



BIOGRAPHY OF H. H. 33RD MENRI TRIZIN, LUNGTOK TENPAI NYIMA

As 33rd Abbot of Menri Bon Monastery, H. H. Menri Trizin is spiritual head of the Tibetan Bon religion. He was born in Tibet in 1929, in the village of Kyongtsang, in the far eastern province of Amdo near the Chinese border, and was given the name Lama by the local priest.

His mother died when he was a child, and he was raised by A-Nyen Machen, an elderly friend of his family. When Lama was eight years old, his father Jalo Jongdong took him to the nearby monastery of Phuntsog Dargye Ling, where he learned to read, write, and chant and where he began his lifelong study of the Bon religion. Devoting himself to spiritual practice and scholarship, he completed his Geshe degree in philosophy at 25 under the guidance of Lopon Tenzin Lodro Gyatso.

The following year he traveled south to the Bon province of Gyalrong, where he printed copies of the Bon Kanjur from traditional woodblocks. After gathering a vast amount of material, and using mules to carry more than 100 volumes of the sacred texts, he made an arduous, six-month journey back to his monastery.

At 27, he set out on foot as a pilgrim, initially to China, where he visited a number of holy sites, and then continued on, by truck, to Lhasa. For the next several years he studied in Tibet at the Bon monasteries of Menri, Khana, and Yungdrung Ling, where he became known as Sangye Tenzin Jongdong. He also lived for a time at Drepung Monastery in Lhasa.

In 1959, he fled Lhasa for Nepal and met the Abbot of Yungdrung Ling in the province of Dolpo, where the renowned teacher was living in exile. It was also in Dolpo, at Samling Monastery, that he first encountered Tibetan scholar Professor David Snellgrove of the University of London. In Dolpo, spurred by the urgent need to preserve Bon religion and culture, Sangye Tenzin collected many important Bon texts in both printed and woodblock form, which he subsequently took to India, once again using mules as the most available and reliable means of transport.

In 1961, together with Samten Karmay and several other Bon monks, Sangye Tenzin made his way to New Delhi.

There, with the encouragement and support of Tibetan specialist E. Gene Smith (then the South Asian representative of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.) he continued his lifelong commitment to copy, print, and preserve invaluable sacred Bon texts and literature.

In 1962, with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, Sangye Tenzin Jongdong, Samten Karmay, and Tenzin Namdak taught Tibetan culture as assistants to Professor Snellgrove at the School of Oriental and African studies at the University of London where they also studied Western history and culture.

While in England and during his travels in Europe, Sangye Tenzin stayed at a number of Christian monasteries. In 1964, he attended a private audience with Pope Paul VI in Rome. Later that year, at the request of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, he, along with other volunteer teachers, opened a high school in Mussoorie in northern India for Tibetan refugee boys who had completed 8th grade.

In the mid-1960s, a permanent camp for Tibetan Bonpos was established at Dolanji, in India's Himachal Pradesh, on land chosen by Lopon Tenzin Namdak and purchased by the Catholic Relief Services in New Delhi.

In 1966, at the invitation of Tibetan scholar Per Kvaerne, Sangye Tenzin Jongdong was living in Norway and teaching Tibetan history and religion at the University of Oslo. It was then that he learned that he had been selected to succeed the 32nd Abbot Menri as spiritual leader of the Bon religion.

In 1969, after extensive preparatory initiations, he assumed his duties as the 33rd Abbot of Menri and accepted the responsibility of leading the effort to reestablish at Dolanji the original Menri Monastery that has been founded in 1405 in the Tibetan province of Tsang and destroyed during Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

Since then, with insight, skill, and tireless commitment and with the generous assistance of many friends and supporters, H. H. Menri Trizin has focused his time and attention on creating in Dolanji a vibrantly authentic Bon monastery and a living center of Bon culture and tradition.