

# The Qualities of Gen Jamphel-la



## Gen Ngawang Sangye

Sera Je Monastery, 6 February 2008

Translated by Ven. Tenzin Tryingly

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As it will take a great amount of time, I am not able to present Gen's life in great detail. If you want to make a biography of his life, it will be a very thick book, so I will tell the main points from this life, such as how he studied.

As Gen Jamphel-la is becoming the abbot of Nalanda Monastery, I want to talk briefly about his life. I wanted to classify this talk into three sections; firstly where he was born and what he learnt at a young age, secondly how he became a monk and studied here, and thirdly how he became a geshe and his life after this. But as there isn't much time, I will say a few brief things on the second section.

Of all the students who joined our class, only 35 completed all their studies, and of these, the best 25 were selected to take their Geshe exam. My result and Gen Jamphel-la's were very far apart – there were maybe 10 people between the two of us. In our class, Segar Rinpoche was the best student. Almost every year he attained the first place in the class. The second and third position was usually held by Gen Jamphel and Gen Chöphel; some years Gen Jamphel was second and some years Gen Chöphel was second with Gen Jamphel third.

In our class, when the time arrived to become a lharam Geshe only 25 students remained, and Gen was one of them. There are five different types of Geshe with lharam being considered the highest in all three of the great monasteries of Sera, Ganden and Drepung; and Gen became a lharam geshe.



Since he got the highest degree of geshe, I think that you are very fortunate to have a teacher like him. To become a lharam Geshe, you had to study thoroughly for 18 years, and then you had to revise for the big Gelug exam that is held for the three great monasteries. So it is very fortunate for you all that you are studying with someone who got the highest level of Geshe.

When Gen Jamphel-la first came here as a refugee he was very poor and very humble. Though he faced many difficulties, he took the difficulties on his shoulders and studied very hard. When Gen was studying Buddhist philosophy, he would study early in the morning and late at night. He made very good use of electricity!

In the way we study, the main medium of our studies is debate. We put great effort into debate. Because Gen debated so much in both the morning and the evening, he developed sores on the palm of his hands.

Gen Jamphel-la also has great faith in his teacher, unlike other students, and dedicated everything to his teacher, in order to study hard.

We study five great texts: Prajnaparamita (Parchin – Ornament of Clear Realisation), Madhyamaka (Uma – Supplement to the Middle Way), Pramanavartika (Tsema – Treatise on Valid Cognition), Vinaya (Duwa), and Abhidharmakosa (Dzö – Treasury of Knowledge). Among these five subjects, Gen Jamphel-la is an expert especially in Madhyamaka and Pramanavartika, where he has great knowledge. Although he is very good in all subjects, he has especially great knowledge in Madhyamaka and Pramanavartika.

We study Prajnaparamita (Parchin) for six years. In the middle of the studies of Parchin there is a festival (rig.chung) which only happens once where the top sixteen students of Sera Je are chosen and they have to debate before all of the students. All of the monks attend a puja in the Sera je dratsang and then two monk's debate in the morning and another two in the afternoon. This continues for four days until all sixteen have debated. In this festival the most intelligent students are chosen to debate and amongst them Gen Jamphel-la came first and Gen Nyima Dorje from Tehor Kamptsen came second.

You are really very fortunate to have Gen Jamphel-la. Some centres have Geshes, but they don't really understand the Dharma, but Gen Jamphel-la understands very well. His mind is also very consistent, everyday he is the same. So many people here like him.

While Gen was studying, he used to teach many students, and this was still whilst he was still in the process of becoming a geshe. Since Gen has many students, his students were very sad when he went abroad and they found it very difficult to find another teacher. When Gen Jamphel-la went abroad, many monks were sad because he is such a good teacher; many



students requested that he remain in Sera Je. People said that the best students are leaving Sera. The best in our year left [Segar Rinpoche teaches in Tibet, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan], the second best has also left [Gen Jamphel-la is in Europe] and also the third best student [Gen Chöphel is in Taiwan]; now they are left with teachers like me!

After becoming a geshe, Gen wanted to teach Buddhist philosophy to foreigners and that is why he went to France. Because there are many people at Sera who already have a good knowledge of Buddhism, he saw that if he taught in the West, there would be a greater result than if he stayed here. He saw that if he went to the West there would be more benefit as there is not a great knowledge of Buddhism there.

I am very happy that you have great interest in his life and want to make a biography. This is a very brief explanation about Gen. If you want to know more detail, I will write this and send it to Nalanda.

I had ten close friends from our Geshe class and of these ten, Gen Jamphel-la was the best. And if you think that I am just saying this because he is my friend, then you can check with the others!

Because he attained the highest Geshe degree, and has great knowledge, especially in the subjects of Madhyamaka and Pramanavartika, you are very fortunate. Since he is now going to become abbot of Nalanda Monastery, you are very fortunate. And I wish you good study, good discipline and good success for your monastery.

*Question:* Of the ten qualities of the teacher, how can the student see whether the teacher has the qualities relating to emptiness?

*Gen Sangye-la:* In Pramanavartika, it is explained how to examine whether the teacher has the qualities of emptiness. There are two ways. The first is for the sharper student and the second is for the normal student. To examine thoroughly whether a teacher has the qualities, the student should have a little knowledge of emptiness. For the normal student who doesn't have any knowledge about emptiness, he can ask other people whether the teacher has knowledge about emptiness. For the normal student, he should ask someone who knows the teacher well, who are near to the teacher. For example to know about Holland, it is best to ask Losang Gendun. To know about Gen Jamphel-la you should ask those who are near to him. For the sharper facultied student, they should first know a bit about emptiness.

And I have already said that Gen Jamphal-la is a specialist in Uma and Tse.ma, and Uma is emptiness. So I have answered this question even before you asked it!

Afterwards I will send a detailed account of Gen Jamphel-la's life. It is very important that wherever we go, if someone asks who our abbot at Nalanda Monastery is, but we can only say



that he is from Sera, that is not good. We should know about our abbot in detail, so that's why I will write and send this.

***Colophon:***

On 6 February 2008, in response to the repeated requests from Gen Jamphel-la's students, Gen Ngawang Sangye gave this talk in his room at Ngari Kamptsen, Sera Je Monastery. The talk was translated by Gen's student, Ven. Tenzin Tryingly and later transcribed and edited by Ven. Losang Dorje.

Gen Ngawang Sangye was born in 1970 in Lhadak and entered Sera Je Monastery at the age of 9. He and Gen Jamphel-la were classmates throughout their monastic studies from 1982 → 1999 and he is now a very famous Pe.tri Gen at Sera Je with more than 1,000 students.