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My life: Trinley Thaye Dorje

One of the men enthroned as the 17th Karmapa, His Holiness talks to Nicole Chabot about mentors, meditation and playing Angry Birds

THE CHOSEN FEW I was born in Lhasa, Tibet, but at the age of 10 I went to India, and so I grew up mostly there. The family home was simple; nice and cosy. My father was a Nyingma (the oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism) master called Mipham Rinpoche, and my mother came from a noble family from eastern Tibet. Many people used to seek out my father for advice. My mother was his disciple and assistant. My parents were also my tutors and spent a lot of time schooling my brother [who is recognised as one of the reincarnations of a great master of the Sakya - another major school] and me. My father would teach the main classes; my mother would look after revision.

I was 11 when I was recognised as the Karmapa [head of the Karma Kagyu sub-school of Tibetan Buddhism], but was a little bit too young to feel much about it. I started my education [for the role] the same year, which consisted of studying the great Buddhist texts of philosophy, practice and meditation, receiving transmissions of empowerments and learning English. His Holiness Shamar Rinpoche has been my main teacher but I have been fortunate to live alongside many great mentors, including my parents, who I consider my first mentors.

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT Tibetan Buddhism is about practising compassion and wisdom in one's daily life and our school goes about this on the basis of a unique lineage called the transmission of Mahamudra and the Six Yogas of Naropa. These are just other terms for very similar practices that are practised and studied by the rest of the Tibetan schools, to achieve a deep understanding of life. One main difference between Tibetan Buddhism and other forms of Buddhism is the use of the Tibetan language. Also, the practice is mainly that of the Vajrayana, which is one of three main Buddhist paths - quite different to the Mahayana, which is mainly practised in China, and the Theravada, which is mostly practised in the rest of the Buddhist countries, starting from present-day India. In essence, all three yantras of Buddhism are the same, seeking liberation from disturbing thoughts and achieving clarity, so that there is harmony.

MEAT YOUR MATCH Generally speaking, although the Buddhist path is what is known as a harmless path, being vegetarian doesn't define someone as a Buddhist. If a Buddhist can become a vegetarian and chooses to do so, it's good. But some may not be able to do so, due to reasons such as health. Somehow, carrying Tibetan genes, a strictly vegetarian diet doesn't really agree with my body. When a non-vegetarian Buddhist consumes meat, he or she has to have awareness and compassion for that being. He or she should not take pleasure in it and develop an attachment to it.

BETWEEN THE LINES My time mostly revolves around practising and teaching, and though there may be worldly issues concerning the lineage [two candidates have been enthroned as 17th Karmapa, a cause of much controversy], I don't have much time for those. I was recognised by the red-hat Karmapa, the second lineage holder of the Karma Kagyu school, so until I am asked about being chosen, I usually don't think about it.

A typical day for me involves getting up, meditating, eating, meeting people, studying, sometimes teaching, some-times receiving visitors and then eating again, meditating again, taking rest and sleeping. In my spare time, I like doing things that are generally done by people of my age: reading on my iPad, watching YouTube video clips and even occasionally playing *Angry Birds*.

A KNOWLEDGE OF WEALTH My major task in the world is the development and preservation of the monastic sangha [community] of Buddhism, since it is declining. It's a tradition that has been unbroken since Buddha's enlightenment.

Wealth is essential for any society to develop and grow in harmony, and the most important wealth of all is inner wealth - that is, the human qualities and values which are deeply rooted in us. To achieve realisation, I ask my students, as I do myself, to regularly practise awareness, to generate compassion and wisdom. I'm also trying to set up schools that provide general education and bring about awareness of inner wealth.

CIVIL SOCIETY The future of Tibetan Buddhism is open - there is always room for change. I believe that the relationship between Buddhism and politics can be harmonious, since spirituality is a freedom that every individual exercises; and politics is required when there is a society. But when human values - such as our inner wealth - are forgotten, then neither spirituality nor politics have much benefit, and bad relations between them will develop. In such times, they need to seek a good lawyer and get a divorce. Also, the tulku system [the reincarnation of high lamas] has functioned well but we reincarnated lamas have to think about the tradition and whether it can still benefit sentient beings in the 21st century.

This is my fourth visit to Hong Kong. I was invited by my students here to share the Buddha dharma, to provide teachings, Q&A sessions and empowerments, for the welfare, prosperity and benefit of all sentient beings, and particularly for the people of Hong Kong.