

A Biography of Choney Lama

The following biography of Choney Lama Drakpa Shedrup is excerpted from the introduction to “Sunlight on the Path to Freedom,” a translation of his commentary to the Diamond Cutter Sutra prepared by the Ancient Literature Research Department of the Sedona College of International Management.

The three lives of Choney Lama

The commentarial tradition that came out of Sanskrit, and then into the Tibetan and Chinese languages, is an extraordinary one. It literally contains over 200,000 precious books of Two-Husband knowledge: knowledge that could change this entire world.

Just imagine if all of us always remembered that all the people or situations which irritate us are actually coming from *us*. Just imagine if all of us understood that sharing what we have, and not competing with each other, is the only way to increase our income. Just imagine if we could “plant” any life we wanted. The world would literally become a paradise, for every one of us.

This is the contribution that the present book, Choney Lama’s great commentary to the Diamond Cutter Sutra, can make. And we are infinitely fortunate that it is he who wrote the commentary.

Of all the hundreds of great writers in this wisdom tradition, Choney Lama is unique in his ability to present difficult topics in an extremely clear and organized way. Rather than assuming that he is speaking to an expert in the field, he always guides us gradually, thoroughly, and logically through the teaching. It is no exaggeration to say that—of all these hundreds of eminent masters in this tradition—it is Choney Lama’s writings which have the best chance of bringing these great, world-saving ideas to the West.

Let’s look a bit at the events in his life which formed his thinking and his style of presentation. We’ll use a number of sources; the most touching is a short autobiographical piece that he wrote in verse during the last year of his life. This was at the age of 73, which was extremely old in Tibet of the 1700’s—and from the tone of it we feel that he is baring parts of his life and thinking

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that he never did before, knowing that the end of it may be near.¹ Choney Lama's present commentary to the Diamond Cutter, by the way, was written only a few years earlier, and thus we can say represents the culmination of his thinking.

In his final review of his time here, the Lama divides his life into three parts: his outer life; his inner life; and his mystical life. We'll begin, as he does, with the first.

His outer life

Choney Lama was born in the Amdo province in the northeastern part of Tibet, on the 8th day of the first month of 1675; this is considered an auspicious day of the month as the moon is just over halfway through its waxing. His mother's name was Kelsang Men, and his father was Sungkyab Bum.

He began to learn reading and writing from his father and others at the age of 7, although his parents would later say that he seemed to master these things without any help from anyone. At 9 he was ordained by Trichen Gendun Drakpa, the abbot of Choney Gunchen Monastery. Following the pattern set by sages like Je Tsongkapa centuries before, at the age of 21 he traveled to the capital city of Lhasa to deepen his studies at one of the "Great Three" monasteries. He entered Sera that year, and began his studies under Tashi Pelsang.

As a monk at Sera would do even now, one of Choney Lama's first tasks was to memorize the *Ornament of Realizations* of Lord Maitreya and Master Asanga; along with Master Chandrakirti's *Entering the Middle Way*. These two works would have given him a solid foundation in the teachings on emptiness presented by the two branches of the Middle-Way School; and it is said that for ten intense years he rarely slept a full night, steeping himself in Two Husbands Theory.

He entered the debate ground early and—again as any young monk would do now—devoted himself to what are known as the "Collected Topics of Logic and Perceptual Theory." In his autobiography he says of those years, "I studied the Topics and grasped them quickly; I think it must have been a seed from my past life"—and this seems the case with much of his life and writing to come.

From here he went on to the source of the Topics, which is Master Dharmakirti's *Commentary on Valid Perception*. From his excellent commentaries on them, and from his earlier biography, we know that he also mastered the subjects of Higher Knowledge (Abhidharma) and Vowed

¹ A short autobiographical piece: This is entitled *Words to Please Fair-Minded Folks*; see bibliography entry B10 (ACIP digital text S25004) below. We have also relied heavily on the excellent biographical summaries found in *The Treasury of Names* (pp. 485-490, B1, ACIP S12327) and *The Treasure of Knowable Things* (pp. 449-451, Vol. 1, B27, ACIP R00003). These in turn are based largely upon a biography, which we have also referenced, written by a student ten years before the versed piece; this is known as *The Play of the Stars* (B13, S25005).

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Morality (Vinaya); and thus completed the five traditional courses of study within the geshe (“master of Buddhism”) program. He stood for his geshe examinations at the age of 30, debating with distinction before 20,000 monks assembled in Lhasa.

In the following year, 1706, he travelled to Tsang Province northwest of Lhasa, where he received his full ordination. In those times, it was traditional for a monk to spend more years in his novitiate than now; probably a good custom that allowed people more time to consider making the final commitment. He then entered Gyutu Tantric College, which is one of the two major monasteries of the tradition of Je Tsongkapa dedicated to the study and practice of the higher, secret teachings of Buddhism.

For those with an interest in the specific teachers and teachings that most influenced Choney Lama during his formative years, have a look at the extensive description towards the end of Ngawang Tashi’s biography.

Again following the pattern of many great teachers, Choney Lama headed back to his home province after completing his studies, in order to share what he had learned. He caught the eye of the state preceptor of the province, Guoshi Nangso Yeshe, who was laboring to institute a philosophical college at Choney Monastery; they worked together and, when construction was completed in 1714, Choney Lama became its first head. We also know from the colophons of several of his works that the Guoshi continued to support and encourage his work for years to come.

In 1721 Choney Lama resigned his position as head of the philosophical college and devoted himself to six or seven years of writing; this was certainly one of the most productive times of his literary career. By 1727 though the Goushi had convinced him to return to formal administration and teaching; and in 1729 he went on to found yet another college, this one devoted to the study and practice of the secret teachings.

Choney Lama resigned once again around 1737, and spent the final decade of his life writing and teaching privately. Even in his old age, this included frequent journeys to other parts of Tibet, where he was invited to teach. He passed from this world in 1748.

His writings

Choney Lama’s writings span the entire subject matter of Buddhism; he had the courage and energy to delve deeply into all of its numerous major topics, each one almost a separate language onto itself. At the great Mey College of Sera Monastery, his works are considered an entire companion series to the standard textbooks for the college composed by the eminent Kedrup Tenpa Dargye (1493-1568).

Oral tradition at Sera Mey says that Choney Lama’s collected works were considered so valuable that almost all copies were kept tightly in the monastery library. This custom became a tragedy when—during the Cultural Revolution—the library was destroyed during a bombardment, and all these books burned.

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The Asian Classics Input Project (ACIP) was able to locate an entire set of the Choney Lama's collected works during our 14-year effort to catalog the massive Tibetan-language collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg; in keeping with the terms of the contract, we were able to scan and then input the entire 11 volumes and make them available without charge to the public. ACIP director John Brady and staff member Jason Dunbar especially contributed to the success of the effort to recover all of Choney Lama's writings.

A more expanded version in 14 volumes has since been published, and is found in the bibliography. Both versions of the collected works end with a pair of volumes (numbered *Aa* and *Aa-aa*) which seem to have been carved later, as all the dated colophons here (15 of them) relate to the last five years of his life. The earlier biography contains, at the end, an extensive listing of works completed up to that time, some still uncarved and a number of these it seems still absent from printings of his collected works.

The first thing to say about Choney Lama's writings is that they provide a very solid and thorough philosophical background for anyone seeking to understand this exquisite wisdom tradition. In order of the great books of the geshe course, he has first composed a massive analysis, in 800 pages, of the *Ornament of Realizations*, the classic presentation of the concepts of the Independent branch of the Middle-Way School. If we add his overviews to the same work, as well as his commentary to four of the traditional supplemental topics, Choney Lama has written well over a thousand pages on this topic.

As for the higher half of this school—called the “Consequence” branch—he has composed, in six commentaries and analytical treatments, close to another 800 pages. His textbook on Higher Knowledge (Abhidharma) runs over 400 pages; and his explications of Vowed Morality (Vinaya) more than 200.

The final geshe subject—Logic & Perceptual Theory (Pramana)—Choney Lama has covered in his own version of the Collected Topics, in 320 pages. He has also contributed important works on the Mind-Only School and the “Steps to the Path” (*lam-rim* in Tibetan)—which can be considered two supplemental topics of the geshe studies. Here too we can place his work on *siddhanta*, or the comparative study of religious systems.

But we can also say that much of Choney Lama's mastery and uniquely helpful style derive from his interests beyond the “hard” philosophical subjects. His collected works are a treasure trove of broad intellectual curiosity and spiritual exploration. He tackles for example famous deep-practice topics such as *The Offering to Lamas*, by His Holiness the First Panchen Lama, Lobsang Chukyi Gyeltsen (1565-1662), and other practice texts centered on one's personal teacher; as well as the Miktsema Mantra cycle focused upon Je Tsongkapa.

In addition, we see work on the practice of deep retreat, and personal purification, as well as details of how to maintain an ethical way of life, particularly through the three types of vows. An entire work is devoted to bodhichitta: cultivating a wish to see the entire world become a

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place of peace and happiness; and we see a work on the concept of spiritual shelter, the foundation of this aspiration.

In the secular realm, Choney Lama has written in detail on history; geography; psychology; poetics; grammar; linguistics; and calendrical calculation. On life itself, he has advised us how to extend human lifetime, and then how to take the journey into the bardo—the world beyond it.

It is atypical for great lamas of the lineage of Je Tsongkapa to comment directly upon the earliest teachings of the Buddha, but here again Choney Lama is an exception. We know that one of the first things he did when he arrived back home after his studies in central Tibet was to offer an oral recitation of the roughly 100,000 pages of the Kangyur: the direct teachings of Lord Buddha from some two thousand years before his time.

Inevitably, reading these teachings aloud to his followers must have piqued his interest in many of the works; in his commentary to the Diamond Cutter for example we see him moving freely through the ancient Indian sutras and commentaries for references, and he wrote explanations as well of the Mother Sutras; the Heart Sutra; the sutras on karma; and an important work of Arya Nagarjuna.

His biographer notes that Choney Lama studied both ancient Sanskrit and Mongolian; and he himself recommends frequent and deep explorations of the originals of the Buddha; the early Indian masters; and the “Father and his sons”—referring to the 25,000+ pages of brilliant commentary by Je Tsongkapa and his two major disciples, Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen (1364-1432) and Kedrup Je Gelek Pel Sangpo (1385-1438).

Choney Lama’s relationship to these ancient classics wasn’t just as a reader; like most great lamas, he committed many of them to memory. His prowess as a memorizer was legendary, and even in his earliest years at Sera he was appointed the *kyorpun* of his class. This is the class leader, whose duties include memorizing vast quantities of monastery textbooks and reciting them before the abbot each time the class reaches a new topic.

We see from his biography that he also memorized large sections of Je Tsongkapa’s *Great Book on the Steps to the Path (Lam-rim Chenmo)*, as well as all of his *Essence of Eloquence*; the latter is responsible for Choney Lama’s mastery of the art of interpreting the interchange of ancient Buddhist schools, without which the differences can be mystifying.

The Lama’s proficiency in memorization is said to have been particularly important during his participation in the Winter Debates of Jang Monastery. This was a chance, once a year, for the cream of the geshe candidates from the Great Three monasteries to face off against each other in a month of intermural debate—sort of the Olympics of Buddhist Philosophy which are still held today. Here he was recognized, again, as preeminent.

Beyond his mastery of philosophy and secular studies, Choney Lama excelled in the higher, secret teachings of Buddhism. Of more than 250 compositions in the various collections of his works, nearly 100 are devoted to these esoteric topics. Working your way through one of his massive commentaries on the subject is extremely comforting, since again he makes unique

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efforts to organize the material in a logical way and to attack and resolve, proactively, questions and issues that are sure to come up in a student's mind. His treatment of the workings of the inner body is especially enlightening.

From his biographies, we learn that a large part of this mastery of the higher teachings began even in his childhood, when his parents and teachers introduced him to the secret cycles of divine beings like Tara; the White Parasol; Bhairava; Vairochana; and Amitayus. At Sera this expanded to include Guhya Samaja; Medicine Buddha; Manjushri; and Sanvara.

It is said that a lot of the reason for Choney Lama's many writings on these subjects is that he would compose new works as his students at the esoteric college that he founded in 1729 required them for their own studies. It is also said that these and his other works were in such demand by students and instructors that many of them were carved almost immediately, spontaneously, so that everyone could get a copy.

Given that Choney Lama's writings are one of the best points of access to this wisdom tradition for people in the modern world, our Diamond Cutter Classics Series of translations of ancient Asian literature—which is projected to include 108 works—is emphasizing a number of these masterpieces. In addition to the present commentary to the Diamond Cutter, our team has also already begun translations of Choney Lama's texts on the Heart Sutra; Higher Knowledge (Abhidharma); Comparative School Systems (Siddhanta); and Emptiness Meditation (*ITa-khrid* in Tibetan).

The final word on his massive literary output comes from Choney Lama himself: “I may not have been any great master, but it seems that in my past lives I made many prayers to share this wisdom with others—and this is why I was able to write so extensively.” His biographer Ngawang Tashi puts it a little more bluntly: “He just *worked harder* than any other lama we ever saw.”

His inner life

In his brief autobiography, Choney Lama then moves on to describing his inner life. He is brutally frank, knowing that this might be one of the last things he ever writes. Here are some themes; on the emphasis of his private spiritual practice, he says:

It seems like a lot of people focus their private practice on trying to see divine beings, face to face. I've always thought it was more important for me to focus on improving my capacity for love; feeling compassion for those in need; working for a pure and peaceful world; and understanding where reality itself is coming from.

Here is what he has to say about meditation:

You know, there are deep states of meditative concentration that often don't have any particularly spiritual content—in scripture they are called “form realm meditations” and “formless realm meditations.” I see a lot of people making efforts in these. Myself, I

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always thought it would be better to try to master the Buddhist practice of taking shelter, where we seek to protect ourselves and others by understanding the Buddha, and emptiness.

About his goals, he says:

The world is actually a huge downward cycle: painful events triggering reactions in us that create the next painful event. One of the goals in my life was to try to break this cycle.

As for his own personal spiritual progress over the course of a well-spent lifetime, he is quite open, with statements including:

Ever since I was a child, I have had moments of spontaneous and very sincere compassion for others. Over my years of spiritual practice, I have made a very conscious effort to improve on this beautiful foundation. And I can say that now my concern for others has become, truly, heartfelt and sincere.

I don't know if I can honestly say that I've had that breakthrough moment of perceiving all beings in the universe directly, and loving them absolutely, and determining to work for them forever. On the other hand, I have worked towards this; and I do realize that if I had not, my life would have been wasted.

My main practice has been to master emptiness; but to do so in a way where compassion is at the heart of the emptiness. I can say truthfully that I have had a realization of the very core of this emptiness.

On how to reach this highest goal of seeing emptiness directly, he says:

The main difference between all the many different historical schools of Buddhism is how they view the concept of emptiness; and more precisely, what it is that emptiness is empty of: the idea of reality that we all have all the time, and which is completely mistaken.

How to fix the problem? Acquaint yourself with what each school believes is absent, in emptiness. Learn Nagarjuna. Learn Chandrakirti. Learn Tsongkapa, and learn his sons. And be very sure that you understand how things can be completely empty, and still do what they do.

Which of course is something we covered very carefully above with The Pen, and the writing that comes out of it. He says further:

The way to learn emptiness is to sit and think it out carefully. There are a thousand different proofs of emptiness to be found in the scriptures. For goodness' sake, learn them! They will set you free.

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“And don’t forget,” he says, “that the platform from which you see emptiness is a daily meditation practice. Learn all the different kinds of meditation, and ride them all the way up to the deepest parts of the secret teachings—the highest teachings of Buddhism.”

Reading through the different accounts of Choney Lama’s life—looking at them rather like a curriculum vitae for hiring an amazing person—other, unexpected, virtues seem to repeat themselves:

He was no stranger to controversy, or politics

One of the defining moments in Choney Lama’s life is the circumstances under which he stood for his geshe degree. He was born into the reign of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, an impressive scholar who had also consolidated the center of power in the country, building for example the iconic Potala Palace.

Behind this figure though was Desi Sangye Gyatso, minister of state, who spearheaded much of this activity. The Great Fifth passed away in 1682, and in one of the strangest stratagems of political history, this minister kept the fact hidden for a full 13 years, in part by using an actor to impersonate the deceased luminary.

Now geshees were often examined in public during the Great Prayer Festival in the capital, once a year; and Choney Lama had been scheduled to stand, it seems, for sort of a standard geshe degree called a *kachupa*, or “master of the ten books.” On the eve of the debates, the ruse was revealed, which led to a storm of controversy. After a brief power struggle, the minister was murdered—and the Festival cancelled.

What looked like a disaster for the young philosopher suddenly turned around. Twenty thousand monks flooded into the capital, about five times more than for a normal Prayer Festival, and suddenly it was announced that anyone who thought they were qualified were welcome to stand for even the highest geshe degree—the *hlarampa*.

Choney Lama’s teacher at the time, Tsultrim Rinchen, grabbed him and told him to go for it! But the young man was scared to death and, it seems, even ran away for a brief period. But then his sense that he should obey his teacher—which we will see was one of the guiding lights of his personality—won out.

He did show up for the final debates, and was assigned to defend concepts from the second chapter of Master Dharmakirti’s classic on logic and perceptual theory. Anyone who has had to debate this particular subject knows that it is one of the most difficult in all of Buddhism. You can guess of course the end of the story: Choney Lama excelled, and finished the new Festival before one of the largest gatherings of monks in history with the highest geshe degree in hand.

One of the figures who helped cool this situation down was the extraordinary Jamyang Shepay Dorje (1648-1721) of Drepung Monastery, who deserves a place right up with Choney Lama in his mastery of all the subjects of the ancient wisdom tradition, and his ability to present them. We even see in his biography that Choney Lama did some studies with him (the teacher is referred to there by his ordination name, Ngawang Tsundru). In fact, Choney Lama’s earlier

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biographer identifies himself as Ngawang Tashi, and there is a good chance that this is the famous disciple of Jamyang Shepa known as “Ngawang Tashi of the Clan of Sey,” who lived 1678-1738.²

Back home in Choney Province, as we have seen, Choney Lama navigated successfully around powerful government figures such as the Goushi, forging cooperations that led to mutual success. Like the administrator of any major educational institution around the world, in any historical period, he also had to make some difficult decisions—including, in Choney Lama’s case, a determination to make the curriculum at Choney Monastery one of the toughest in Tibet. This led naturally to some controversy and resistance from his fellow monks, but again he proved himself adept at diplomacy, and won the day.

He had a strong work ethic

As we have seen from his biographer’s comment above, Choney Lama knew how to work, and work hard. We see even from his childhood that he would sit and memorize prayers, all on his own, and then run out to do chores for his father—which included long stints herding the flocks in the mountains, or writing out letters and other documents in his father’s office.

His literary output speaks for itself; and we see a number of incidents in his later life where he literally has to run away and lock himself up in a little hut he had built, just to do his practice and write his books. In one incident we see him hiding from well-meaning relatives who want to bring him food; and it is said in fact that one of the reasons he agreed to the Goushi’s directive to resume his post as abbot of the monastery was that he was literally starving in his hut, while trying to write more and more books.

He took responsibility

Anyone who’s tried to design and build and run a major educational institution like the one Choney Lama did—and he did it successfully, twice—can tell you that there are countless challenges and obstacles; we can say that he was, indeed, a person who took personal responsibility for his fellows, and for getting things done.

He was also human!

We get messages from his biographies that Choney Lama though was quite human, and that he knew it. He comments that in the days when he was recognized as the best debater from Sera during the intermural contests, he had to struggle sometimes with a sense of pride. On another occasion, we see him declining to engage in a debate with some critics, for fear that he won’t be able to maintain his equanimity.

One of the toughest jobs in a Tibetan monastery is known as *kangtsen gergen*, or “house master.” This is sort of a glorified babysitter who has to watch over say 20 to 30 very young monks; keep them disciplined; see that they are well fed and dressed; and exhaust them with studies and memorizing, so they stay out of trouble. At one point in his biography, Choney Lama admits to

² *Ngawang Tashi of the Clan of Sey*: His presentation of the Collected Topics of logic is perhaps the best ever, and has been included in the present Diamond Cutter Classics Translation Series.

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us that one of the reasons he returned to his home province was that he had heard he was about to be appointed a house master at Sera!

He was open to different viewpoints

From his biographies, we learn that Choney Lama grew up in a household that was open to different viewpoints. His father, we discover, was actually not only a devout Buddhist but also a master of Bon: the ancient shamanic religion of Tibet. And so as a child, our Lama was watching his father perform Bon divinations of the future (called *naktsi* in Tibetan) even as his mother was reciting traditional Gelukpa prayers to Tara. At one point we see him, still a child, leafing through the famous *Collected Songs* of Milarepa—a saint of yet another Tibetan tradition, the Kagyu—and memorizing his favorite verses.

Choney Lama's father also practiced the path of the Ancient Ones of Tibet: the Nyingma; and for any one seeker to devote themselves to all these different approaches is quite rare in Tibetan culture. We can say in fact that Choney Lama himself would have later advised against the attempt, given his total grasp of Je Tsongkapa's insights—but at the same time he would have stood strongly for mutual respect among different paths.

There is an interesting incident towards the end of his life, in fact, where Choney Lama is approached by some devoted followers of Bon who entreat him to write several treatises about their own beliefs—which by that time he no longer held. He kindly agrees to the request, and several biographers note that, although he completed the task, these works were used privately but left uncarved, for fear of the controversy they might raise among fellow members of his monastery.

He was devoted to his teachers

The root of the Buddhist path, ever since the time of the Buddha, has always been the relationship between a fully qualified spiritual teacher, and their disciple. Choney Lama's devotion to this spiritual way is repeated constantly throughout the story of his life. We've seen how his decision to follow his teacher's advice at the Great Debate, despite his overwhelming fear of participating, set the tone for his entire life.

There is also a tender account in his biography where—on the way home to Choney—he comes to the village of a lama who had taught him briefly on his way to Lhasa more than a decade before. By now, says Choney Lama, he realizes that what this teacher had shared with him was incomplete, or even incorrect.

But at the same time he recognizes that the guru relationship is paramount to spiritual progress; and he determines to help the aging lama in any way he can. By this point in his travels Choney Lama is completely broke, but he actually pauses in the village for six months and loans himself out for *shapten* ceremonies (those lunches at the sponsor's house that we mentioned at the beginning of this introduction), to raise a small bag of coins—which he gracefully offers to his onetime Teacher. And then once more he hits the road for home.

He was very sensitive, and had a big capacity for love

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One of the first subjects that Choney Lama ever studied, still as a teenager at home, was medicine; we read that he was apprenticed under the master physician Takri Gelong, and got pretty far along in his studies, learning to treat even advanced diseases with compassion and care.

This and other events in his life served to sharpen his feelings of empathy. We often see that people who have special challenges as infants seem to gain a greater capacity for compassion. During his earliest years, it is said, his father had gone on a business trip to the east and returned with a dangerous fever, which soon infected his mother. She was also unable to nurse him, and only some special efforts by an aunt to acquire some mother's milk saved his life. It's intriguing that—much later in his life—Choney Lama has a powerful dream that Tara, a Buddha in female form, is saving his life again, by granting him spiritual milk from her breast.

On the road to Lhasa, at a place called Nakchuka, he and his companions were again caught up in a serious epidemic, and several of the group immediately died. Choney Lama paused, but only briefly—he decided that the best thing he could do for them would be to become the teacher that he eventually did.

Even in his later years he was a good son, and we witness a beautiful reunion with his parents upon his return to Choney in 1707. What we find out later about his first resignation from the abbot's post is that his mother had died in 1715, and then a dear cousin—Tenzin Sherab—a few years later, from smallpox. This threw him into such grief that he retired to a hermitage for seven long years of prayer, reflection, and writing. The first carvings of his works are said to have been a reaction by his students to this period, when they enjoyed only limited contact with him.

He knew what was important

One of the last things his biographer has to say about Choney Lama is that he really didn't care for honors, or meeting famous people, or the like. He knew what was important, which was educating himself in the path and then practicing what he had learned.

His mystical life

This brings us to the final chapter of the Lama's story, which is his own description of his mystical life—his dreams and visions. As he is being interviewed for his earlier biography, Choney Lama steadfastly refuses to reveal any of these details because—as he puts it—first of all he wishes to honor the tradition of avoiding any exaggeration of his own spiritual attainments.

Secondly, he says, he has noticed that every time he shares his special dreams or visions, even privately with close friends, they stop for months at a time! But in his final days, in his final autobiographical poem, he breaks down and shares with us at last.

There are three visions described there which are especially important for us. In Choney Lama's own words,

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The earliest dream I can remember came to me when I was but a very young boy; and it was repeated several times. I am standing on the ground of this great earth and looking off towards the eastern sky. From afar I see several figures flying towards me through the blue: they all look to be Buddhas. They pause overhead, and then fly off straight to the West. I still don't know what this dream means.

And I would have another dream. I am standing looking again to the eastern sky, and suddenly Gentle Voice—Manjushri, the embodiment of the wisdom of all the Buddhas—appears above, shining in russet gold. He is so beautiful that my breath catches. Again he is racing away towards the West, but I call up to him and ask him to pause—I am thinking that if he does, then I will have a chance to prostrate myself at his feet, if only for a few moments. And then suddenly he turns, and dives down, and melts into my chest. And I think to myself, “Oh yes; now I have received his blessing.”

In a third dream I see Nagarjuna, the realized one—the one who saw emptiness directly and wrote the greatest words on how to accomplish this feat. His body is made of pure gold, shining like the sun, and he also is travelling through the sky, headed West. He too pauses, and comes, and melts into me—and I awaken with pure joy.

If Buddhas really do live forever, and can see all future time; and if Choney Lama really did have a close connection to them, and to their greatest representatives; then it's not beyond the stretch of the imagination to say that in these dreams he was seeing a message from the future: a future when the greatest works of one of the clearest writers of the ancient wisdom tradition of Asia would be translated, and fly to the West and the rest of the modern world, to help us make a perfect world, together.