

ENTRANCE TO THE
GREAT PERFECTION



A Guide to the Dzogchen Preliminary Practices

Compiled, Translated, and Introduced by
Cortland Dahl

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*This book is dedicated to the long life and flourishing activities
of Chatral Sangyé Dorjé Rinpoche*

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Whatever goodness comes of this project I dedicate to the flourishing of the Great Perfection in all times and places, to the long lives of the masters who uphold its teachings, and to the enlightenment of all beings!

Tsultrim Shönu (Cortland Dahl)
Boudhanath, Nepal
November, 2008

INTRODUCTION



In the winter of 1757, a young man with little formal education but great spiritual potential began a long period of strict retreat in the highlands of central Tibet. In the months and years that followed, he experienced a number of visionary encounters with saints and buddhas, meetings that inspired him to compose some of the greatest masterpieces of Tibetan literature. His fame soon spread, and before long he was reputed to be a living buddha—one who has left behind every form of confusion and suffering and manifests the entire range of enlightened qualities. This spiritual adept came to be known as Jigmé Lingpa.

To this day, Jigmé Lingpa's legacy continues to shape the spiritual landscape of the Buddhist world. His philosophical works are studied in many of Tibet's prestigious educational institutions, while the ritual liturgies he revealed have become core practices in numerous monastic centers. The instruction manuals he wrote on profound and secret forms of meditation are widely taught to practitioners throughout Tibet and the Himalayas, and now in the West. Jigmé Lingpa was also instrumental in training some of the most influential Buddhist masters of his age. Many of the students he taught became great masters, embodying his example of deep meditative realization, profound insight, and vast compassionate activity. Yet despite his renown as a meditation master and philosopher of the highest order, he lived his entire life as a simple yogi, content to spend his days writing, meditating, and guiding the fortunate students with whom he shared a karmic bond.

Of all his achievements, Jigmé Lingpa's greatest contribution to Buddhism in Tibet lies in a revelatory collection of teachings and practices known as the Longchen Nyingtik, the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse. The prayers, liturgies, and instruction manuals contained in this collection are at once

THE SUBLIME PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT



A Concise Liturgy for the Longchen Nyینگtik Preliminary Practices

JAMYANG KHYENTSÉ WANGPO

REFUGE AND BODHICHITTA

Namo

I and all beings take refuge

In the Three Roots 'til enlightenment is won.

To attain enlightenment for the benefit of others,

I cultivate aspiration, application, and ultimate bodhichitta.

THE MEDITATION AND RECITATION OF VAJRASATTVA

AH

Upon a lotus and moon disc on the crown of my head,

Sits guru Vajrasattva and his consort.

A stream of nectar descends from the mantra in his heart,

Purifying illness, malevolent forces, misdeeds, and obscurations.

Then recite the hundred syllables:

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA VAJRASATTVA TVENOPA
TISHTA DRIDHO MÉ BHAVA SUTOSHYO MÉ BHAVA SUPOSHYO MÉ
BHAVA ANURAKTO MÉ BHAVA SARVA SIDDHIM MÉ PRAYACHA SARVA

APPENDIX I



Learning to Visualize

EXCERPT FROM *NOTES ON THE DEVELOPMENT STAGE*

BY KUNKHYEN TENPÉ NYIMA

Start out by placing a painting or statue before you, using one made by a skilled artisan and with all the appropriate characteristics. Next, arrange offerings before it and practice the preliminaries. You can do the latter in a brief form or a more extensive one; either is acceptable. Then, according to the oral instructions of Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (which he taught from the Condensed Realization of the Gurus), visualize a throne on the crown of your head. It should be held up by snow lions and piled with lotus, sun, and moon disc seats. Upon this throne imagine your kind, precious root guru in the form of the guru Vajradhara, the embodiment of all sources of refuge. Then, with great devotion, pray to him as the very essence of all the buddhas throughout the three times and offer him your body and all your possessions. Supplicate him to bless your state of being and, in particular, request his blessings so that the true absorptions of the development stage will arise in your mind this very moment. Imagine that your guru is pleased by this and smiles. He then dissolves into red light and dissolves into your crown. Once your ordinary mind and his enlightened mind have merged inseparably, rest for a while.

Once this is finished, gaze at the painting or statue placed before you. Then close your eyes and visualize the image immediately, transferring it to your own body. Train by alternating between these two steps. Once you've gotten used to the visualization, you can refine your ability by changing its size, increasing or decreasing the number of figures, visualizing the central

APPENDIX II



Retreat in the Longchen Nyingtik Lineage

In Tibet, dedicated meditators often spend extended periods in strict retreat, where they do nothing but practice the Buddha's teachings for months and years on end. In the following pages, I will give a brief overview of a traditional Longchen Nyingtik retreat as practiced in the lineage of Chatral Rinpoche, a renowned yogi who oversees numerous three-year retreat centers throughout the Himalayas.⁵⁹

THE THREE-YEAR RETREAT CURRICULUM

The traditional three-year retreat is broken up into three phases: the preliminary practices, development stage, and completion stage/Great Perfection. The first phase begins with a one-hundred-day retreat. For the duration of the retreat, four three-hour meditation sessions are practiced each day. In the first hundred days, two hours of each session are spent contemplating the topics contained in the outer preliminary practices (for the first fifty-two days) and various bodhichitta-style contemplations (for the last forty-eight days). In the third hour of each session, the practitioner accumulates the prayers of refuge and bodhichitta. By the end of the one-hundred-day retreat, the retreatant will have spent eight hundred hours contemplating and accumulated one hundred thousand refuge prayers and thirty thousand bodhichitta prayers.

Once these practices have been completed, the meditator accumulates one hundred thousand recitations of the one-hundred-syllable mantra. For the mandala practice, one must accumulate thirty thousand three-kaya

APPENDIX III



The Fourfold Heart Essence

In the fourteenth century, Longchen Rabjam compiled the Nyingma tradition's most famous collection of Great Perfection teachings, the Fourfold Heart Essence. This massive compilation spans thirteen volumes and contains hundreds of individual titles. It is perhaps the most thorough presentation of the Heart Essence teachings ever put down in writing. Over the centuries, the greatest scholars and meditators of the Nyingma school have looked to these sacred texts for guidance on the profound meditative practices of Vajrayana Buddhism. Later works on the Great Perfection, such as Jigmé Lingpa's renowned *Supreme Wisdom*, draw heavily from its lucid explanations and pith instructions. Its texts are even used as a primary source of information by Tibetan historians.

The Fourfold Heart Essence contains five sections: the Heart Essence of Vimalamitra (Vima Nyingtik), the Heart Essence of the Dakinis (Khandro Nyingtik), the Guru's Quintessence (Lama Yangtik), the Quintessence of the Dakinis (Khandro Yangtik), and the Profound Quintessence (Zabmo Yangtik).⁶⁶ The first two sections contain the Heart Essence teachings of Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava, respectively. The following three sections contain the writings of Longchenpa: The Guru's Quintessence contains his commentaries on Vimalamitra's teachings; the Quintessence of the Dakinis contains his clarifications of the Heart Essence of the Dakinis; and the Profound Quintessence deals with the teachings of both. In the following passage, the Third Dzogchen Rinpoche gives a brief overview of the contents of the Fourfold Heart Essence:

APPENDIX IV



The Nine Yanas

In the Nyingma school, the spiritual journey is framed as a progression through nine spiritual approaches, which are typically referred to as “vehicles” or “*yanas*.” The first three *yanas* include the Buddha’s more accessible teachings, those of the *Sutrayana*, or Sutra Vehicle. The latter six vehicles contain the teachings of Buddhist tantra and are referred to as the *Vajrayana*, or Vajra Vehicle.

Students of the Nyingma teachings practice these various approaches as a unity. Lower vehicles are not dispensed with in favor of supposedly “higher” teachings, but rather integrated into a more refined and holistic approach to spiritual development. Thus, core teachings like renunciation and compassion are equally important in all nine vehicles, though they may be expressed in more subtle ways. In the Foundational Vehicle, for instance, renunciation involves leaving behind “worldly” activities and taking up the life of a celibate monk or nun, while in the Great Perfection, renunciation means to leave behind all dualistic perception and contrived spiritual effort.

Each vehicle contains three distinct components: view, meditation, and conduct. The view refers to a set of philosophical tenets espoused by a particular approach. On a more experiential level, the view prescribes how practitioners of a given vehicle should “see” reality and its relative manifestations. Meditation consists of the practical techniques that allow practitioners to integrate Buddhist principles with their own lives, thus providing a bridge between theory and experience, while conduct spells out the ethical guidelines of each system.

APPENDIX V



Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro Literature

Tibetan Literature on the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro

- ▶ The liturgy for the Longchen Nyingtik ngöndro:
rNam mkhyen lam bzang by 'jigs med 'phrin las 'od zer (Jigmé Trinlé Özer)
- ▶ In addition to the liturgical arrangement itself, the primary texts for this practice were written by Jigmé Lingpa:
Thun mong gi sngon 'gro sems sbyong rnam pa bdun gyi don khrid thar ba'i them skas
rDzogs pa chen po klong chen snying thig gi thun mong gi sngon 'gro khrid kyi lag len la 'debs lugs
rDzogs pa chen po klong chen snying thig gi thun mong ma yin pa'i sngon 'gro'i khrid yig dran pa nyer gzhag
- ▶ Other important works are:
Klong chen snying thig gi sngon 'gro'i ngag 'don gyi 'bru 'grel rnam mkhyen lam sgron by chos kyi grags pa (Chokyi Trakpa)
sNgon 'gro kun las 'dus pa by g.yu khog bya bral ba chos dbyings rang grol (Yukhok Chatralwa)
sNgon 'gro'i ngag 'don rnam mkhyen lam bzang gsal byed by mkhyen brtse dbang po (Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo)
sNgon 'gro'i khrid yig thar lam gsal byed sgron me by 'gro 'dul dpa' bo rdo rje (Adzom Drukpa)
sNgon 'gro'i rnam bshad mtshungs med bla ma'i byin rlabs 'char rgyun by theg mchog rdo rje (Thekchog Dorje)
sNgon 'gro'i dmigs rim bsdu pa by dpal sprul O rgyan chos kyi dbang po (Patrül Rinpoche)

ABBREVIATIONS



- BT *Treasury of Knowledge: Systems of Buddhist Tantra*. Jamgön Kongtrul. Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2005.
- CCM *dPal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa phyogs bcu'i mun pa thams cad rnam par sel ba*. Klong chen rab 'byams. In *rNying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 26, pp. 1–629, compiled by bDud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje. Kalimpong, India: Dupjung Lama, 1982–1987.
- CG *bsKyed pa'i rim pa cho ga dang sbyar ba'i gsal byed zung 'jug snye ma*. dGe rtse ma h'a pandita tshé dbang mchog grub. Odiyan, Calif.: Dharma Publishing, 2004.
- DMW *Deity, Mantra and Wisdom: Development Stage Meditation in Tibetan Buddhist Tantra*. Jigme Lingpa, Patrul Rinpoche, and Getse Mahāpaṇḍita. Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2006.
- DR *rDzogs rim chos drug bsdus don*. dPal sprul O rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po. Chengdu, China: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2003.
- DZ *The Practice of Dzogchen*. Tulku Thondup. Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1989.
- EM *Empowerment*. Tsele Natsok Rangdröl. Kathmandu, Nepal: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1993.
- GP2 *Great Perfection, Volume 2: Separation and Breakthrough*. The Third Dzogchen Rinpoche. Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2008.
- HE *Zab mo snying thig gi gnad thams cad bsdus pa'i don kbrid lag len gsal ba*. bKra shis rgya mtsho. In *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 90 (si), pp. 1–96. Paro, Bhutan: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976.
- JL *bsKyed rim lha'i kbrid kyi rnam par bzhag pa 'og min bgrod pa'i them skas* (Dodrupchen edition). 'Jigs med gling pa. Dodrupchen Monastery, n.d.
- KG *dPal sgrub pa chen po bka' bgyad kyi spyi don rnam par bshad pa dngos grub snying po*. 'Ju mi pham rgya mtsho. Chengdu, China: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2000.

GLOSSARY



- Absolute bodhicitta* (*don dam byang sems*) – The wisdom that directly realizes EMPTINESS. [TD 1304]
- Absorption* (*ting nge 'dzin*) – “To truly grasp,” meaning that within this mental state one is able to focus one-pointedly and continuously on a given topic or on the object one is examining. [TD 1027]
- Accomplished master* (*grub thob*) – An individual who has actualized the unique realizations of the path and achieved both supreme and mundane SPIRITUAL ATTAINMENTS. [TD 403]
- Accumulation of merit* (*bsod nams kyi tshogs*) – The accumulation of positive, virtuous activities, such as making offerings, that involve a conceptual reference point. [TD 3051]
- Accumulation of wisdom* (*ye shes kyi tshogs*) – The accumulation of nonreferential WISDOM is the accumulation of the undefiled virtue that enacts the attainment of the DHARMAKAYA, the fruitional wisdom in which EMPTINESS is embraced by BODHICITTA. [TD 2594]
- Active wisdom* (*bya grub ye shes*) – The form of WISDOM that involves the enlightened form, speech, and mind spontaneously working for the welfare of sentient beings. [YT 431]
- Afflicted mind* (*nyon yid*) – A neutral, obscured state of mind characterized by fixation on the self; this form of consciousness, which continues to function until the paths of realization have been attained, observes the UNIVERSAL GROUND CONSCIOUSNESS and continually takes it to be a self. [TK 2, 197]
- Affliction* (*nyon mongs pa*) – A factor that upsets or disturbs the mind and body and produces fatigue. [TD 971]
- Afflictive obscurations* (*nyon mongs pa'i sgrib pa*) – Thought patterns, such as avarice, that obstruct the attainment of liberation. [TD 970]
- Akanishtha* (*'Og min*) – See SUPREME REALM.
- Akshobya* (*Mi bskyod pa*) – As one member of the FIVE BUDDHA FAMILIES,

RECOMMENDED READING



CONTEMPORARY PRESENTATIONS

- Chagdud Tulku. *Gates to Buddhist Practice: Essential Teachings of a Tibetan Master*. Junction City, Calif.: Padma Publishing, 2001.
- Chogyam Trungpa. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. Boston: Shambhala, 2002.
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- Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse. *What Makes You Not a Buddhist*. Boston: Shambhala, 2008.
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- . *Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet*. Boston: Shambhala, 2001.
- Sogyal Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- Thinley Norbu. *The Small Golden Key*. Boston: Shambhala, 1993.
- Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche. *The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008.

TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. *The Heart of Compassion: The Thirty-seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva*. Boston: Shambhala, 2007.
- . *The Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones: The Practice of View, Meditation, and Action*. Boston: Shambhala, 1993.
- Jamgön Mipham. *White Lotus: An Explanation of the Seven-Line Prayer to Guru Padmasambhava*. Boston: Shambhala, 2007.

NOTES



- 1 Rongzom is one of the earliest of the great scholar-adepts of the Nyingma school. His seminal work on the *Tantra of the Secret Essence* topic, *Jeweled Commentary on the Guhyagarbha Tantra*, was the first major Tibetan commentary on this tantra. To date, Rongzom has received relatively little attention from the academic world. One notable exception is Heidi Köppl's recent translation of *Establishing Appearances as Divine* (*sNang ba lhar sgrub*) (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2008). In addition to her lucid translation, Köppl also discusses the life, works, and philosophical views of Rongzom. Other important works by Rongzom include *An Introduction to the Principles of the Great Vehicle* (*Theg chen tshul la 'jug pa*) and his influential commentary on Padmasambhava's *Key Instructions on the Rosary of Views* (*Man ngag lta phreng*). I have translated this text and am preparing it for publication. It will be accompanied by commentaries on the same text by Jamgön Kongtrül (translated by Gerry Wiener) and Mipam.
- 2 Longchenpa's commentary on the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* is entitled *Dispelling the Darkness of the Ten Directions* (*Phyogs bcu mun sel*). His life and works will be discussed in detail later in the introduction.
- 3 Mipam's main commentary on the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* is actually an overview of Longchenpa's commentary (see previous note). Entitled *Luminous Essence*, this text is one of the most widely studied commentaries on the topic. The Dharmachakra Translation Committee has published a translation of this text entitled, *Luminous Essence: A Guide to the Guhyagarbha Tantra* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2009).
Mipam's influence on the trajectory of Nyingma thought can hardly be overestimated. In the present day, his texts are far and away the most commonly studied commentaries in Nyingma monastic colleges. Two excellent sources on Mipam are Douglas Duckworth's *Mipam on Buddha Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008) and John Pettit's *Mipham's Beacon of Certainty* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1999). Both contain extensive information on Mipam's life, works, and philosophical views.
- 4 Atisha initially refused the former king's request, stating that he was needed in India to help ensure that the Buddha's teachings would endure, as Buddhism was in the midst of a state of decline due to the Muslim invasions that were plaguing the Indian subcontinent. When Yeshé Ö learned of Atisha's refusal, he believed that his offering of gold to Atisha had been insufficient. To obtain more gold, he then traveled to another kingdom, but was thrown into prison by the ruler of the area. When Yeshé Ö's grandnephew, also a monk,

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SAVING THE LIVES OF ANIMALS



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