

THE EMPOWERMENT OF ÖSEL TENDZIN

On August 22, 1976, Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, empowered Thomas F. Rich, a long-time student of his, as his regent and as a holder of the Kagyü and Nyingma lineages. He did this in a ceremony performed before members of the sangha in the Shrine Hall of Karma Dzong, in Boulder, Colorado. Boulder is the central seat of Vajradhatu, the association of Buddhist centers under Rinpoche's direction.

The ceremony began with an invocation of the blessings of the Kagyü lineage. Ösel Tendzin made offerings to the body, speech and mind of Rinpoche as his root guru. Rinpoche then presented him with this extended form of his refuge name: Karma Chö-kyi Dawa Legpai Lodrö Ösel Tendzin Choglê Namgyel, which means "Karma Moon of Dharma, Excellent Intellect, Radiant Holder of the Teaching, Victorious in All Directions." Rinpoche read the name in Sanskrit, Tibetan and English and then gave a short talk about the significance of the event for the sangha and for himself. In that talk he said:

"This is a long-awaited situation in the introduction of buddhadharma into the Western hemisphere, which has become a very large and energetic task.... There is the possibility that members of the sangha, Western people, can take over from the Tibetans. We are not trying to transplant culture, particularly. Our main concern is to transplant buddhadharma, with or without culture. Buddhism is such a clear, precise and sane nontheistic tradition that it can fit in anywhere, even the middle of the Gobi desert or the Black Hole of Calcutta. And in the midst of America it is flourishing.

"This whole development is not my doing alone, but your doing as well. It is your practice, participation, warmth and devotion and sense of trust which has brought us to this point. So buddhadharma in America is our mutual creation.... And as for my relationship to Ösel Tendzin, that there has been a definite growth in his development is almost doubtless, completely doubtless, and finally doubtless. My original inspiration concerning his crystal quality of brilliance made me think that he would be the only person who could be my dharma heir and regent. I am honored, and in fact I feel great, that I am the first teacher in this country who actually can trust his own student, a special student, and make him Regent. So I am ready to make this transition and to hand over my whole being to him. In a sense I have already done so, but this ceremony makes it official. I will keep watch with my

critical eye, which is my duty. And I think the duty of the sangha is to extend its devotion and emotional commitment...”

In the second part of the ceremony, Ösel Tendzin took the samaya oath of inseparability from the teaching. He asked for the blessings of the Kagyü and Nyingma traditions and promised to act on behalf of Trungpa Rinpoche in propagating buddhadharma and the vision of the three yantras throughout the world and to implement the purposes and intentions of Vajradhatu and the Nalanda Foundation.

The empowerment ceremony ended with the final enthronement of Ösel Tendzin, in which he assumed his regency and received offerings. Rinpoche, having acknowledged that Ösel Tendzin’s oath was valid and that he had become Regent with the full blessings of the lineage, made offering to his body, speech and mind. Then there were offerings from the various divisions of Vajradhatu and of the Nalanda Foundation.

David Rome, Rinpoche’s private secretary, spoke and expressed the feeling of the entire Vajradhatu sangha when he said:

“What’s happened here today, which is the culmination of something that has been happening for six months, and before that for five years, and before that for two thousand five hundred years, doesn’t mean that we have to split up our devotion. Instead, it creates further devotion because it expands our vision. So at the same time that the sense of devotion to you, Rinpoche, is expanded, it is also extended to the Vajra Regent, Ösel Tendzin.

“I think the simplest way for me of saying what’s happened with Ösel Tendzin is that he learned how to give up. I think he learned that in some ways more deeply, and in some ways earlier than the rest of us. And because Ösel Tendzin is one of us, so to speak, that quality is tremendously inspiring. It is tremendously moving.”

The ceremony ended with the chanting of traditional liturgy by the entire gathering.

“The Empowerment of Ösel Tendzin,”
Garuda V: Transcending Hesitation
(Boulder: Vajradhatu, in association with
Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1977)

Copyright © 1977 by Chögyam Trungpa. All rights reserved.

Used by permission.