

Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche: A detailed biography



Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche is a meditation master in the Nyingma lineage of the Buddhist tradition. He received his education and training for ten years starting at the age of fourteen at Larung Gar in Serta, eastern Tibet, with his teacher, the great Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche, who is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest Dzogchen masters of the twentieth century.

Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche grew up in a remote village in Eastern Tibet. From an early age, he was interested in meditation and spirituality and recalls the excitement he felt visiting his first teacher, Khenpo Depa, on a daily basis while he was building a Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava statue in his hometown. At a young age, Rinpoche began reading Tibetan with his father and his first teaching came early on from Khenpo Depa, who taught him the Namcho Ngondro, foundational teachings for meditation and spirituality, for one month. It was during this time that Rinpoche really began to become inspired to study in depth, practice meditation, and begin the journey to enlightenment.

In 1983, Rinpoche and his father went on pilgrimage to meet the great Dzogchen master Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. They travelled for an entire day by horseback to see this highly respected teacher and this trip proved to be a pivotal experience in Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche's life. In the two weeks that Orgyen Chowang was visiting Larung Gar, the meditation retreat center of Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche, he had the opportunity to spend time with many special meditation masters. Rinpoche saw people receiving teachings, studying together, and practicing meditation together. It was unlike any experience he had before. Until that moment, Rinpoche didn't know what he wanted to do with his life, but after that visit, he felt inspired and it suddenly became perfectly clear.

At the end of their visit, as he and his father were getting ready to return home, Rinpoche eagerly asked his father if he could please stay and continue to study at Larung Gar and become a full-time student of Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche. His father agreed and soon they had the opportunity to meet privately with Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche where they formally requested permission for Orgyen Chowang to move to and be accepted as a student at Larung Gar. Jigmed

Phuntsok Rinpoche happily supported this decision and encouraged Orgyen Chowang to please “come back quickly” so that he could begin to learn with the other students.

As a result of this decision, Orgyen Chowang had the unique and precious opportunity to live at Larung Gar and continuously receive training and teachings from Khenpo Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche on practically a daily basis from 1983 to 1992. These ten years were a very profound and transformative period in Orgyen Chowang’s life. As a student at Larung Gar, Orgyen Chowang was able to immerse himself in the study and practice of the core texts and principles found at the heart of the Mahayana, Vajrayana and Dzogchen teachings. Over this ten-year period he received teachings, meditation instructions, and spiritual training. In particular, he developed a special appreciation of and connection with the teachings of Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava.

Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche personally taught the most precious and profound teachings of the Buddhist tradition regularly during this rare period of time. For example, on a yearly basis particular emphasis was placed on the teachings on The Six Bardos; The Secret Essence Tantra, The Longchen Nyingthik tradition as well as instructions pointing out the nature of awareness from the traditions of Guru Rinpoche, Vimalamitra, Longchenpa, and Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche’s own treasure teachings.

Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche’s training and education is authentic and unique in that he received in-depth and comprehensive teachings and advice from an enlightened Buddhist master on profound texts multiple times and over many years.

One of the highlights of his training occurred in 1987 when Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche travelled with 10,000 Tibetans to WuTaiShan (Manjushri Mountain) in eastern China on a three-month pilgrimage with Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche where he visited Buddhist sacred locations and received very precious teachings and transmissions on Longchenpa’s Seven Treasures as well as on Khenpo Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche’s own Manjushri Dzogchen treasure teachings. This trip had a very special impact on Orgyen Chowang’s life because it was the first time his eyes were opened to the possibility of traveling outside his childhood home in eastern Tibet. The special circumstances of this experience inspired him to develop strong inspiration to eventually leave his homeland in order to teach and share the teachings of Guru Rinpoche with people from all cultures, ethnicities, and parts of the world. It was during this time that it became clear that his life’s mission would be to share these transformative teachings with people all over the world.

In 1990, Orgyen Chowang completed the studies, practice, and meditation training required for the *khenpo* degree, the highest degree of Buddhist study and practice. Out of a class of over one thousand, he was among the first group of only fifty-five highly accomplished students upon whom Jigmed Phuntsok Rinpoche bestowed the degree. The graduates of this and subsequent classes from Larung Gar now teach throughout the world preserving this enlightened lineage.

In 1992 Orgyen Chowang arrived in Kathmandu Nepal where he taught at Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery for three years as a resident teacher to lamas, monks, and western students. During this period of time, he had the opportunity to receive Dzogchen teachings in the Chokling Tersar tradition from Tulku Urygen Rinpoche. In 1995 he had the great fortune to meet and receive teachings from Thinley Norbu Rinpoche. He developed a very special and deep connection with Thinley Norbu Rinpoche, and during this time he received empowerments, transmissions and teachings of the Dudjom Tersar Lineage from this great master. Soon thereafter Thinley Norbu Rinpoche personally invited him to come to the United States to live and teach. In 1996 at Thinley Norbu Rinpoche's suggestion, Lama Tharchin Rinpoche hosted Orgyen Chowang at Pema Osel Ling in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California, where he taught in the Vajrayana Foundation College of Buddhist Studies. Three years later, he moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, where he currently resides.

From 1996 to 2004, in addition to traveling to many parts of the United States teaching, Rinpoche dedicated time to teaching two groups of students four times a year in the California Napa Valley.

Between 2004 and 2009, Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche shifted his focus to his own practice and to developing his own meditation experience. He internalized the studies that he received many years before at Larung Gar and contemplated each teaching to gain a more experiential connection with what he had learned. He began working on the practice that would become the foundation for his first book, which is currently nearing completion.

With his meditation practice established and his English improving, from 2009 to 2010 Rinpoche began exploring more parts of the Bay Area and teaching in other locations around the US such as Hawaii, the East Coast, the Pacific Northwest, and several locations throughout Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

In 2011, Rinpoche founded Pristine Mind Foundation (previously known as Atiamrita), and began teaching weekly events and weekend retreats. Rinpoche teaches across a broad range of audiences to students from many backgrounds including psychology students, business professionals, long-time Dharma practitioners, and yoga practitioners.

Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche teaches from his own experience, and doesn't rely solely on intellectual descriptions. He teaches very passionately about meditation and spirituality and makes even the most complex topics seem simple and accessible. Both new and experienced students easily understand Rinpoche's teachings. Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche's students treasure him for the happiness and clarity his teachings bring to every area of their lives.