

Hawai'i through the Eyes of a Bhutanese Rinpoche

by Kahuna Valley



It seems interesting how much the little Kingdom of Bhutan high up in the Himalayan Mountains near Tibet has been in the news in Hawai'i these days. We've heard that this country is shifting from a monarchy to a democracy, that the king is turning over the country to his son, and that a big art exhibit from Bhutan was the rage on O'ahu ... and here on Kaua'i, we have the wonderful opportunity to host one of the most respected Buddhist leaders of Bhutan who will be leading meditations and offering healing sessions here over the next few weeks.

The non-profit Kahuna Valley organization of Kaua'i hosted H.E. Jamgoen Trulku Rinpoche at its 6-acre retreat in Kapahi for two months this past February and March, along with his assistant lama named Hodo. These two gentle monks have been learning about our culture in the process of studying English and leadership skills under the guidance of Francesco Garripoli.



By a request from the King of Bhutan, the Rinpoche – which is a highly respected title for a Buddhist monk who is considered a treasure to his culture – was told he needed to learn English in order to become the leader he is destined to become. Through a curious process involving high level discussions and the counsel of Bhutanese astrologers, Francesco was selected to facilitate this. Jamgoen Rinpoche, who is also a “lama,” or teacher, is believed to be the reincarnation of the 17th century leader of Bhutan who united the country. At 24 years old, he is the fourth highest rinpoche in Bhutan, revered for his lineage and dedication. At the age of five he was identified by a team of lamas as a reincarnated rinpoche because of his ability to recite Buddhist scripture and select holy objects that only the ancient leader would have known. Rinpoche was one of the youngest monks to ever accomplish many scriptural memorization exercises and was observed as exceptionally gifted and talented from infancy.

Rinpoche studied and practiced under many high Buddhist lamas in Bhutan and Tibet. After completing his study of Buddhist philosophy, Rinpoche started his first three-year-retreat at the

age of 20, and then went for his further practice to a secluded monastery in a cave in the high mountains, where he stayed for more than a year. Rinpoche is being groomed to be the spiritual leader of Bhutan's monastic order and general population. His vision is to do good activities in the world and fulfill his lifework for all sentient beings.

In his country, people revere him – even bowing when they meet – so imagine the shift for him coming to laid back Hawai'i. We

so take for granted the freedom we enjoy here, from the clothes we wear to our ability to travel freely. In Bhutan, Bhutanese wear traditional clothes as dictated by the royal family, live in homes that must follow Bhutanese architectural design, and have to sign in at government check points every 20 or 30 miles when traveling. Here on Kaua'i, Rinpoche and Hodo, who every once in a while break from the traditional robes reserved for monks and don shorts - have been learning English through sessions with Francesco Garripoli utilizing his Mentor Ohana program tools that Kahuna Valley offers to teens at Kapa'a Middle School and at Kapa'a High School. Bridget Arume of the Dept. of Education has also been graciously volunteering her time to teach them English. Kyong Ho Lee, a licensed acupuncturist from O'ahu, has come to Kaua'i to help with English and much appreciated support services at Kahuna Valley. The moment she showed Rinpoche how to set up a video chat with his brother in a monastery in Taiwan was a precious moment of joy! Watching the worlds gently collide through the eyes of a monk who has spent his whole life insulated from the modern world is heartwarming.

Rinpoche says he loves Kaua'i as it reminds him of Bhutan. He and Hodo have started biking, going the 40 miles from Kapa'a to as far as Lihu'e and back in one day! This may not seem like much for a seasoned biker, but think about the fact that just ten days before, the monks couldn't ride at all! They enjoyed visiting the Hindu Temple through a personal invitation from Ceyonswami and also attended the Lawa'i Pilgrimage of Compassion where they

met many like-minded people, as well as Mayor Baptiste and his wife. They even performed a Bhutanese Buddhist chant to open Francesco's music and songwriting debut at Small Town Coffee to a standing room only crowd. That was a big step for Rinpoche as it was out of his normal comfort zone to be with so many people who were neither praying nor meditating – but it is precisely these kinds of experiences that bring out our inner strength and true leadership skills.

Thanks to Carol Yotsuda and the Garden Island Arts Council, Rinpoche got to meet with the beautiful children of Ni'ihau; he and Hodo chanted for them in Bhutanese and the youth sang songs in Hawaiian. Rinpoche and Hodo got to learn about the Hawaiian culture in many other ways during their stay, including attending a lu'au and paddling up the Wailua River (their first time in a boat!) thanks to Pua, Shelly, Rockie and Nazira of the Kawaiikini Canoe Club.

Way up in the mountains bordering Tibet and India, Bhutan, a small country of 600,000, can be thought of as an isolated island like ours. It shares many of the same challenges we do – from threatened sovereignty to teen challenges. Kahuna Valley, through its Mentor Ohana program, will be bridging youth programs between Bhutan and Kaua'i in the areas of cultural awareness and vocational/career education. Rinpoche will be active in these programs as he has been given the big responsibility of being in charge of his Sewela Monastery and two other smaller monasteries in his country that house, feed and educate over 125 monks – with virtually no funding by the government. Rinpoche says that

there are many young boys and girls that want to become monks or nuns, but the monastery simply cannot afford to house these impoverished or orphaned youth.

Members of the Kaua'i Dharma Center down Kahuna Road from Kahuna Valley have been wonderful at inviting Rinpoche to their sangha gatherings, supporting his work with donations, and attending events such as the New Year Empowerment held at the Kahuna Valley



Retreat. Rinpoche has led public meditations at the Retreat and offered private healing sessions to those fortunate enough to attend. Donations helped support the Rinpoche's monasteries and the monks he is responsible for in Bhutan.

Francesco Garripoli, who has been leading group study trips to Asia for the past 12 years, has been traveling to Bhutan to work with the senior queen's Youth Development Fund. Last year he led a group study trip there to raise awareness and funds for the monasteries and nunneries in need of support and he plans on leading other trips as he has time. He will be spending the month of May there to live in Rinpoche's monastery to assess what can be done to help, and to take photographs to document the conditions and the life of a Rinpoche who has been given lots of responsibility for a young man trying to do good in the world. 🍀

For more information or to make a donation, please contact Kahuna Valley at info@kahunavalley.org or visit

<http://www.kahunavalley.org/rinpoche-h.e.jamgoen-truelku.htm>

...and be sure to sign up for the free newsletter to be informed of upcoming events and Rinpoche's return.

