



KAGYU DRODEN KUNCHAB

1892 Fell Street, San Francisco, CA 94117 (415) 752-5454

Founded by His Eminence Kalu Rinpoche Directed by Ven. Lama Lodu Rinpoche

KDK's Presentation to His Eminence Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche on the Activity and Accomplishments of Lama Lodu Rinpoche for the previous Fifty Years

September 16th, 2022

Your Eminence Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche, Students, Guests, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm going to tell you today a little about the history and beginnings of Kagyu Drodren Kunchab. In doing this, I'm also giving the history of our beloved teacher Lama Lodu Rinpoche, since the story of KDK is his story too.

The day before Thanksgiving in 1979, Lama Lodu Rinpoche arrived in San Francisco, having been sent here by his teacher, His Eminence Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche, to establish one of the first Dharma centers ever to be created in the West. Stepping off the plane knowing none, with almost no money in his pocket and very little English, it must have felt a little like being sent to establish a colony on Mars.

But no, it turned out much better than that. Lama Lodu Rinpoche was quickly welcomed by the seven students who at that time made up the entire sangha of the fledgling KDK. They had all previously met Kalu Rinpoche and become his students, and they were very eager to follow and support this emissary from their teacher. They took him back to the little house they rented on Dolores Street and as they slowly learned to practice together, and began to know and trust each other, the foundations of an enduring samaya were established.

One of the first things that Lama Lodu Rinpoche noticed was the exacting way these students did the Chenrezig puja twice a day--precisely as Kalu Rinpoche had taught them. It is a testament to their dedication and to Lama Lodu Rinpoche's enduring commitment that the practice has continued for nearly fifty years, with the same prayers and offerings being performed every morning and evening without fail, at KDK San Francisco. Not a single day has been missed.

On sending him to San Francisco, Kalu Rinpoche gave the young Lama Lodu Rinpoche three tasks: to set up a city center in San Francisco, create a rural retreat center not more than a day's drive from the city, and to build stupas on that land.

Within a few years, the Dolores Street sangha had grown to 18 people and they were anxious to buy a house where they could set up a proper center and extend the scope of their Dharma activities. They eventually found a run-down three-story house in the questionable neighborhood of the Panhandle and somehow managed to pool their resources and cover a down-payment on the property. So in the fall of 1980, the Fell Street Center came to be and within a decade or so, it had become a thriving hub of Dharma activity with hundreds of members and satellite groups around the country.

Not long after this, Lama Lodu Rinpoche and his students bought 160 acres of undeveloped land in the mountains of Mendocino County where they put in electricity, a well and water system, houses, cabins, men and women's compounds and eventually nine exquisite marble stupas, which now radiate their infinite blessings out into the world, thus fulfilling the second and third of the tasks.

In the mid 1980's one of the first traditional Kagyu three-year retreats ever to be done in the US was conducted on rural land near Eugene, Oregon, which Lama Lodu and his students had bought and developed according the instructions of Kalu Rinpoche. Two more three-year retreats were begun and completed on the Mendocino property.

Over the years Lama Lodu Rinpoche has brought to his centers many of the world's most prominent Tibetan Buddhist masters, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, His Holinesses Dudjom Rinpoche, His Holiness Sakya Trichen, His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche, His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche, His Holiness Gaden Tri Rinpoche, His Eminence Thrangu Rinpoche, His Eminence Mingyur Rinpoche, and the Very Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche, among many other revered scholars and sages. And of course, His Holiness Rangjung Kunkyab, the previous Kalu Rinpoche, came here many times to give teachings and advice to Lama Lodu Rinpoche and the rest of his students.



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The three monumental tasks that His Holiness Rangjung Kunkyab gave to Lama Lodu Rinpoche were the tip of the iceberg--beneath which was the churning ocean of everyday life at KDK--with its unexpected challenges, demands and dilemmas. In addition to a dizzying schedule of teachings and initiations here and around the country, Lama Lodu Rinpoche navigated bureaucratic labyrinths, ran a complex organization on a shoestring, pulled rabbits out of hats, embodied order in chaos, averted crises, calmed and comforted suffering, and was always, always working for the Dharma, around the clock, every day and night of the year, for the countless people who needed his support, guidance, knowledge, vision, humor, warmth and love. And he did all this while steadfastly maintaining his own rigorous daily practice.

Lama Lodu Rinpoche arrived in San Francisco at a time when the Buddha-Dharma was still very new in the West. Along with people like Suzuki Roshi and Choyam Trunpa Rinpoche, he was part of the first wave of Buddhism to reach American shores and participated in that first epochal engagement with the wild American mind. The flowering of the Dharma that is now evident everywhere in the West came from the seeds planted by those pioneering mentors.

We must also remember that Rinpoche is part of the last generation of teachers we will ever meet who were raised and educated before the modern world came to Asia--and as such he is a direct emissary from the sacred roots and traditions of Tibetan culture. He has worked unceasingly to present the Dharma exactly as it was passed down to him by his own teachers, thus forming a link in an unbroken chain that reaches back to the time of Shakyamuni Buddha--and to even more distant realms, beyond history.

Because of his tenacity and unselfishness, we sometimes forget that our teacher's health is increasingly fragile and in decline. Now in his 85th year, he contends with diabetes, blood pressure issues, and lungs that were long ago compromised by tuberculosis. It is Rinpoche's great wish to have the time to teach and practice and to hand over the day-to-day responsibilities of the center to someone younger.

Your Eminence, the time has come. We must not delay in giving our beloved teacher his well-earned rest and retirement. On behalf of the KDK Board and countless others who share our concern for Rinpoche's health and wellbeing, we humbly request that you move heaven and earth if necessary to assign a director who can, without delay, take over the administration of KDK with the dedication and zeal that Lama Lodu Rinpoche has been giving it for the past half-century.

Thank you.

Jon Burrows, PhD (CFO)

Maude Honemann (KDK Board of Directors)

Dave Falla (Secretary)

Jana Silverman (KDK Board of Directors)

Jennifer McLaughlin (KDK Board of Directors)

