

KHENPO KARTHAR RETREAT: THIS WEEKEND IN ANN ARBOR
October 10, 2012

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

I have worked with the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche for almost thirty years, ever since he came to me in a dream and the dream actually came true. He proceeded to manifest in my life as an actual living person. What a surprise! I posted this story some time ago, and the link is here.

<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10151123199552658&set=a.110624912657.118041.587252657&type=3>

I cannot convey in words the brilliance, compassion, and sheer kindness that Rinpoche personifies. If I had not experienced it for myself, I would never have believed these qualities existed in the world in one person.

For many years Rinpoche travelled to all of his centers, including our own center, the Heart Center KTC, here in Big Rapids, Michigan.

And we have travelled to hear him teach at the monastery where he is an abbot, Karma Triyana Dharmachakra in the mountains above Woodstock, New York. I have written before that we have made the trip to the monastery enough times to circle the equator of the Earth one and one-half times, and then some.

Time passes, and we are all growing older. Rinpoche is now 89 years of age, yet still traveling to Nepal, to Taiwan, and every once in a while to a place near where we live, in this case to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

A chance to meet Rinpoche, to sit in his presence for even a few minutes is an unforgettable experience. Spending a weekend with him is beyond my imagination, but that is just what is about to happen in Ann Arbor. Rinpoche has decided to visit that center and offer one of the rarest of dharma teachings, plus refuge, and the White Tara empowerment, all in three days. Just meeting and listening to Rinpoche teach would be enough, but there is more.

I have been to more than 500 teachings by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, have edited and transcribed scores of others, and even watched a few more being streamed live. Of course, they all were wonderful to experience and take in.

But in my opinion and in my experience the very few times that Rinpoche has given what are called the "Pointing Out Instructions," these are beyond elaboration on my part. They are just profound beyond words. They can be life changing. They were for me.

The “Pointing Out of the True Nature of the Mind” is a rare opportunity to take in the essence of the Vajrayana dharma in a session or two. In Ann Arbor, Michigan, on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, October 12th, 13th, and 14th at the Ann Arbor KTC at 614 Miner Street, Rinpoche will give a very, very special teaching which I will now tell you something about.

Back in the late 1950s, a few years before the Communist Chinese invaded Tibet, a strange thing took place. There was a khenpo (an abbot) who was teaching at one of the two Surmang monasteries in the province of Kham in Tibet. His name was Khenpo Gangshar. As I understand it, Khenpo Gangshar was taken ill and soon died. However, a few days later he returned to his body and suddenly was alive again, but there was a difference. He was no longer the same person.

Instead, he was brilliantly filled with inspiration and began to teach throughout Kham. It seems he somehow suddenly knew that Tibet would soon be invaded and that learning dharma in the gradual traditional manner would no longer be possible in the coming time. Instead, he said he was infused by certain great teachers while in the bardo (after death) with the pith essence of all of the most profound dharma teachings, and was told to teach this material to all who would listen, which he did.

What he taught is all that anyone might need to become enlightened, but in a nutshell. He taught this not only to monks and at monasteries, but in towns and to anyone he would meet along the road. He was totally inspired. Then, after about three years of teaching, Khenpo Gangshar suddenly changed back to his old personality and never gave the teachings again.

The great Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and my own teacher Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche (in person) heard and were inspired deeply by these teachings. These teachings have never been taught publically until quite recently.

Khenpo Rinpoche will present the mind instructions of Khenpo Gangshar, called “Naturally Liberating Whatever You Meet” in Ann Arbor on the above mentioned dates.

What can I say? Here is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to meet Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche AND to receive a profound (concise) teaching that has been said to be all that you need to know, and from a great lama. I am sure all of you who live anywhere near Ann Arbor are busy with your lives. But think about it for a moment. What is really important in the long run?

Chances are that an opportunity like this will never arise again in our lifetime, at least not in Michigan, and not with Rinpoche. Margaret and I will be there, even though I have taken this teaching before, and have transcribed the entire teaching word-for-word for all three times that Rinpoche has offered it. That should tell you something. There are no requirements to attend. I am amazed that it is open to the public. It is this teaching that has changed my life and given me a practice that is both doable and works! Take a chance!

Margaret and I will be there for support

A DAY IN THE TRAFFIC OF ANN ARBOR

October 13, 2012

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

It was a packed house for Khenpo Karthar's public talk Friday night. Two of my own kids were there, Lotis and Anne, plus my newest granddaughter Emma May. Emma was very good, considering she is nine-months old. For one, she fulfilled one of Rinpoche's analogies I have heard for over twenty years, which is to let the mind be fresh like a child coming into a shrine room. She came into the shrine room.

Emma was in fact just the child for that, as she craned her neck every which way, dazzled by the rich colors on all sides of her and the various colored cloths hanging from the ceiling. It was something to see. And the talk was a dharma talk for the general public. Tomorrow begins the very concise teaching called "Naturally Liberating Whatever You Meet" by the great Tibetan enlightened master Khenpo Gangshar.

And while the evening talk went off as planned and was very organized, I can't say that the rest of the day was quite as tranquil. For one, Margaret and I, and my daughter Anne, are responsible for cooking for Rinpoche, two lunches (his main meal), and one breakfast. That sounds easy enough, but it involves negotiating a strange kitchen in a town getting ready for the University of Michigan Wolverine's Homecoming football game on Saturday.

The Homecoming game in Ann Arbor is not just a football game. The entire town comes to a complete stop as more than 110,000 fans descend on the place, clogging up every major highway and street with bumper-to-bumper traffic. I should know. I grew up in Ann Arbor and used to scalp tickets at this very same stadium.

But this was Friday, not football Saturday, so I naively assumed we had some breathing room before the big game. That was a mistake on my part. Things were good as we pulled up to the Ann Arbor KTC Dharma Center Friday morning. We were there to see in-passing my daughter May who was traveling but managed to breeze through Ann Arbor just to see Khenpo Rinpoche for a short interview. And we could spend a few moments with her. We don't see her often enough.

After that Margaret, Anne and I headed out to shop for all the food we would need to cook for Rinpoche this weekend. It was busy out there but not too crazy, at least not yet. Later in the day we planned to meet for an early dinner with friends. Now I was aware enough not to try to meet for a restaurant because I knew that the football fans would be pouring into town a day early, for sure, and the wait to eat would be longer than the time allotted, etc. My idea was to get carry-out food and meet at the house where we are staying, thus avoiding the rush to restaurants by the football crowd. So it shows at least that I was thinking, just not as clearly as I might have.

Then time began to cascade, getting shorter and shorter until I was in a bind to get all the food orders in from those we were meeting with, call in the order, and then actually pick the order up, and return to where we were staying. I failed to anticipate two factors.

My first mistake was that, aside from fact that the Homecoming game was already casting its shadow on the town with streams of traffic, I failed to know that there was a hockey game Friday night. And second, as I whizzed across around the outside of central Ann Arbor I ran in to a complete stop near the Michigan Stadium and found out the entire bridge for Stadium Blvd. was out. Gone.

Since I know Ann Arbor like the back of my hand, I tried to cut across town through the central part of the city. M mistake. I ran into the hockey crowd, big time. Bumper to bumper, they were down Hoover Street, and State Street was packed both ways as far as I could see.

Since I used to drive delivery trucks in Ann Arbor as a boy, I knew every trick and alley and soon found myself almost magically picking my way through the traffic, dodging here and zooming up side streets there, etc.

But even my luck ran out and I was mired for a long time on Packard Street trying to get to where we had to pick up our food. I am sure this is more than you want to know, but just giving you a picture of our late afternoon antics. The long and the short of it is that we picked up the food and began trying to get back across town to where we were staying.

This time I went outside Ann Arbor to the big expressways and drove around the entire town, coming in from the west side.

Anyway, we got there, had food, and hightailed it over to the dharma center where we tried to find seats for everyone and passed Emma around from one to another. She had a great time.

So there you have my yesterday. It is now very early Saturday morning and Margaret and I are getting ready to head over to the center and help make pancakes for Rinpoche. I hope all of you are well.

IT'S NOT OVER TILL IT'S OVER

October 14, 2012

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

Well, the teaching is completed and it is early Monday morning, but it's not over yet. Margaret and I, along with our daughter Anne (and baby Emma), are cooking lunch for Rinpoche today and then taking him to the airport. We will be making Tibetan momos, the little filled dumplings that are so delicious. We will be getting some help from Rinpoche's attendant, Ani Karuna Tara,

who really knows this stuff. After that, who knows what? We will no-doubt eventually pop out of the bubble we are in and somehow find our way back home, about a three-hour drive.

Yet these kinds of intense events, in which so much is crammed into so little time, tend to change me somehow. I am never quite the same, and have to readjust by priorities. Of course, every time I see Khenpo Rinpoche and spend time with him, I have to create a new montage of myself after picking up all the pieces. Who knows who or how I am anymore? And it is not even over yet. I still have an interview with Rinpoche later this morning. I just am getting ready to step off that riverbank of sleep and into the stream for another day.

Yesterday we made lunch for Rinpoche, literally in the nick or niche of time, pulling the whole thing together in about forty minutes after the morning teaching session ended. Of course, we had been up very early that morning doing all the prep work. By the time we finished the lunch and did all the dishes, it was time for the afternoon teaching to begin. This whole event has been back-to-back and wall-to-wall. Hard to find time to even go to the bathroom much less wait in the long of people line for that.

After the teaching yesterday, things began to slow down a bit. Various members of my immediate and extended family began to filter in to spend a few moments with Rinpoche. My daughter May's husband Seth (my son-in-law) drove five hours straight, through wind and rain, to spend a few minutes with Rinpoche, and then had to turn right around and head back up north. That is some dedication!

Connection with Rinpoche is a little hard to explain. We all naturally want to strengthen our bond with him, because he represents such a stable and positive influence in our lives. I know he is the touchstone of my life, the pole star which always confirms my whole idea of a life direction. I don't know how it works, but if there is a possibility of being near Rinpoche in another (or many) future lives, I want to be there. All of my kids, all of my grandkids, and so many of my extended family and friends managed to make it here to Ann Arbor to strengthen the bond they have with Rinpoche or to forge a new one. There is a reason why the Tibetan word 'rinpoche' translates as "precious one."

And one of the stars of the show was my newest granddaughter Emma May, now nine-months old. Emma attended the entire two-day teaching and was quite happy to be there. She was very content, with virtually no crying, but many little coos and clucks as she climbed around on her mom and anyone else in the vicinity. Emma had a grand time, wiggling her little legs and clapping her hands as she smiled at everyone she met. Here is a picture Emma with Rinpoche at the end of the teaching.

So that is the state of the union here as I ramp up for another busy day. Hope to be back home by tomorrow. And thanks to Tyler Duncan for being such a great host to us and giving us a place to lay our heads.

TIBETAN MOMOS

October 16, 2012

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

As I write this, I am safely back home in Big Rapids after our wild weekend-plus in Ann Arbor. I have a lot to think about, but I might as well finish off this little journal of the trip with an account of what happened on Monday, our last day there.

Of course, we were up early and moving about, gathering our wits and whatever else we might need to make Rinpoche lunch. We actually showed up at the Ann Arbor KTC Dharma Centre while the translator and Rinpoche's attendant were still having breakfast. We had a lot to do and little time to do it in, because Rinpoche had to be out of the centre and on the way to the airport before 11 AM; we arrived there around 8:30 AM. And....we were going to attempt to make momos, a traditional Tibetan meal of steamed dumplings filled with all kinds of good stuff.

My daughter Ann had been making momos for some time, and even cooking them for one of the events for which she sometimes cooks at. But making momos for Rinpoche is another thing entirely. He knows exactly what momos should taste like and the recipe in Tibet must go back a thousand years or so. In other words, there is a way momos should look and taste. And so it began.

And this was complicated by the fact that Margaret, myself, and Ann each had a personal interview with Rinpoche, and since there were no other interviews scheduled for Monday morning, these things can stretch out beyond their usual 15 minutes, and they did. Both Margaret and Ann went way over, which brings me to the wildcard, which was baby Emma, who was definitely very much a part of this mix. Emma does well playing on the floor or scooting around the place AS LONG AS her mom is not too far away. However, when she figures out that mom is no longer near, that is a very different story.

And it was not just momos that we were preparing. Tibetans are used to a lot of little side dishes, and today we had things like a salad, a carefully prepared bowl of cut fruit, cooked cubes of squash, steamed bok choy, cooked daikon radish, and, of course, the momos.

We did have one saving grace and that was Rinpoche's personal attendant Ani Karuna-Tara, who volunteered to help us make the momos. How lucky for us, because, for one, she knows exactly how to make them and, as it turned out, we needed every minute of her time to get them done... right.

I had a short interview, so it was Ani Karuna, myself, and baby Emma that were center stage in the kitchen. And sure enough, it did not take Emma too long to figure out that the voice and presence of her mom had vanished and there she was, with only grandpa to entertain her.

Now Emma really loves me and we have a lot of laughs together. After all, I have no shame when it comes to making funny faces (and sounds) that Emma likes, but there is a limit to my

appeal, and that was crossed early-on. So I soon found myself touring the colorful shrine room (temple) with Emma in my arms. This worked pretty well, at least for a while.

We would look at every flower, thangka, brocade, and what-have-you. The trick was to allow Emma to gently touch each object with her tiny forefinger while saying something that sounded like “dough,” but not let her lunge and grab the object with her full fist. Emma has the strongest grip I have ever seen in a child, much less a baby. In fact, one of our nicknames for Emma is “Strong Girl.” You get the idea. And so it went.

Both Ann and Margaret finally appeared and, with a full complement of chefs, we did the next-to-impossible. We actually got the whole meal on the table, and roughly in time. Aside from babysitting, I did a lot of very fine chopping of Chinese cabbage, odd-looking mushrooms, and so on, while the dough was made, rolled out, cut, and the tiny dumplings put together and steamed. And I set the table and made the salad and fruit plate too.

When all was said, the meal tasted great and we were soon packed and on the road to the airport, where we said a sad goodbye to our beloved Rinpoche. He was off to Wichita and other places beyond that. And suddenly there Margaret and I were, sitting in an empty car, and with an empty feeling. It was over, well not quite over.

We still had to shop at Whole Foods, pick up some medicine at the Anthroposophical medicine place, and go and get all our stuff where we had been staying, because we had to empty the car to get Rinpoche, his translator and attendant, and all of their luggage, plus ourselves in the car.

Then it was about a three hour drive home. It will take a day or two to come back down to earth and to fill that empty feeling I have with my routine once again, but this blog is the first step in that process. I am home.