars and great practitioners of the Sakya tradition were there to celebrate his one-year birthday. When Rinpoche reached the age of 6, his teacher, the 43rd Abbot of Sakya whose name was Sangye Rinchen taught him how to read the Tibetan scriptures. Around that time he also studied the many great tantric practices, such as Hevajra, Vajrakilaya, Vajrayogini, also Amitayus, and the Mahakhala, torma offering pujas etc. From Lopon Shakya la he studied the ways to draw the lines of mandalas and the hand gestures or mudras of pujas, as well as the rhythms of prayers and how to use musical instruments and also Vajrakilaya Cham dances such as the one called the “tsa cham” and also how to make tormas. He also studied from the Sakya Secretary, Loter Khangsar Wangdu how to write the Tibetan script. From his father the great Trichen, he received the
Lamdre Tsogshye initiations and transmissions as well as the Khön style of Vajrakilaya practices, initiations as well as the dharma protector’s initiations. By the age of 17 Rinpoche had already completed the Vajrapani, Bhutadamara, Hevajra, Vajrakilaya, Mahakala, Amitayus, Hayagriva, as well as the Kurukule retreats.
I think it must have been after around 1951 that Rinpoche left Sakya to study under many great masters of his time such as Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro Rinpoche as well as receiving teachings and initiations from one of his other main root guru Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. From Khyentse Chokyi Lodro he received the Lamdre Lobshey initiations as well as the Gyude Kundu (a collection of initiation manuals for the 132 mandalas of the Sakya tradition) as well as many initiations from this great master. Also at the request of Dzongsar Khyentse Chokyi Lodro, Rinpoche himself gave to Dzongsar Khyentse Chokyi Lodro as well as to the many great masters gathered at that time in Dzongsar, Tibet many initiations such as the Mahakala initiation, Vajrakilaya initiations,
and also the *Chatur Mukha* long life increasing initiation, as well as the *Amitayus* and *Hayagriva* initiations. Also, at the request of *Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro*, who wished to see Rinpoche lead the performance of the *Vajrakilaya Cham* Dance in the Sakya’s own style, Rinpoche led the Vajra dance. When Rinpoche was performing the dance, *Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro* was seen to be very happy, and he exclaimed that on that day he had seen *Vajrakilaya* himself in the form of Dagchen Rinpoche.

By the year 1959, Rinpoche was in Lhasa and due to the unfortunate circumstances following the occupation of Tibet by China, Rinpoche had to leave Tibet. I think he must have gone through Bhutan and after that he went to Darjeeling. Darjeeling is a very cold place in northeastern India. He stayed in rented quarters in close proximity to the *Ghum Sakya Monastery* for some time. I believe that around that time the professor from the University of Washington whose name was *Professor Turrell V. Wylie* was around in Darjeeling seeking Tibetan masters with whom he could work with at the University. Since he was a professor in Tibetan Studies and Language, he needed some help in his work and so he was looking for the right person to bring with him back to the States. So when he was searching around he found the 3rd *Dezhung Rinpoche* who was Dagchen Rinpoche’s wife, *Dagmo Kushog*‘s uncle. *Dezhung Rinpoche* was a very learned and kind master.
and along with him Dr. Wylie invited the whole Sakya family to the United States to work at the University of Washington in Seattle. The Sakya family was the first Tibetan family to arrive in the United States. In that first group of Tibetans to arrive in the United States, there was Dezhung Rinpoche, Dagchen Rinpoche, Dagmo kushog, Dagchen Rinpoche’s younger brother Trinley Rinpoche, and also Dagchen Rinpoche’s three sons: Minzu Rinpoche, Ani Rinpoche and Mati Rinpoche. Also in the group were Rinpoche’s youngest sister Kunyang Norbu and a Gelugpa monk named Geshe Ngawang Nornang with his niece. So I think they left from India and through Hawaii arrived in Seattle. They were the first Tibetan family as well as the first Tibetans to arrive in the United States. Once they arrived in the United States, for several years the three teachers: Dezhung Rinpoche, Dagchen Rinpoche and Trinley Rinpoche worked with Professor Turrell Wylie at the University of Washington. There were also many other scholars there and they were very helpful to those professors in their research in the Tibetan studies. After about three years of working there, they realized that they might not be able to return to Tibet immediately due to the continued occupation of
Tibet by China and so they applied for and later became American citizens. Rinpoche had a total of five sons. The three oldest, Minzu Rinpoche, Ani Rinpoche and Mati Rinpoche were born in Tibet while his two youngest sons Zaya Rinpoche and Sadu Rinpoche were born in the United States. Now that Rinpoche was an American citizen, and Rinpoche as well as Dezhung Rinpoche and the rest of the family could stay longer in the United States, Dagchen Rinpoche recommended that they make a center where the many students of the lamas could come to receive regular teachings from them. And so Sakya Thegchen Choeling came into being and the many disciples of the lamas benefited from that center because so many great masters visited the center besides the presence of the resident masters who were Dagchen Rinpoche, Dezhung Rinpoche and Trinley Rinpoche. Also many great masters such as Dudjom Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Kalu Rinpoche and Choegye Trichen Rinpoche as well as many other great masters blessed the center. Eventually Rinpoche and the Sakya family found a Christian
church which was up for sale. They bought the church and were able to make very good use of it. They remodeled everything and transformed it into what we now have in Seattle, the Sakya Monastery of

Tibetan Buddhism.
When Rinpoche was in Tibet, he gave the *Lamdre* teachings two times, the first in Sakya Monastery in Tibet in 1951 and the second time at the *Mynak Pal Lhakhang* in Eastern Tibet in 1955. Even after he arrived in the United States, from time to time he visited India, Nepal as well as many other countries to give teachings. He gave three *Lamdres* after he left Tibet. He gave the first of the three at the *Tharlam* Monastery, Nepal in 1990. The second at *Ghum* Monastery, Darjeeling, India in 1999 and the last and most recent at the *Tharlam* Monastery, Nepal in 2007. So he gave the *Lamdre* two times at *Tharlam* Monastery. In his lifetime, Rinpoche gave the *Lamdre* teachings a total of five times.
Rinpoche also travelled to India, Nepal, Bhutan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Europe, Canada and once to Tibet after having left in 1959. Basically it is impossible to really fully explain the Buddha activities of a Buddha but I have just explained to some extent and in very short the main accomplishments of Rinpoche’s life. Rinpoche has benefited so many sentient beings through his loving kindness, compassion and wisdom, and for that we will ever be grateful. This year Rinpoche showed signs of illness and also signs of getting prepared to depart from this world, and so with Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche leading the three grandsons of Rinpoche: Avikrita Rinpoche, Abhaya Rinpoche and myself as well as some of Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche’s senior monks and some of our Sakya Monastery lamas and monks, and monks from
India, offered a long life initiation for Rinpoche after which his health seemed to improve quite noticeably. Also this year when His Holiness Sakya Trizin Rinpoche visited Seattle, Rinpoche offered Dagchen Rinpoche a long life initiation as well and I think due to that and the prayers of his disciples as well as his own compassion for all of us, Dagchen Rinpoche was able to extend his life for some more time and delayed his departure so he could be with us.

However, sadly on April 29, 2016, while in Seattle, Rinpoche passed into Parinirvana and went into the thugdam state—which is a meditative state that great practitioners go into when they pass away. So Rinpoche remained in the thugdam state for 7 days, during which His Holiness Sakya Trizin Rinpoche who was not far away, in New York, arrived as quickly as he could to Seattle to help with the prayers as well as to lend us his guidance and support with all the necessary preparations during that time. And after 7 days of remaining in the state of thugdam, Rinpoche then left his holy body or his physical form.
Although his mind, Dharmakaya is still with us, he left his Rupakaya or form body. As many of you probably know, Rinpoche’s kudung (holy body) was taken to the Sakya Monastery in early May and for 49 days hence, (which is the traditional number of days during which we perform the pujas for the deceased) pujas were performed at the monastery. For an ordinary person, the 49 days of prayers are done mainly for that person to have a better rebirth and to always have the opportunity to practice dharma from one lifetime to another until enlightenment. But in the case of Dagchen Rinpoche, he was a fully enlightened being already from the start and so the purpose of our 49 day prayers was for our misdeeds and obscurations to be purified as well as for Rinpoche to bless us and that he may always look after us compassionately and lead us to enlightenment. During the over six months that the kudung resided at the Sakya Monastery, Guru Yoga puja was performed daily at the monastery. Also following his passing away into parinirvana, Rinpoche displayed many special signs for all his devoted students to see. And most recently in November, 2016, Rinpoche’s
kudung or holy body was taken from the United States to Phuntsok Podrang in New Delhi, India. Presided over by His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trichen, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, His Eminence Luding Khenchen Rinpoche as well as His Eminence Luding Khen Rinpoche, and accompanied by attendant lamas and monks, pujas were performed in the four directions. The funeral preparations and the ceremony on November 11th, 2016 was performed most magnificently. During that time, many Sakyapa followers as well as Kagyupas, Nyingmapas and Gelugpas, all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism came together to pay their last respects to this great master who came to our world to benefit sentient beings. I believe that because Rinpoche had such a great impact on all of our lives, and of course especially for those of us who were fortunate to have met him in person as well as to practice his teachings, he will forever guide us. For those of us who have already had a dharma connection through Vajrayana empowerments and so
on, the best thing that we can do now is put the teachings into practice and one of the best ways that I would recommend is to do the *Guru Yoga puja* practice through which we can receive the blessings from the *Guru* immediately and spontaneously. And for those who have not had the opportunity to meet him in person, I think just by actually hearing his name, that person can be liberated or the seeds of liberation would be sowed into that person and it won’t take too long to attain enlightenment. For those who have never met him, all they really need to do is visit the Sakya Monastery which he established, or maybe his residence the Sakya *Phuntsok Phodrang* (commonly known as the Sakya House) which is not too far away from the monastery, because those are now pilgrimage places to go to. Since Rinpoche lived in Seattle for a very long time, his blessings are very strong there. One just needs to go there and look around and the presence of Rinpoche can be felt everywhere. And also Rinpoche’s passing has a great message for all of us because Rinpoche gave many teachings and those who were able to practice it and get to
higher levels were very fortunate of course but many of us may not really have progressed that much. I am not really in a position to say many of us, but some of those who may not have taken the practices really seriously. Now that Rinpoche, the Buddha in human form, has physically left us, it really means we must strive with our utmost effort to follow the teachings that our Guru has taught us. The Guru has physically left us and we have not progressed so far in our dharma practice, the message of death means we have to really take it seriously. One day when we ourselves die, then it will be too late by then if we have not accomplished anything really worthy mainly in our dharma practice. One day it is inevitable that we die. I feel that now that Rinpoche has passed away, this should really inspire us to take the dharma practice very seriously. If we were an angry person before, through Rinpoche’s message of loving kindness and compassion, we can change that nature of ourselves and be a kind person; which could be one of the greatest offerings to Rinpoche if you want to repay his kindness. Now what is most important is that we pray to
Rinpoche regularly for him to bless us with faith, love, compassion and wisdom so that we may spontaneously be endowed with such great qualities. And through the blessings of Rinpoche I am very sure that all of those wishes can be fulfilled easily. The main dharma practice of Rinpoche was loving kindness and compassion which he himself said again and again many times. He always praised the noble qualities of Avalokiteshvara whom we call Chenrezig in Tibetan and in Chinese Kuan Yin Phu sa. Rinpoche said that Chenrezig was the main object of his prayers. Chenrezig was the deity to whom he offered prayers regularly and Rinpoche himself was actually Chenrezig in human form. Rinpoche said that reciting the Mani mantra (Om Mani Padme Hung), which is the mantra recited by almost all Tibetans, has great benefits because for Mahayana practitioners it helps fulfill the practitioner’s goal. The Mahayana practitioner’s goal is to free all sentient beings from their sufferings and to lead them to enlightenment. Rinpoche said the significances of the Mani mantra are that the syllable “Om” has the power to get rid of the sufferings of the Gods. Although the Gods live for a very long time and enjoy most of their lifespan, at the time of death, they suffer very much because their skin color which was always full of light turns dark, and other Gods ignore them, also the Gods see that due to their karma they will be reborn in the Hell Realm because all of
the results of their good *karma* have already been experienced or exhausted in the God Realm. Now the only place to go is to the Hell Realm and they are able to see that through their clairvoyance and therefore they suffer a lot because of that. So the seed syllable “*Om*” has the power to get rid of the Gods suffering of dying. The syllable “*Ma*” has the power to get rid of the suffering of the Demigods because the Demigods are always supposed to be fighting with the Gods. The Demigods have a big tree that is rooted in their realm, but the tree is so big that the fruits of the tree go way up to the heavens, and so although the tree is in the Demigod realm, the top of the tree is up in the heavens and the Gods eat their fruits, which make the Demigods jealous. Because of that, the Demigods go to war with the Gods fighting for that tree. Usually the Demigods always lose because the Gods are more powerful and so the Demigods die at the hands of the Gods. So that is their suffering. “*Ma*” gets rid of the sufferings of the Demigods. The syllable “*Ni*”- has the power to get rid of the sufferings of human beings. The sufferings of human beings are: birth, old age, sickness, and death. “*Ni*” is said to have the power to get rid of the sufferings of human beings. While “*Pad*” has the power to get rid of the sufferings of the Animal Realm because the animals are said to suffer from stupidity, they are not so smart and because of that, animals fall into traps by many other animals as well as humans which we can see clearly in our world these days. Animals eat each other
and so they have a lot of sufferings because of that as well. The syllable “Me” has the power to get rid of the sufferings of Hungry Ghosts. They are said to have big bellies, as big as a mountain and throats as narrow as a strand of hair, and so nothing can go through their throats easily, and even if it does, the food will burn the throats and not go down to their stomach. Because of that, they are always suffering from hunger and thirst, they are not able to eat or drink anything because of their throats but they still continue to exist because of their karma. They have to suffer because of their karma. Although it may seem unimaginable, it is possible since all sentient beings have their own different karmas. All sentient beings are different from each other and so therefore not all sentient beings create the same kind of karma. So they have created some karma that will lead them to that realm and they have to suffer because of that. And the syllable “Hung” which is pronounced and recited by Tibetans as “Hung” seems to have originated as “Hum”. So the syllable “Hung/Hum” has the power to get rid of the sufferings of Hell Beings because the Hell Beings suffer from extremes of cold and heat. The Hell Realm actually has many kinds of hells within it such as the hot realm and cold realm. There are also many other realms in hell but those are the two main hell realms. So some Hell Beings suffer extreme cold and some suffer from extreme heat when lava is poured on them. In the cold realm, they are submerged in an ocean of icy cold
It will take too long to go into details about the sufferings of the sentient beings of the six realms because there is so much sufferings in the six realms. Even the sufferings of each sentient being from each realm is too much to describe in detail. The power of the *Mani* mantra is said to benefit sentient beings and can get rid of each of their sufferings and lead them to enlightenment very quickly. Now although this mantra may seem to be just an ordinary string of words, that is not the case. You may wonder how these ordinary syllables “*Om Ma Ni Pad Me Hung*” gets rid of sufferings and have so much power to help beings? It is because this is the mantra of *Avalokiteshvara* who is the Buddha of compassion and this mantra is said to be *Avalokiteshvara* himself in the form of sound and therefore he himself has blessed this mantra to benefit sentient beings. It is said that even if the Buddhas were to explain the benefits of each syllable, the teaching would never end because the benefits are endless and therefore the teachings are endless.

That is why so many great masters in the past have taken this mantra as their main practice and attained great realization and have become great compassionate beings through the blessings of this mantra. *Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava* has himself said that these six syllables are the quintessence of the mind of the noble *Avalokiteshvara* and if you recite them 108 times a day, you will not take rebirth in the three lower realms which are Hell Realm, Hungry Ghost Realm and the Animal Realm and in your next
life you will attain a human body and in actuality have a vision of noble Avalokiteshvara. If you recite the mantra correctly 21 times daily, you will be intelligent and retain whatever you learn. You will have a melodious voice and become adept in the meaning of the entire Buddha Dharma. If you recite this mantra 7 times daily, all your misdeeds will be purified and all your obscurations will be cleared away in subsequent births and no matter where you take birth, you will never be separated from noble Avalokiteshvara. Guru Rinpoche also said if someone is afflicted by disease of evil influence, compared to any other mundane ritual of repelling obstacles, the merit of the six syllables are much more effective in warding off obstacles or disease. Compared to any medical treatment or cure, the six syllables are the strongest remedy against sickness and evil. And he also said the virtues of the six syllables are immeasurable. It cannot be fully described even by the Buddhas of the three times. Why you ask? It is because this mantra is the quintessence of the noble Boddhisattva Avalokiteshvara who continuously watches over the six classes of sentient beings with compassion. Thus recitation of this mantra liberates all beings from samsara. I have also recently seen a message written by Lharung Khenchen Sherab Sangpo who met Dagchen Rinpoche a couple of years ago. In his writings, Khenchen Sherab Sangpo describes how Rinpoche talked about the mantra and how his main practice was loving kindness and compassion.
and that he would recommend to others too to develop loving kindness and compassion and to pray to Avalokiteshvara and recite his mantra. These are the words of the Buddha himself so we should not doubt them. By looking at the accomplishments of Rinpoche’s life and by being fortunate enough to be close to Rinpoche, it seems very clear that the activities he engaged in are the very activities of Avalokiteshvara. So everyone who has had contact, have had a dharma connection or have even just seen him if not a dharma connection can be sure that they have seen Avalokiteshvara in person. And so after talking about the biography of Rinpoche, I have talked a bit about the benefits of the six syllable Mani mantra mainly because if Rinpoche was talking to you all, he would also say the same thing. So I just wanted to sort of repeat the same thing and say it because he would be very happy to know that this teaching about the benefits of the six syllable mantra are being taught. So just as an offering to him and also with great hopes that this practice will benefit you all since it is also the main practice of my Guru, I just wanted to share this with you all. To conclude, now that Rinpoche has already passed away, I sincerely hope that Rinpoche’s reincarnation returns to us and that his reincarnation will benefit sentient beings just as Rinpoche himself did and may his Buddha activities be just like Rinpoche’s was. I would like to thank you all for allowing me this opportunity to honor the memory of His Holiness Dorjechang Jigdal Dagchen Rinpoche by speaking about Rinpoche who was not only my grandfather but my Guru. Thank you also for letting me hopefully accumulate some merit in the process. Thank You!
Sponsored by:

Vietnam Sakya Center
(Sakya Tsechen Shiday Choling)
76 Tran Quoc Thao, Ward 7 Dist. 3
Hochi Minh City, Vietnam
info@sakya-vietnam.org