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Imagine a good-hearted American educator steeped in the values of the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights teaching and promoting those principles to remote Amazon tribes. Imagine the challenges he faces convincing people with no history of American culture or institutions, who don't speak his language, to adopt and live by the precepts he himself cherishes.

Now multiply those challenges a thousand times. To my mind, that is what Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche did to import, articulate, teach and translate the wisdom of the Buddha to those with a totally different language, tradition, culture and history.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche died way too young. That can only be due to the lack of merit of sentient beings in general, and especially of those with a proclivity for the dharma in the west.

Look at Trungpa Rinpoche's incredible pioneering work in just 17 short years in North America to bring the true dharma into the totally different language and culture of the west. By comparison, 34 years after he passed away, we really haven't made much headway in how we transmit, translate, conceive, understand, and interpret the dharma today.

On the one hand, we see some westerners, without any qualms, without blinking or thinking twice, arrogantly assuming they know others' cultural nuances and then interpreting everything according to their own culture. For instance, the moment they hear the word "compassion," they just decide they understand what that means in Buddhism, which is a wisdom tradition from the east. Not only do they explain the word in their own way, but they even rush to make judgments based on their own interpretation.

On the other hand, some lamas, who are supposed stakeholders and proponents of the dharma, are either too caught up in their own

worlds and responsibilities, or maybe just haven't had the time to turn their energy to trying to understand the totally alien culture of the west.

Basically, on both fronts, there is today minimal genuine, skilful transmission of the dharma. And so, it is in these days that we truly miss Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. For it was he who had the guts and the wits to wear a suit and tie, to mingle with and blend into the host culture, to speak its language, to live a lifestyle in which he was never raised or expected to live, and at the very same time to transmit the authentic dharma.

Some of us who claim and pretend to teach audiences that are culturally different still find ourselves, either blatantly or inconspicuously, using Trungpa Rinpoche's nuances, language, and symbols.

He gave so much thought to seemingly minute details like the dimensions of meditation cushions to suit western bodies, the set up and arrangement of shrines, and the colours, wall hangings and flower arrangements that would create the right atmosphere for teachings.

We are awed by Trungpa Rinpoche's stubborn insistence on teaching first the sravakayana path, and then the mahayana path, finally leading qualified students to the vajrayana, where he gradually and carefully introduced them to the wisdom of Vajrayogini, Cakrasamvara, and ati yoga.

That gradual path was so open, accommodating, modern and up to date. And yet, at the same time, it transmitted the true quality, flavour and blessings of the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages in a way that remained totally intact, genuine, and firmly rooted in more than a millennium of lineage transmission.

And then of course there is the incredible skilful means that Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche used to tap into the basic goodness of sentient beings through the language of drala, werma and the Shambhala teachings.

When we think of all this, we can only wonder if ever again there will be a teacher like this in the future. We can only pray that beings may be so blessed again.

It may be just my perception. But when I recall how carefully Trungpa Rinpoche ensured his own cultural traditions would not stain the authentic transmission of the Buddha's wisdom, I have to say I got disheartened when I recently heard and saw some of his own people going back to the very cultural trappings he worked so hard to shrug off. That at least is the image and feeling I had.

And this is why I see the Sakyong Wangmo's decision to revive the full spirit of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, including his full array of teachings, with all its nuances, colours and shapes, as much more than a ray of hope. It is really a bright light on the horizon.

As well, I know that some of Trungpa Rinpoche's older students, whom he nurtured and cared for so deeply, are aging, waning, and even disappearing. But quite a few are still roaming this earth, and so I am very encouraged to see many of them joining and supporting the Sakyong Wangmo in her splendid initiative.

In fact, I've long been encouraged to see so many of Trungpa Rinpoche's students remaining devoted to his teachings. And I still find it remarkable that hundreds of them left their lucrative jobs and obeyed his command to move to the god-forsaken outpost of Nova Scotia and even remain there all these many years.

But here I also have to shout, bleat and bray noisily that there is not much time for these devoted students to do what's necessary now. There are only a few years left to grab this precious opportunity and make it a reality. It is literally now or never.

If we don't act now, the Great Eastern Sun will be veiled by clouds of fear, in which we either rush to hide in the shelter of archaic culture and cheap, meaningless tradition, or else go astray in the desert of so-called critical thinking, political correctness and an individualism that merely cherishes selfishness.

Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse