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Chogyam Trungpa: His Life and Vision

Fabrice Midal

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Master of meditation, artist, poet, social visionary—Chögyam Trungpa was all these and more. Yet "Who was Chögyam Trungpa?" is a slippery question, for who can nail down the personality of a man who by all accounts seemed to be a different person to different people at different times and on different occasions? Fabrice Midal, by steering his way between conventional Western biography and traditional Tibetan hagiography, has succeeded in painting a detailed portrait of this unconventional Tibetan lama, who is regarded as one of the most influential forces in transporting Buddhism to the West.

From his first years of teaching in Britain and the United States, Trungpa began making friends with and teaching his students in a completely free style, with few Buddhist references, adapted to the language and understanding of young Westerners. Yet his radical emphasis was on the traditional source of Buddhism: the root practice of sitting meditation.

In his oral teachings, Trungpa surprised his audiences by making no concession to their expectations, speaking directly from his heart to their hearts, without alluding to techniques and philosophy.

His work was unique in its emphasis on a secular rather than religious approach to spirituality. Among the practices that he encouraged his students to undertake were calligraphy, flower arranging, Japanese archery, tea ceremony, dance, theater, health care, psychotherapy, poetry, elocution, and translation. His founding of centers, communities, and innovative educational institutions was also part of the flowering of a new culture of Buddhism in the West. He founded Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado; Shambhala Training; and Vajradhatu, an international association of meditation centers (now called Shambhala International).

This biography presents a wealth of anecdotes from Trungpa's life, excerpts from unpublished talks, reminiscences by those closest to him, and facts from the archive that preserves his legacy—all making the book a treasure chest of insights and teachings not found in any other book published so far.

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