

# Kalu Rinpoche



Secret Buddhism

Vajrayana Practices



# Secret Buddhism

## Vajrayana Practices



# Secret Buddhism

## Vajrayana Practices

Kalu Rinpoche

Translation from Tibetan into French  
François Jacquemart

Translation into English  
Christiane Buchet

ClearPoint Press  
San Francisco, California

# **Secret Buddhism**

Vajrayana Practices

Published by:

ClearPoint Press

P.O. Box 170658

San Francisco, CA 94117

The original text of this book was published in France and was titled: *Bouddhisme Esotérique*

Copyright reserved for all countries:

Editions Claire Lumière

5 avenue Camille Pelletan

13760 St Cannat, France

Copyright © 1995 English Edition

ClearPoint Press

Printed in the United of America

Printed on acid-free paper

Second Printing 2002

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 95-78920

ISBN 0-9630371-6-1

## Publisher's Acknowledgement

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous help of Dwayne, Mei Yen, Gordon, and Robin Ladle; Parson and Yvoone Wong; Nelson and Teresa Kwan; Wilson and Wendy Tsai; Tau Fen and Shiao Yu Wu; Ge Shin and Celia Wang; Mike and Marie Chuang; Zimmer and Yun Ching Jan; Allen Jan; Tracy Jan; Ghieh Ning Cheng Ru; Li Ping and Yu Ping Zhao; Jeng Long and Ying Mei Jiang; Tsai Farn Jan and Family; Chain Shu and Family; Thomas Jan; and Christiane Benedict.

Many generous friends helped in the different phases of the production. Thanks to Elson Snow, Jason Espada, Rosemary Gilpin, Juanita Hall, and Karen Graham. Special thanks are due to Chen-Jer Jan for his ongoing help and kind support.





## Introduction

This volume is part of a series of three books devoted to Tibetan Buddhism as seen through the teachings of one of the most revered masters of modern times, Kalu Rinpoche. The complete three-volume work is composed of:

*Excellent Buddhism*

*Profound Buddhism*

*Secret Buddhism*

The first volume, *Excellent Buddhism*, contains a number of biographical documents on Kalu Rinpoche, notably the remarkable memories of Lama Gyaltsen. The first volume also contains teachings dealing more specifically with daily life and with the relationship between Buddhism and the West.

The second volume, *Profound Buddhism*, presents the teachings on Hinayana and Mahayana as esoteric aspects of Buddhism. *Profound Buddhism* expounds on the absolute nature of mind, emptiness, and compassion; dealing with conflicting emotions; the situation of the individual in the cycle of existence; and karma. Finally, the third volume, *Secret Buddhism*, reveals the principles of Vajrayana, mantras, empowerments, the six yogas of Naropa, and so on. It includes important chapters on the *bardo* (the period of time between death and rebirth), Tibetan medicine, and initiation lineages.

Kalu Rinpoche, Lama of Light, came to France for the first time in 1971. Tibet, an inaccessible stronghold of highest spirituality, had remained separate up to this time, on the grounds that the rest of the world could not understand her. Kalu Rinpoche, then almost 70 years old, was the first, despite the skepticism of the majority of his peers, to believe that Tibetan Buddhism could have an impact in the West.

History proved that he was right. He taught many people during numerous trips until his death in 1989. A great number of them were captivated by his charismatic radiance and set out on the path of liberation. Kalu Rinpoche is no longer with us, but the wealth, depth, and diversity of his recorded teachings remain.

Unfortunately, these recordings are not accessible to the public. Not only is the lamp kept in the dark, but this treasury runs the risk of becoming lost. Reflecting on this situation, Lama Gyaltsen, Kalu Rinpoche's nephew, who was for 40 years Rinpoche's servant and then his secretary, asked Claire Lumière Publishing to collect and edit all the available teachings of Kalu Rinpoche. We have collected all the material that we have been able to find and, wishing to present the most accurate text possible, we have retranslated these teachings directly from the Tibetan. Lama Gyaltsen then asked ClearPoint Press to translate them into English.

We thank all persons who, in one way or another, brought their precious contribution to this publication. We more particularly want to thank the people of the following Dharma centers, who authorized us to use the teachings that have been given in the framework of their institutions:

**Sogyal Rinpoche**  
**Rigpa**  
**22 rue Burq**  
**75018 Paris, France**

**Tsenjur Rinpoche**  
**Kagyü Kunkhyab Chuling**  
**4939 Sidley Street**  
**Burnaby, B.C., Canada V5J 1T6**

**Lama Gyurme**  
**Kagyü Dzong**  
**40 route circulaire du Lac Daumesnil**  
**75012 Paris, France**

**Lama Gyurme**  
**Vajradhara Ling**  
**Chateau d'Osmont**  
**Aubry-le-Panthou**  
**61120 Vimoutiers, France**

**Lama Sonam**  
**Kagyü Ling**  
**Chateau de Plaige**  
**71320 Toulon-sur-Arroux, France**

**Lama Tonzang**  
**Karma Migyur Ling**  
**Montchardon**  
**38160 Izeron, France**

**Mrs Camille Vitrac**  
**Kagyü Djong Sonam Ling**  
**261 promenade des Anglais**  
**06200 Nice, France**

**Karma Shedrup Gyamtso Ling**  
**33 rue Capouillet**  
**1060 Brussels, Belgium**

## Table of Contents

<b>Foundations of the Vajrayana</b> .....	17
<b>FROM HINAYANA TO VAJRAYANA</b> .....	17
Hinayana .....	17
Mahayana .....	18
Vajrayana .....	19
<b>PRINCIPLES AND METHODS</b> .....	20
Beyond existence itself .....	20
Empowerment .....	21
Change of identification .....	22
The yidams, pure manifestation .....	22
Continuation of the practice .....	23
<b>THE POWER OF TRANSFORMATION</b> .....	24
Multiplication of hands .....	24
The old woman who had become a tiger .....	26
<b>MASTER AND DISCIPLE</b> .....	27
Qualifications of the master .....	27
Qualifications of the disciple .....	27
One master or several masters .....	28
The right attitude .....	28
The grace of the lama .....	29
Importance of the lama .....	30
The name of Vajradhara .....	31
<b>Tantras' context</b> .....	33
<b>THE VAJRAYANA IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE THREE</b>	
<b>VEHICLES</b> .....	33
The teaching of the Buddhas .....	33
The extent of the Mahayana .....	33
Evolution and aspirations .....	34
Approaching refuge .....	34
Motivations .....	36
Various views .....	36
Appropriate treatments .....	37
<b>INTRODUCTION OF TANTRAS IN TIBET</b> .....	37
Different classifications .....	39
Unity beyond denominations .....	39
Beginning of Buddhism in Tibet .....	40
Monks and lay people .....	40
The sacrifice of King Jangchub-O .....	41
A new model .....	42
Gampopa's contribution .....	42
Tsongkhapa .....	43

Translators and lineages .....	43
Tantras in the evolution of humanity .....	44
Preeminence of the Dharma .....	45
<b>Empowerments, Vows, and Sacred Commitments .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>EMPOWERMENTS PART I .....</b>	<b>47</b>
A sacred investiture .....	47
Vase empowerment .....	48
Secret empowerment .....	50
Wisdom-knowledge empowerment .....	51
Empowerment of the precious word or oral empowerment .....	52
<b>EMPOWERMENTS PART II .....</b>	<b>52</b>
The four stages of an empowerment .....	52
Preparatory phases .....	53
Vase empowerment .....	53
Secret empowerment .....	54
Wisdom-knowledge empowerment .....	54
Empowerment of the precious word .....	54
<b>SACRED VOWS AND COMMITMENTS .....</b>	<b>55</b>
Refuge vows .....	55
Lay people and monks .....	55
Temporary or definitive vows .....	56
Monks and yogis .....	57
Importance of Hinayana vows .....	58
Sacred Vajrayana commitments .....	59
Drukpa Kunlek avoids an empowerment .....	60
The four main samayas .....	60
First samaya .....	61
Second samaya .....	62
Third samaya .....	62
Fourth samaya .....	63
How Atisha maintained his vows .....	63
<b>The Six Bardos and the Six Dharmas of Naropa .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>THE SIX BARDOS .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>THE BARDO OF GESTATION .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>THE BARDO FROM BIRTH TO DEATH .....</b>	<b>66</b>
Vast faith and compassion .....	67
Limited freedom .....	69
A progressive discovery of powers .....	70
Doubts of Sakya Pandita .....	70
Against our will .....	72
Free of any limitations .....	73
Illusory body .....	73

<b>BARDO OF DREAM</b> .....	73
Sangye Nyentonpa's hair .....	74
<b>BARDO OF THE MOMENT OF DEATH</b> .....	75
Dissolution of elements .....	75
Powa .....	77
Who wants to go to the Land of Bliss? .....	78
When false dead people become true dead people .....	80
Transfer of consciousness in Tibet .....	81
<b>BARDO OF THE NATURE IN ITSELF</b> .....	81
Reabsorption of the tigles .....	81
Attaining Awakening .....	83
Clear light or darkness .....	84
Appearing of the deities .....	84
Shariputra's mother leaves hell .....	85
<b>BARDO OF BECOMING</b> .....	86
Return to the previous life .....	87
To future life .....	88
Rebirth of the tulkus .....	89
Cycle of the bardos .....	91
Escaping when there is still time .....	92
Milarepa and the Vinaya .....	92
Milarepa and the monk who sold a yak .....	93
<b>The Six Dharmas of Naropa</b> .....	95
1 - TUMO .....	95
2 - ILLUSORY BODY .....	96
3 - DREAM .....	97
4 - THE CLEAR LIGHT .....	98
5 - POWA, TRANSFER OF CONSCIOUSNESS .....	99
6 - THE BARDO .....	99
<b>The Land of Bliss</b> .....	101
A DIFFERENT TIME SCALE .....	101
BIRTH IN A LOTUS .....	102
CONJUNCTION OF FOUR FACTORS .....	104
NOT LOOKING BEHIND .....	105
THE CARPENTER'S DAUGHTER .....	106
BENEFIT OF THE LAND OF BLISS .....	108
FROM ASSUMPTION TO CERTAINTY .....	108
<b>Mantras</b> .....	111
POWER OF SPEECH .....	111
SUBTLE ANATOMY .....	111
A SIXTH ELEMENT .....	112

WHO CAN CREATE A MANTRA? .....	112
FUNCTION OF MANTRAS .....	113
AVALOKITA, HUSBAND OF THE OGRESS .....	114
UNTRANSLATABLE MANTRAS .....	115
EASY AND BENEFICIAL .....	115
CHASING OUR RETICENCES .....	116
<b>Specific Preliminaries .....</b>	<b>119</b>
REFUGE AND BODHICITTA .....	119
The Three Jewels .....	119
Buddha .....	120
Dharma .....	121
Sangha .....	121
The Three Roots .....	121
The refuge tree .....	122
Visualization of the lama .....	122
On the behalf of all .....	123
A complete and constant attitude .....	124
Engendering bodhicitta .....	125
Meaning of suffering and happiness .....	125
The four levels of refuge .....	126
End of the session .....	126
VAJRASATTVA .....	126
The four veils .....	126
Immaterial but effective veils .....	127
Vajrasattva practice .....	128
Factors of the purification .....	129
End of session .....	130
OFFERING OF THE MANDALA .....	130
Structure of the universe .....	132
An infinite offering .....	132
Three kinds and four levels of offering .....	133
End of session .....	134
GURU YOGA .....	134
The lama, activity of the Buddhas .....	135
The seven main verses .....	136
The Buddha's tooth .....	137
Final consecration .....	139
End of session .....	140
<b>Chod .....</b>	<b>141</b>
ORIGINS OF THE PRACTICE .....	141
Intelligence and realization .....	141
Cutting the ego at the root .....	142

A practice inspired by Prajnaparamita .....	143
Padampa Sangye .....	144
Milarepa and Dharmabodhi .....	144
Padampa Sangye kicks Milarepa .....	145
Padampa Sangye and the Chinese master .....	147
Sakyapandita and the two ignorant monks .....	148
MACHIK LABDRON .....	150
Exceptional gifts .....	150
Machik Labdron and Thopa Bhadra .....	150
Fast reading .....	151
Memory of a past life .....	151
The conversion of the bad son .....	152
FUNCTION AND ASPECTS OF THE PRACTICE .....	152
Fear is empty .....	152
Sangye Nyentonpa and the collapsing cave .....	153
A remedy to madness .....	153
Essence of the practice .....	154
Offering of the mandala .....	155
Powa .....	156
Offerings .....	156
The four types of guests .....	157
CONTINUITY OF THE PRACTICE .....	159
Giving our body .....	159
Complete acceptance .....	159
Not forgetting the essential .....	160
The heart offered to the demon .....	162
The practitioner terrorized by the damaru .....	163
The sacred syllable .....	163
<b>Tibetan Medicine .....</b>	<b>165</b>
THE FIVE SCIENCES .....	165
A REVEALED MEDICINE .....	165
ILLNESSES AND MIND .....	166
THE THREE HUMORS .....	167
ANATOMY AND MICROORGANISMS .....	168
404 TYPES OF ILLNESSES .....	169
THE EIGHT BRANCHES OF MEDICINE .....	169
EMBRYOLOGY .....	170
DIAGNOSIS .....	171
OBSERVATION OF THE TONGUE .....	171
OBSERVATION OF URINE .....	172
EXAMINING THE PULSE .....	172
THE THREE BASIC PULSES .....	173
ORGAN EXAMINATION BY THE PULSE .....	173

TREATMENTS .....	175
THE FUNDAMENTAL UNITY OF MEDICINES .....	177
PHYSICIAN AND PATIENT .....	177
A HAND WITH TWO CUTTING EDGES .....	178
THE MEDICINE BUDDHA .....	179
THE FOUR MEDICINE TANTRAS .....	180
<b>The Kagyupa Lineage .....</b>	<b>181</b>
SHAKYAMUNI AND VAJRADHARA .....	181
KAGYUPA LINEAGES .....	181
VARIOUS PRESENTATIONS .....	183
DISTANT AND CLOSE LINEAGES .....	183
MAITRIPA, THE BELL AND THE BOWL .....	185
ATISHA, TARA, AND TIBET .....	186
SHAWARIPA, PEACOCKS, AND LICE .....	186
NAROPA PAYS HOMAGE TO MILAREPA .....	188
MARPA'S MISTAKE .....	188
SITU DROGON RECHEN AND THE MELTED SNOW .....	189
THE FEAST OF TUMO .....	192
PROGRAM OF A THREE-YEAR RETREAT .....	193
PRINCIPLES OF THE YIDAM MEDITATION .....	194
<b>Khyungpo Naljor and the Shangpa Lineage .....</b>	<b>197</b>
THE SOURCE OF THE TEACHINGS .....	197
The kalpa of one thousand Buddhas .....	197
Very rare teachings .....	198
Advancing toward liberation .....	198
Facets of Buddhism .....	199
Origin of the lineages .....	200
<b>KHYUNGPO NALJOR'S MASTERS .....</b>	<b>203</b>
A predestined child .....	203
Khyungpo Naljor meets Niguma .....	203
Encounter with Sukkhasiddhi .....	204
Niguma .....	205
Sukkhasiddhi .....	205
Virupa does not pay for his beer .....	207
<b>KHYUNGPO NALJOR'S MIRACLES .....</b>	<b>208</b>
The vision of Rinchen Dorje .....	208
One hundred and eight Khyungpo Naljors .....	209
Varied miracles .....	209
A monastic plot .....	210
A visit to the gods' realm and to hell .....	211
Khyungpo Naljor's death .....	212
<b>KHYUNGPO NALJOR'S SUCCESSORS .....</b>	<b>212</b>



<b>Mochokpa and Gampopa</b> .....	<b>212</b>
<b>Kyergangpa meets Avalokita</b> .....	<b>213</b>
<b>The caravan of Sangye Nyentonpa</b> .....	<b>214</b>
<b>Sangye Nyentonpa caresses the thunderbolt</b> .....	<b>215</b>
<b>The sculptor and his work</b> .....	<b>216</b>
<b>Sangye Tenpa</b> .....	<b>217</b>
<b>Decline and renaissance</b> .....	<b>217</b>
<b>Lodro Thaye met the enigmatic Karma Norbu</b> .....	<b>217</b>
<b>The work of Lodro Thaye</b> .....	<b>218</b>



# *Foundations of the Vajrayana*

## FROM HINAYANA TO VAJRAYANA

---

### **Hinayana**

The Small Vehicle (Sanskrit, Hinayana) can be condensed into two great principles:

- observance of an ethic that avoids all that can harm others
- understanding of the emptiness of the subject, also called the “non-I of the individual”

In this way, all conflicting emotions—desire, aversion, jealousy, pride, and so on—cease, and the mind remains totally absorbed in emptiness.

The state reached is called that of an *arhat*, that is to say, “conqueror of the enemy.” The term “enemy” refers to conflicting emotions. It is, to a certain degree, liberation, but not ultimate Awakening.

Although one can dwell there for an extremely long time, up to several *kalpas*, the state of an *arhat* is not definitive. A day comes when the body of a Buddha emits a ray of light that touches the *arhat*, and awakens the motivation to engage in the Great Vehicle. From then on, the *arhat* follows this path and continues on to perfect Awakening.

The Small Vehicle is reduced to these two great principles. It does not envision the possibility of becoming a Buddha by the grace of the Buddha, nor does it envision the existence of the Pure Lands, which are concepts developed in the Great Vehicle.

## Mahayana

The Great Vehicle (Sanskrit, Mahayana) also takes into account the two foundations of the Small Vehicle, but going further, it opens onto a vaster domain:

- to the observance of ethics that avoids harming, it adds the will to do everything for the benefit of others
- to the understanding of the emptiness of the subject, it adds understanding of emptiness of the object, or the "nonself of phenomena"

The Great Vehicle teaches that all external phenomena grasped by the senses as truly existing objects—such as form, sound, smell, taste, or contact—are, in fact, lacking a reality. They are engendered by the mind. The mind being empty, they are also necessarily empty. The conclusion is then reached that mind is empty internally, and that phenomena are externally empty also. Dualistic grasping of a subject and an object is illusory.

Furthermore, practitioners of the Great Vehicle never consider their own happiness a sufficient end in itself. Believing that all beings were once their father and mother, they want all beings to obtain the happiness of Awakening. The motivation of practitioners is extremely vast. Seeing that beings do not understand emptiness, and that they conceive a *me* and *other* where there is no me and no other and that they wander in the cycle of existence, Mahayana practitioners develop an infinite compassion toward them. This compassion motivates the Mahayana practitioners to take on themselves the suffering and veils of all beings and to give them some of their own happiness and positive karmic potential. Relying on the union of emptiness and compassion, they practice the six *paramitas*: giving, ethics, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom. Mahayana practitioners exert themselves for many *kalpas*, purifying themselves, and accumulating merit and wisdom, until they ultimately reach full Awakening or Buddhahood.

*Taichung, April 13, 1986 and Taipei, April 30, 1986*

## Vajrayana

The Vajrayana, or Diamond Vehicle, retains the foundations of the Small Vehicle and the Great Vehicle: not harming others and helping them, and the emptiness of subject and object. It is based on the use of particularly efficient methods of realization, called the two phases of meditation: creation and completion.<sup>1</sup> The phase of creation, using skillful means, is comparable to a bow. The phase of completion, using wisdom, is comparable to an arrow. The bow speeds the arrow toward the target. Awakening can be reached in a single lifetime. To use another comparison, when one wants to cross the country from one end to the other, one can go on foot—which is a very long trip—or with a car in less time, or one can take a plane, which is very fast. Traveling on foot corresponds to the Small Vehicle, traveling by car to the Great Vehicle, and taking a plane to the Vajrayana.

The Vajrayana considers that everything is fundamentally pure. The state of an ordinary being is only nonrealization of this purity. Likewise, the six classes of beings, if their purity is realized, appear as the six Buddhas' Lands.<sup>2</sup> When the mind is impure, all appearances are samsara. When it is pure, they are nirvana. The purpose of the methods of the Vajrayana is to produce the transformation of impure into pure.

*Taipei, April 30, 1986*

---

<sup>1</sup>These two phases relate to the meditation on deities, the *yidams*. The phase of creation includes visualizations, recitation of mantras, praises, and offerings. The phase of completion implies, most often, a formless meditation with the mind dwelling in its mode of being, after reabsorption of the visualization into emptiness.

<sup>2</sup>The six Buddhas mentioned here are the five Father Buddhas, each of them governing a family of Awakening, to whom is added Vajradhara (Dorje Chang), whose activity covers the five families.

### **Beyond existence itself**

It is not possible to reach Awakening as long as we consider our body and the manifested world endowed with an existence made up of the four elements (earth, water, fire, and air), and that these elements have themselves a true material existence. This perception is false. This is why during the phase of creation, one meditates on the external world as a pure land, the house as a divine palace, and oneself and all other beings as having the body of the deity. There is nothing conceived as materially existent, but everything is looked upon as the unsubstantial union of appearance and emptiness.

Similarly, we give a real existence to outer sounds formed by contact with the four elements, as well as inner sounds which are the speech of all beings. For this reason, sounds are interpreted and judged as pleasant or unpleasant, as sources of pleasure, fear, or annoyance. In the phase of creation, all sounds are considered as the mantra. Having no reality of their own, they are the union of sound and emptiness.

The mind itself is empty. Many thoughts and conflicting emotions proceed from it. They are as empty as the mind that produces them, but nevertheless are considered as real entities. The emptiness of the mind is similar to the ocean, and the thoughts to waves that rise and fall without interruption on the surface. Waves are none other than the ocean, and thoughts are none other than the mind.

Misunderstanding this reality, we wander endlessly in the cycle of existence. The disciple must be introduced to the realization of the true nature of his or her mind by a competent master, and then must meditate. When the disciple effectively reaches this recognition, the waves of the mind are reabsorbed in the immensity of primordial awareness. It is realization of Mahamudra or Maha-ati, the union of intelligence and emptiness, to which the phase of completion leads.

*Taipei, April 13, 1986*

## **Empowerment**

The Vajrayana cannot be practiced if, first, one does not receive a ritual transmission that empowers one and is thus called an empowerment.

A complete empowerment is divided into four parts.

- vase empowerment
- secret empowerment
- knowledge-wisdom empowerment
- speech empowerment

Moreover, an empowerment must carry four transmissions coming from an uninterrupted lineage.

- transmission of the empowerment itself
- transmission of the words forming the text of the ritual
- transmission of the meaning
- transmission of the grace or spiritual force inherent in the ritual

Grace is a subtle notion and is hard to understand. It is comparable to electrical power, invisible and very powerful. In this comparison, Buddha, the source of grace, is like an electrical power plant and the lineage that transmits grace is the wire. As long as the wire is not cut, a bulb can be connected to it at any place, and the bulb is lit. But if the wire is cut, one may have a power plant at one end and a bulb at the other, but it is impossible to get any light. If the lineage of transmission has been interrupted at a given moment, it is impossible to receive grace through an empowerment. The lineage has become entirely sterile.

In order for a ritual of empowerment to be effective, three conditions must be met.

- The lama who confers an empowerment must be motivated by love and compassion. The lama must also have certain experience of the phase of creation and phase of completion of the deity whose empowerment is given
- the disciple must trust, without reservation, the validity of the ritual and qualification of the lama

- the symbolic objects (vase, *torma*, and so on) necessary for the ritual must be present

### **Change of identification**

The empowerment is only a starting point and must be followed by proper practice. It is very difficult to directly experience emptiness of body, speech, and mind. So the Vajrayana uses skillful means. During meditation, identification with an ordinary body is replaced by an assimilation of the body to the *yidam*, the visualized deity. One no longer thinks, I am such and such person, but, thinks, for example, I am Avalokita (Tibetan, Chenrezig). One imagines having the form, colors, clothes, and ornaments of Avalokita. This is not envisioned with the idea of a material body, but as the union of visible manifestation and emptiness, similar to a rainbow, the image of the moon on water, or a reflection on a mirror. In the same way, by the mantras, speech is seen as the union of sound and emptiness. Finally, any mental activity becomes empty intellectualization, Mahamudra. The efficiency of this technique is due to the mind that has the power to become that which it wishes to be.

### **The yidams, pure manifestation**

The question of the degree of existence of the *yidams* is often asked. *Yidams* really exist, but in a way different from ours, because they are not conditioned by karma.

Avalokita, for example, is an emanation of the compassion of all the Buddhas, appearing with the intention of helping all beings. It is a totally pure manifestation from its origin, and is in no way the result of karmic causes supplying the white color of its body, the lotus in the left hand, the rosary in the right hand, and the other characteristics. The different traits and attributes of Avalokita are only the formal expression of compassion.



Likewise, its two eyes mean that it possesses perfect knowledge and compassion. With the first eye, it completely knows the totality of phenomena of the cycle of existence and liberation. Having the eye (Tibetan, *chen*) of compassion, unceasingly (Tibetan, *re*) it watches (Tibetan, *zig*) beings with love. Consequently, its name in Tibetan is Chenrezig. The silks and jewels are worn to indicate that it is endowed with all the qualities of Awakening.

### Continuation of the practice

Those who know the Vajrayana and whose qualifications are sufficient in the phase of creation and the phase of completion can use, outside of the moments of meditation, all the circumstances of existence as a support for their progress.

- with the food they absorb, they make a vajra feast
- during deep sleep, they apply instructions on clear light
- during light sleep, instructions on the dream
- at the moment of death and during the *bardo* of the nature in itself and the *bardo* of becoming, different techniques of liberation belonging to the *Six Dharmas of Naropa* can be used

In fact, people whether of superior or mediocre capabilities, who have received empowerments and directives for practicing the Vajrayana, if they do not lose diligence and preserve inner meditation without failure, can attain Awakening while continuing ordinary activity and appearing to act like everyone else.

Taipei, April 30, 1986

Following the Small Vehicle and Great Vehicle is like taking the stairs to the top floor of a high building. The Vajrayana is like taking the elevator.

Again, if all suffering and difficulty are the back of the hand, and the palm is Awakening, the Vajrayana is simply turning the hand face up.

Taipei, April 13, 1986

## THE POWER OF TRANSFORMATION

Considering that it is not possible to reach Awakening by retaining the impure components of our personality, the Vajrayana proposes a system that allows us to transform impure into pure.

- the body becomes the pure body of the *yidam*, inseparable manifestation and emptiness
- speech becomes the mantra, the pure word, inseparable sound and emptiness
- the mind becomes the five wisdoms, pure mind, inseparable intelligence and emptiness

All phenomena are production of the mind. This is why, if one develops sufficient mastery of the mind, phenomena can all be transformed. The Vajrayana uses this power of transformation to undertake the passage from impure to pure. The two following stories illustrate this.

### **Multiplication of hands**

A yogi placed one of his disciples in solitary retreat after having instructed him to meditate on the *yidam* Hevajra, who possesses sixteen arms. The disciple trained with assiduity in visualizing himself in the form of Hevajra. His meditation was good, so after some time, the disciple could effectively manifest under the form of a being with sixteen arms. He was proud of his accomplishment. His master, although far away, became aware of this pride. Wanting his disciple to make progress he came to visit him. Arriving at the hermitage, the master said.

“I traveled a long way to get here and I am a little tired. Could you bring some water and wash my feet?”

The disciple hurried to get what was needed and started to wash the feet of his master. He had hardly touched the feet when the master manifested four feet. It did not matter to the disciple who then manifested four hands. The master then showed eight feet, and the disciple followed with eight hands.



Hevajra

Sixteen feet? Sixteen hands. Thirty-two feet? Impossible to go beyond this point. The disciple was used to concentrating on having sixteen arms, but, not having realized yet the ultimate nature of the mind implying unlimited creativity, he could not manifest thirty-two arms. His master then gave him new instructions, and the disciple was able to manifest numberless emanations.

### **The old woman who had become a tiger**

Part of the region of Benares was covered by an immense forest which was the den of roaming tigers. At the edge of the forest was a small village whose residents lived in fear of the intrusion of these wild animals. It happened that an old woman of the village was always the victim of mischief by children. They made fun of her, bit her, threw rocks at her, and played all kinds of tricks on her. The old woman did not know how to get rid of the children. One day, she heard a guru and remembered this sentence, "All phenomena are products of the mind and it is possible to transform them if one trains oneself to do so."

"Very well," she told herself, "to repel the children, I just have to change into a tiger!" She began to strongly and constantly concentrate on this idea. "I am a tiger, I am a tiger." She finally succeeded by appearing as a tiger. The villagers were so scared that they ran away and never returned. The village was abandoned.

Actually, it is easier to appear with the form of a *yidam* than one of a tiger, because the tiger lacks the power to transform itself, while the *yidam* has grace and compassion. In this life however, it remains difficult to make such a metamorphosis. But it is easier during the *bardo* of becoming. The mind, then devoid of body, is extremely fluid, and any thought can be immediately actualized. It is enough to think,

"I am Avalokita," to take the form of Avalokita. It is then easy to go to the Land of Bliss or into another Pure Land.

*Taichung, April 23, 1986*

## MASTER AND DISCIPLE

The qualifications of the master and disciple are many. One can nevertheless consider three essential qualities of the master and four of the disciple.

### **Qualifications of the master**

- The master must have good knowledge of the three Vehicles (Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana). In the context of the Vajrayana, the master must have received scripture empowerments and transmissions, and must have accomplished at least some practice.

- The master must have great compassion. Whether in the presence of a vast gathering or in a small group, when the master teaches, it is always with the motivation of helping those students on the path of Awakening.

- Knowing the Dharma and motivated by compassion, the master must care only about benefiting the disciple and never pursue his or her own interest. The given instructions must not have any other function than guiding the disciples on the inner path.

### **Qualifications of the disciple**

- The disciple must have total and immutable faith and trust in the master and the Three Jewels, which are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

- The disciple must use great diligence in applying the instructions and directives received from the master

- In the Small Vehicle, the disciple must have a strong desire for liberation. In the Great Vehicle, the disciple must widen this desire to all beings and must think, "It is not enough that I liberate myself from suffering. It is even more important that

all beings attain this liberation. To efficiently act on their behalf, it is necessary for me to reach Awakening having advanced on the path leading to it.”

- In the Vajrayana, more particularly, the disciple must conform precisely to the word of the master without having the least doubt. If the master says that fire is water, the disciple must think, “I would say that this is a fire, but since the master says it is water, it must be water.”

### **One master or several masters**

Some people prefer to follow a single master, others several masters. Both are possible.

When one follows one master only, one believes that this master is Vajradhara Buddha. One trusts the master's word for everything and feels no need to receive directives from other masters.

When several masters are followed, one of them—in whom one has greatest faith—is considered the main master, and the others are emanations of the main master. One thinks that, in essence, they are one. Some great *yogis* of the past have had many masters. Khyungpo Naljor is said to have had one hundred and fifty masters, and Thangtong Gyalpo five hundred.

### **The right attitude**

Sometimes, disciples are mistaken in their conception of the master. Although they follow a master who is poor in knowledge and compassion, they think, “He or she is my unique master, I do not want to receive teachings by anyone else.” Others will follow a master; then, judging this teacher as not being good, they abandon the teacher for another, which they soon reject for a third one, and so on. This approach prevents any progression.

From the moment one considers someone as a master and receives teachings, it is no longer possible to adopt a critical

attitude. In case one eventually doubts the master's knowledge, capabilities, or behavior, it is necessary to think, "These defects are without doubt not within the master, but in my own way of seeing." Even if one loses confidence in the master, it is necessary to avoid having a negative attitude, and remain neutral without judging. It has been said, "When one has received a single word of teaching of a master, if one does not respect this master, one will be reborn five hundred times as a dog, and then as a miserable human being."

Taipei, April 29, 1986

### **The grace of the lama**

For those who practice the Vajrayana, either the phases of creation or of completion of the meditation, or even Mahamudra, it is extremely important to open to the grace of the lama.

Indeed, the lama is viewed as the union of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots.

*The lama is the Buddha, the lama is the Dharma.*

*The lama is also the Sangha,*

*In front of the lama, who is the union of the Three Jewels,  
I prostrate.*

Or,

*The lama's body: the Sangha,*

*The lama's speech: the Dharma*

*The lama's mind: the Buddha.*

*The lama's body: the lamas*

*The lama's speech: the dakinis and protectors,*

*The lama's mind: the yidams.*

Why is so much importance granted to the lama? The sun emits great light and heat, nevertheless this heat is too diffuse for a piece of paper or cloth to catch fire. On the other hand, when one uses a magnifying glass to focus the rays, they become more powerful and burn the paper, yet the nature of the rays has not changed. In the same way, the lama also

focuses the grace of Awakening in order to transmit it to the disciple. When one considers the master as the union of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots, when one prays from the depths of the heart, this grace will consume ignorance, conflicting emotions, faults, and veils.

Taipei, April 30, 1986

### **Importance of the lama**

The Tibetan term *lama* is composed of two syllables, each possessing a definite meaning.

- *la* means "the highest," or "unsurpassable," precisely as a canopy (*la-dray*, Tibetan) is the highest (*la*) piece of cloth (*dray*) in the temple. The lama is for his or her disciples, the highest being.

- *ma* signifies mother, implying that a lama looks upon all beings with the love of a mother for her only child.

For the disciple, the source lama is more important than all the Buddhas. If you rely on the Buddhas to reach Awakening, this requires much time. On the other hand, it is said that if one prays to the lama from the depths of the heart, one will very quickly attain Awakening. The grace of Buddhas and bodhisattvas resembles the radiance of the sun. Even in the hot season, the sun cannot make a piece of paper on the ground catch fire, but if you have a magnifying glass, the paper will easily burst into flames. The Vajrayana consists of inserting the magnifying glass of the lama between the grace of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and the mind of the disciples. There is the story of an Awakened being called Lekyi Repa. After having prayed to his lama for six months without interruption, he gained the realization of Mahamudra and other powers such as the ability to pass through rocks.

When one accomplishes the practice of a *yidam*, one always must keep in mind that the *yidam* is one with the source lama. Thus, one receives both the grace of the *yidam*



and that of the lama and quickly makes progress toward liberation.

The importance of the source lama is great. It is said that one can stop making offerings to the Buddhas and keep only making those to the lama, because these offerings will be incomparably powerful in accumulating merit and wisdom.

Each lineage offers meditations relating to the great masters of the past, whether it is Padmasambhava for the Nyingmapas, Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa for the Kagyupas, or Tsongkhapa for the Gelukpas. When one practices these meditations, these masters of the past are, in essence, not considered as different from the source lama.

*New Delhi, February 1985*

### **The name of Vajradhara**

To reveal the tantras, the Buddha took the form of Vajradhara (Tibetan, Dorje Chang). This name means, "The one who holds the vajra." *Vajra*, comprising the idea of stability and indestructibility, refers to realization of emptiness, indestructible by nature. *Dhara* (the one who holds) means that the Buddha completely possesses this realization. Vajradhara is represented as holding in his hands a bell, symbol of the wisdom realizing emptiness, and a vajra, symbol of skillful means implemented to help all beings realize emptiness. This is why he is also called "Union of wisdom and means."

*New Delhi, February 1985*



Vajradhara

# Tantras' context

## THE VAJRAYANA IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE THREE VEHICLES

---

### The teaching of the Buddhas

In the *kalpa* which we live, one thousand Buddhas are said to appear. The first three Buddhas were Krakukandra, Kanaka Muni, and Kashyapa, whose teachings have become blurred. The fourth one is Shakyamuni Buddha, whose tradition today remains alive.

The teachings offered by these Buddhas are fundamentally identical. All have expounded the Vehicle of the "Listeners" and that of the "Solitary Buddhas" within the framework of Hinayana, as well as the bodhisattva vehicle in the Mahayana, just as the future Buddhas of this *kalpa* will teach. Because of his aspiration, wishes, and the circumstances of his manifestation, Shakyamuni Buddha differs from other Buddhas for he spread the Vajrayana teachings contained in the tantras on a large scale.

As for the disciples, in essence, they present no difference. All beings have a Buddha potential, the *tathagatagarbha*. However, on a more immediate level, because of their respective karma, they have various spiritual capabilities. This explains the diversity of the vehicles.

### The extent of the Mahayana

It would be useless to deny the differences between one vehicle and the other, while the Buddha himself made a strong distinction between Hinayana and Mahayana in a sutra.

*Mahayana shines like the sun and moon,  
Hinayana as a spark bursting out of fire;*

*Mahayana is high as Mount Meru,  
Hinayana no greater than an anthill;  
Mahayana is vast as the ocean,  
Hinayana small as a puddle of water.*

### **Evolution and aspirations**

Because of these differences, there is the tendency to think that the Mahayana teaching, because of its superiority, should be the only one to be taught, at the exclusion of any other vehicle. From a practical point of view, rejecting Hinayana teachings would deprive us of an approach of great value. Let us suppose that we dress a child in adult clothes. They would not fit, no more than children's clothes would fit an adult. In the spiritual domain, appropriate teachings correspond to various degrees of evolution.

We also must consider the diversity of individual aspiration and mentality. Let us take the example of a great restaurant. Theoretically, a dish or a single menu should fulfill its required function, which is to feed those who come there. Nevertheless, a restaurant displaying a single dish would no doubt have few customers. Stomachs would be filled, but various tastes would not be satisfied. This is why restaurants present a list of various dishes. Even within a family, the children do not like the same food. In all areas, everyone has tastes, likings, inclinations, and this includes the spiritual domain. A teaching must take into account the maturity of disciples, and also their individual personalities.

### **Approaching refuge**

The distinction between Buddhists and non-Buddhists resides in *taking refuge* in the Three Jewels. Buddhists take refuge, non-Buddhists do not.

The Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—are identical in the Hinayana and Mahayana, but the teachings have some differences in the notion of approaching refuge.

In the Hinayana, one takes refuge for oneself, with the purpose of liberating oneself from the suffering of samsara. The vision of Mahayana is larger. In the Mahayana, one takes refuge for the purpose of liberating all beings in samsara, or by thinking of all beings as taking refuge at the same time and by doing so, eliminating their suffering. In the Hinayana, the practitioner takes refuge until death occurs, while in Mahayana, it is done until attaining Awakening.

Finally, the Vajrayana offers a unique approach. One takes refuge not only in the Three Jewels, but also in the Three Roots.

- the lamas, that is to say, the source lama and the lamas of the lineage, are the root of the grace
- the *yidams*, the root of accomplishments
- the protectors of the Dharma and the *dakinis*, the root of activity that removes obstacles on the path

Vajrayana also establishes a distinction among outer, inner, and secret levels of taking refuge.

- the outer level refers to taking refuge in the Three Jewels and the Three Roots as they are usually conceived.
- the inner level means taking refuge in the source lama considered only as the union of all places of refuge. In this case, the lama's body represents the Sangha, the lama's speech, the Dharma, and the lama's mind, the Buddha. Or, the body represents the lamas, speech represents the protectors and *dakinis*, and the mind represents the *yidams*.
- the secret level refers to taking refuge in our own mind. This implies that we experience our mind's emptiness as the Absolute body (Sanskrit, *dharmakaya*), its clarity as the body of perfect experience (Sanskrit, *sambhogakaya*), and the union of emptiness and clarity as the body of emanation (Sanskrit, *nirmanakaya*).

## **Motivations**

If taking refuge separates Buddhists from non-Buddhists, motivation allows one to distinguish Hinayana from Mahayana. In the Hinayana teaching, one seeks liberation for oneself; in the Mahayana, one seeks liberation of all beings. Vajrayana does not differ from Mahayana in the approach to motivation, although each approaches the notion of the liberation of all beings from a specific point of view. Indeed, Vajrayana considers that all beings are already Awakened, but they do not recognize this Awakening. What, then, is the real object of compassion? Compassion sees that all beings suffer because they ignore what they truly are, and compassion wishes to rid beings of this ignorance.

## **Various views**

The view differs from one vehicle to the other.

The vehicle of the "Listeners," first level of Hinayana, achieves the "nonself of the individual," thanks to mind dwelling in emptiness in the course of the meditation, but it does not perceive "nonself of phenomena."

The vehicle of the "solitary Buddhas" adds to the realization of nonself of the individual, a partial realization of the nonself of phenomena.

The bodhisattva vehicle, in the framework of the Mahayana, professes that all phenomena are only appearances produced by the mind. Phenomena possess no reality in themselves but are similar to dream appearances. A series of twelve traditional comparisons illustrates this vision. Phenomena are similar to an image in a mirror, the reflection of the moon on water, a rainbow, a mirage, a castle in the sky, and so on. In this perspective, the nonself of phenomena is entirely achieved.

Vajrayana fundamentally summarizes the idea that any manifestation is of the same nature as a dream. It is what is expressed, for example, in the *Heart Sutra of the Prajnaparamita*.

“Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is no other than form. Form is no other than emptiness.” This agrees with Vajrayana and Mahayana. Nevertheless, Vajrayana goes further by asserting,

*Mind innate in itself is Dharmakaya.*

*Appearances are the luminosity of Dharmakaya.*

Vajrayana teaches the union of mind and appearances. Emptiness is achieved in this union.<sup>3</sup>

### **Appropriate treatments**

Differences that we emphasized between the vehicles do not mean that some vehicles are important, and others negligible. Once again, all have their place, because they answer to a variety of situations, aspirations, and capacities. Although medicines serve to eliminate illness, the same treatment is not given to all the sick people. Similarly, Buddha's teachings are all beneficial, but the context or individual aptitudes make it preferable to present one vehicle rather than another. People who may be *healed* by the Hinayana must *take* Hinayana. Others must *take* Mahayana, while others the Vajrayana.

### **INTRODUCTION OF TANTRAS IN TIBET**

---

The introduction of Vajrayana in Tibet has been done twice, which resulted in two systems—Nyingma (old) and Sarma (new).

These two systems, similar in essence, include the foundations of Hinayana and Mahayana in the same way but they differ in their classification of tantras and presentation of the teachings.

---

<sup>3</sup>While Mahayana insists on emptiness of all phenomena, Vajrayana insists on the union of manifestation and emptiness, emphasizing clarity.



Padmasambhava



## Different classifications

The *Sarma* school proposes a classification of tantras in four classes.

- *Kriya* tantra
- *Charya* tantra
- *Yoga* tantra
- *Anuttarayoga* tantra

The Nyingma school divides the tantras into six classes. The first three classes correspond to the first three classes of the *Sarma* school, tantras called *inferior*, while the last three classes concentrate, as the *Anuttarayoga* tantra, on the tantras called *superior*. These six classes are:

- *Kriya* tantra
- *Uppa* tantra
- *Yoga* tantra
- *Mahayoga* tantra
- *Anuyoga* tantra
- *Atiyoga* tantra

In the Nyingma school, the classification is also frequently referred to as the *nine vehicles*. In this case, there are the Listeners, solitary Buddhas, and bodhisattva vehicles, to which are added the six classes of tantras just enumerated, with each one counted as a vehicle.

## Unity beyond denominations

Despite the differences in the use of technical terms, there is a great unity. Not only are the first three classes of tantras identical in each school, but the *Anuttarayoga* tantra in the *Sarma* school includes a subsection in three parts that corresponds to the three superior classes of the Nyingma school. They are:

- *Father tantras* emphasizing skillful means
- *Mother tantras* emphasizing wisdom
- *Nondual tantras* which equally insist on skillful means and wisdom

## **Beginning of Buddhism in Tibet**

The terms Nyingma and *Sarma* rely more on chronology and the way their respective teachings spread in Tibet than on any other difference.

The Nyingma School designates the first wave of introducing Buddhism to the Land of Snow (Tibet). Requested by King Trisong Detsen, it was the work of two main masters, Guru Padmasambhava and the abbot Shantarakshita. Padmasambhava taught the tantras and Shantarakshita the sutras. Marked by close collaboration between Indian scholars and Tibetan translators, the Nyingma school emphasizes—among many other teachings—the maha-ati. It is often presented under three parts that regroup the various instructions. These are the *mind section* (Tibetan, *sem de*), *space section* (Tibetan, *long de*), and the "instruction section" (Tibetan, *men ngak de*).

The Nyingma tradition has remained and developed up to the present, gathering numerous disciples and allowing them to attain liberation.

## **Monks and lay people**

During the first centuries of expansion of the Nyingma school, the practitioners' condition of life was not considered a significant element of transmission. Monks or lay people received meditation instruction. Practiced intensely, these instructions ideally led to obtaining the state of a *mahasiddha* and a *rainbow body*.

With the passing of many years, some confusion arose. The philosophical foundations of the practice were not always correctly transmitted and assimilated. This gave way to whimsical interpretations. The limits of right conduct ended up becoming blurred, so the line between the correct approach to the dharma and behavior lacking any real meaning was no longer clearly perceived.

## **The sacrifice of King Jangchub-O**

When this confusion began to pose a threat, King Jangchub-O (Light of Awakening) appeared in Tibet and wanted to remedy the situation. He began a vast project by sending intelligent and young Tibetans to India to develop competent translators, and invited Indian scholars and masters to Tibet.

At that time, to go from India to Tibet represented a long and difficult journey. The King's project therefore required considerable financing to pay for the studies of Tibetans in Indian universities and to accommodate the invited masters of the mother land of Buddhism. To take his project to completion, Jangchub-O decided to collect as much gold as he could. He scoured the entire country and also neighboring kingdoms, requesting support from their leaders.

Unfortunately, during his travels the king was captured by the cruel ruler of a country (now Kashmir) who was not at all interested Buddhism. Tibetans sent ambassadors to negotiate the release of their sovereign several times, but without success. The enemy king declared that he would liberate his prisoner only in exchange for his weight in gold. In spite of the difficulty of this task, the subjects of Jangchub-O succeeded in collecting the required amount of gold. By letter, they let their king know the good news. The King's reply was not what they expected. From his prison, he answered, "I thank you for the hardships you have endured, but do not use this gold to pay my ransom. I do not mind spending the rest of my life in a dungeon and dying here. It is more beneficial to use the gold for reviving the Dharma, which is more dear to my heart than my own life."

Thanks to this sacrifice of King Jangchub-O, many Tibetans were sent to India and several Indian scholars arrived in Tibet. Among them, the most eminent was Atisha.

This new vigor was the beginning of the *Sarma* system.

## **A new model**

Atisha and his contemporaries presented Tibet a model for the practitioner of the Dharma that unites in one person three levels of ordination.

- the *outer* level, in other words, monks or lay people's vows also called *vows of individual liberation*, extolled by Hinayana
- the *inner* level, the bodhisattva vows of Mahayana
- the *secret* level, represented by sacred commitments of Vajrayana

Atisha, furthermore, insisted on the notion of refuge in the Three Jewels, with such intensity that he received the nickname of *Pandit of the Refuge*, which everyone called him in Tibet. There were some who even ignored his real name.

Atisha had three main disciples—Ku, Mok, and Drom—who continued the tradition that he had established. This tradition is known as the Kadampa lineage. Chekawa was their main heir and he, in turn, transmitted this teaching to Geshe Drepa, one of Gampopa's masters.

## **Gampopa's contribution**

Gampopa was a holder of the Kagyupa lineage. This lineage, which issued from the Indian masters, Tilopa and Naropa, was held in Tibet by Marpa and Milarepa. Until Gampopa, this lineage had the same point of view as the Nyingma school on the status of the life of practitioners. It mattered very little whether one was a monk or a lay person. It was essential only to receive direct instructions from a master, then apply them with energy and application for attaining realization.

Before becoming Milarepa's disciple and under his direction attaining a realization as vast as space, Gampopa followed Kadampa teachings. This is why he introduced a certain number of Kadampa contributions to the Kagyupa lineage. Among these contributions, there is the insistence on observing the vows. Gampopa gathered, in the same

approach, inner realization and respect for the rules on outer conduct. It is said that Gampopa united, into a single stream, the two Kagyupa and Kadampa rivers.

After Gampopa, the lineage was divided in several branches known as the *four great branches*. Among them, there are those founded by the First Karmapa, Tusum Khyenpa, and the *eight small Kagyupa schools*. All have preserved the will to observe the three levels of ordination, and the majority of their holders have been monks.

The Kagyupa lineage in Tibet had a wide influence. At its peak, it occupied 108 main monasteries and 1002 secondary monasteries.

### **Tsongkhapa**

While Gampopa participated in the development of the Kagyupa school, Geshe Drepa and his disciples were continuing Atisha's work within the Kadampa lineage. This lineage expanded at the time of Tsongkhapa, a contemporary of the Fourth Karmapa, Rolpel Dorje. The efforts, activity, and influence of Tsongkhapa were such that, starting with him, one talks about the *new Kadampa tradition*, also called the *Gadenpa school*, from the name of its main monastery. It is more commonly known today as the Gelukpa school.

### **Translators and lineages**

The efforts of Atisha when he came to Tibet were greatly sustained by translators who rendered Sanskrit texts into Tibetan. In the Kadampa lineage, the most famous translator was Rinchen Zangpo. In the Kagyupa lineage, the most remarkable was Marpa himself, the founder of this lineage in Tibet, who translated many texts brought back from his travels in India. Through these translators, different traditions developed. These translators are known as the *Ten Pillars of Erudition* and the *Eight Great Chariots of Practice*.

To summarize, the Nyingma school refers to the teachings introduced from India at the time of King Trisong Detsen by Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita, while the *Sarma* school designates traditions later brought to Tibet by Atisha, Rinchen Zangpo, Marpa, and their contemporaries. Among the great lineages today, the Nyingmapas, as their name indicates, are the only direct heirs of the Nyingma system, while the Kagyupas, Sakyapas, and Gelukpas belong to the *Sarma* system.

### **Tantras in the evolution of humanity**

Among the classifications of tantras, we have seen that the *Sarma* system proposed four classes. The successive appearance of these tantras is related to the evolution of human beings.

Buddhist cosmogony envisions the formation of a universe that began with a long period when elements slowly structured and arranged themselves until they created a favorable environment for beings having a common karma to be born there. In this common context, individual karma leads beings to incarnate under a given form, human or animal, and in certain circumstances.

As for human beings, they are looked upon as descendants of the gods of the sphere of form. These gods, experiencing different states of meditation in samsara, are distributed in seventeen categories. Some of these gods, whose merit had decreased, momentarily wished to visit the Earth when it became hospitable. First, they continued to live in their divine world, but from time to time, descended on Earth. Then, because their merit gradually continued to decrease, eventually they were unable to return to their celestial land and had to remain on Earth. These were the first human beings.

At the time of these first human beings, conflicting emotions were less powerful than they are today. For

example, a simple exchange of sight was enough to satisfy sexual desire. This first level of intensity of the emotions corresponds to the first class of tantras, the *Kriya* tantra.

Soon, following the exchange of looks, a smile was necessary. This stage corresponds to *Charya* tantra. Later, touching hands was added to the previous sensations, and the *Yoga* tantra appeared. Finally, when the satisfaction of sexual desire required physical union, *Anuttarayoga* tantra was manifested.

In the world of human beings who belong to the sphere of desire, the four classes of tantras are correlated with the development of the complication of sexuality.

The Vajrayana, based on the instructions included in the tantras, proposes a quick way to obtain Awakening. At best, Awakening can be reached in a single lifetime, otherwise, it takes place in the *bardo* or after seven or sixteen lives of practice.

### **Preeminence of the Dharma**

Spiritual instructions constitute the *divine Dharma*. Studies, researches, and activities that are directed only toward material progress and well-being in the framework of this present existence form the *temporal dharma*.

The human existence we now have is not a random result. It implies that, in our past lives, we have been able to accomplish more positive acts than negative acts.

The human condition is generally good, according to the use we make of it; however, there are inferior, mediocre, or superior human existences.

*Inferior* human existence characterizes beings who turn away from the spiritual path and positive activity and commit many negative acts. This existence is considered inferior to the extent that it will lead to great future suffering.

*Mediocre* human existence regroups those who accomplish neither great negative acts nor great positive acts.

Consequently, they will encounter mediocre conditions, neither very pleasant nor very painful in their future lives.

*Superior or precious* human existence, finally, characterizes those who meet with spiritual masters, are interested in their masters' teachings, and put those teachings into practice. Through these acts, they will go to superior worlds and liberation.

Spiritual practice does not imply that it is necessary to abandon this life entirely. We must feed ourselves, dress, find shelter, and so on. Let us remember, however, that the intent of Dharma is for something greater than temporal activities. Everything we do in this life indeed resembles a dream. In the evening, we fall asleep, then at night, we dream. We can dream that we have a beautiful house, or that we stroll around on a magnificent landscape, and everything is beautiful and pleasant. However, when we wake up, the house, landscape, and everything that charmed us have disappeared. Nothing remains. It is the same with our life. When it ends, we will not be able to take anything we have accumulated with us. The only thing that will help us at the moment of death is the inner wealth we have acquired by the practice of the Dharma. This is why the Dharma is so precious. Shantideva emphasized that it would be in vain to hope for a future precious human existence, if we do not make good use of the one we now have.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*



# Empowerments, Vows, and Sacred Commitments

*Empowerments constitute one of the fundamental parts of the Vajrayana. Vajrayana relies on the utilization of a spiritual force—grace, blessing, spiritual influence, or whatever the term is used to translate the Tibetan, jinlap, or the Sanskrit, adhithana. The master is its depository, and the disciple will gain it by the practice of the yidams and recitation of their mantras. In order for this force and its vector—yidam—to be transmitted from the master to the disciple, a particular ceremony is necessary, the empowerment. The Tibetan tradition offers a great number of yidams, and the empowerments are numerous and varied. This variety does not alter the essential unity of grace. It is a little like pure water that can be given and drunk in various containers. The subject of empowerments has already been introduced in the chapter concerning the principles of the Vajrayana. It is resumed here with more detail and completed with an important statement on commitments derived from empowerments. These commitments themselves are placed in the general context of the vows.*

## EMPOWERMENTS PART I

---

### A sacred investiture

The notion of empowerment implies the idea of conceding that there is a power, an authority.<sup>4</sup>

In the political domain, heads of State, ministers, or other governing persons occupy positions of responsibility that confer certain authority on them. To be able to hold power, it is necessary, first of all, for these people to have been invested with that power. According to their respective cultures, they have been appointed, elected, or enthroned. For example, if it concerns a coronation, the future king will be placed on a

---

<sup>4</sup>The Tibetan word translated by empowerment, *wang*, precisely means to be able.

throne in the presence of dignitaries. The different emblems of royalty will be given to him and, from then on, he will be the real chief of his kingdom. Only after this investiture will the king have the authority that allows him to direct, give orders, and be obeyed by all. In the same way, an empowerment including subsections such as vase empowerment, secret empowerment, wisdom-knowledge empowerment, and precious word empowerment confers on those who receive it a power in the practice of meditation.

### **Vase empowerment**

The first subsection within the process of empowerment is the *vase empowerment*,<sup>5</sup> conferred on the body. It implies a relationship with different deities, in particular the five masculine Buddhas, the five feminine Buddhas, and various groups of feminine and masculine bodhisattvas. Because of this relation, the vase empowerment bestows the power to meditate on the impure aspects of the individual and the universe in their pure form, corresponding to deities, and to realize them as such.

The five aggregates—forms, sensations, perceptions, volitions, and consciousnesses—are only the reflection, within the ordinary person, of the five masculine Buddhas in the domain of Awakening. The vase empowerment introduces us to the divine essence of the five aggregates and confers on us the power to realize this essence on the basis of an equivalence between each aggregate and each Buddha.

- forms, Vairocana
- sensations, Ratnasambhava
- perceptions, Amitabha
- volitions, Amoghasiddhi
- consciousnesses, Akshobya

---

<sup>5</sup>The term vase (Tibetan, *bumpa*) refers to a ritual water pot from which the disciple receives sacred water.



དོན་ཡོད་བྱ་བ་ལ། / ལྷ་ལས་སྤྲིན།



པདྨ་ལག་མེད་ལ། / ལྷ་གཞི་མ་མཉམ་ལག་ལ།



མེད་བྱོད་ལ། / ལག་ཐོན་མཉམ་ལག་ལ།



རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྷ་སྐྱོད་མེད་ལ། / རོས་ལྷོ་ལྷ་གཞི།



འཇིགས་པ་བྱུང་ལ། / མཚོ་གསུམ་གྱི་ལ།

## Five Masculine Buddhas

In the same way, an equivalence is established between the five elements and their essence, the five feminine Buddhas, to which the empowerment serves as introduction.

- earth, Buddhalocana
- water, Mamaki
- fire, Pandaravasini
- air, Samayatara
- space, Vajradhatvesvari

Third, the eight consciousnesses—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental consciousnesses to which are added disturbed consciousness and the potential of consciousness (Sanskrit, *alayavijnana*)—are perceived as the eight great masculine Bodhisattvas, and the objects of consciousnesses as the eight great feminine Bodhisattvas.

In this way, all psychophysical constituents of the person are consecrated as deities. The disciple receives therefore the power to meditate visualizing himself or herself in the form of the body of the deity's empowerment. This process is the *vase empowerment*, also called, *body empowerment* of the deity. It is related to subtle channels (*nadis*) allowing the disciple to ultimately actualize the body of emanation.

### **Secret empowerment**

In the subtle channels of the body circulates a subtle energy (*prana*) that is linked with speech and whose totally pure expression corresponds to the body of perfect experience (*sambhogakaya*). To achieve this purity, the *secret empowerment* is conferred. It is also called *speech empowerment* of the deity. Thanks to this empowerment, all impure subtle winds are transformed into pure winds.

To undertake this purification, exercises on winds and recitation of mantras are used. By this secret empowerment, the disciple receives the power to consider all sounds as the deity's mantra. It is necessary to know that the body is innervated by a system of 72,000 *nadis*. The three main ones

are the central channel and the two lateral channels, which flank the central channel on the right and left sides. The final part of each of these channels presents a configuration associated with the thirty consonants and sixteen vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet and forms the basis for speech to function. When the secret empowerment is conferred, by reason of the relationship between subtle winds, speech, and *sambhogakaya*, the ability of actualizing the vajra speech of *sambhogakaya* is given.

### Wisdom-knowledge empowerment

Thirdly, the deity's mind or wisdom-knowledge empowerment is conferred on the disciple's mind. This third empowerment is related to the *tigles* (Sanskrit, *bindu*) and confers the power of implementing meditation techniques using the *tigles*.

Consequently, once the vase empowerment, the secret empowerment, and wisdom-knowledge empowerment are received, it is possible to practice the *Six Dharmas of Naropa*. The *Six Dharmas* are *tumo*, illusory body, dream, clear light, transfer of consciousness, and *bardo*, during which one meditates on channels, winds, and *tigles*. In some cases, this presents an opportunity to practice, within the framework of the Vajrayana, techniques of retention of the *tigles* in sexual union.

To summarize, we have now seen the three empowerments that gather the body, speech, and mind of the lama and *yidam*. We have received the power to effectively meditate on the *three vajras*.<sup>6</sup>

- *nadis* as vajra-body
- *prana* as vajra-speech
- *tigles* as vajra-mind

---

<sup>6</sup>Here, *vajra* refers to the ultimate and totally pure aspect of the body, speech, and mind.

**Empowerment of the precious word or oral empowerment**  
The fourth empowerment is the *empowerment of the precious word*. It relies on the principle that *nadis, prana, and tigles* and the totality of inner and outer phenomena proceed only from the mind. By the fourth empowerment, one is introduced to this nature of the mind, and one receives the power to practice and achieve mahamudra.

Samye-Ling, March 1983

## EMPOWERMENTS PART II

---

The Vajrayana practice is entered through an empowerment. To be efficient, the empowerment requires the realization of the master who confers it, as well as confidence and intelligence of the disciple who receives it. These empowerments take the form of various rituals of greater or lesser complexity. During the empowerments of the great tantric deities, the most common and elaborate versions of the empowerment are characterized by making a *mandala* of colored sands. A version of medium complexity will use a *mandala* painted on cloth. A simpler version will use a *mandala* made of small heaps of rice. Finally, in an empowerment reduced to its essential version, the body of the master who gives the empowerment or a simple mental representation is sufficient to symbolize the *mandala*.

### **The four stages of an empowerment**

An empowerment in its most complete form includes four subsections called the *four empowerments*.

- vase empowerment
- secret empowerment
- wisdom-knowledge empowerment
- fourth empowerment or empowerment of the precious word

Simplified forms of empowerments are limited to transmission of the body, speech, or mind of the deity, or only to the vase empowerment. However, empowerment, in the

full sense of the term, implies the four subsections just mentioned. It is only in those circumstances that the *samayas* play a complete role and must be scrupulously respected for the transmission of grace to open the door of accomplishments.

### **Preparatory phases**

The lama charged with giving an empowerment must, first of all, conform to the reference tantra stated by the Buddha by preparing the *mandala* that will serve as support. This *mandala* can be a sand *mandala*, a painted *mandala*, or a *mandala* composed of small heaps of rice symbolically placed on a base. Officiating alone, the lama executes a part of the ritual in three preparatory phases.

- the *dakye*, where the lama visualizes himself or herself in the form of the deity

- the *dunkye*, where the lama visualizes the deities in space

- the *bunkye*, where the lama consecrates the vase of empowerment, visualizing it as a celestial palace where the deities of the empowerment reside

- Finally, a fourth preparatory phase is added. The lama confers the empowerment on himself or herself (*dajuk*). Only after this are the disciples admitted in the temple to receive the empowerment.

### **Vase empowerment**

The disciple first receives the *vase empowerment*, conferred on the body. This introduces the disciple to the pure nature of the different constituents of his or her psychophysical personality. There are the five aggregates, the five elements, or the factors of perception. This empowerment is given with the help of ritual objects, symbolizing the five masculine Buddhas—such as the crown, vajra, bell, and so on. By this process, faults and veils related to the body are dissipated and the constituents of the personality become the corresponding pure aspects: the

five masculine Buddhas, five feminine Buddhas, eight great feminine and masculine Bodhisattvas, and so on. This empowerment gives the power to meditate with our own body in the form of the deity's body, and will ultimately lead us to achieve the body of emanation (*nirmanakaya*).

### **Secret empowerment**

The second empowerment, *secret empowerment*, conferred on speech, is transmitted by consecrated alcohol that becomes ambrosia (Tibetan, *dutsi*), contained in a skullcap. The disciple drinks a few drops. This empowerment purifies faults and veils related to speech, bestows the power to recite the deity's mantra, and allows one to ultimately achieve the body of perfect experience (*sambhogakaya*).

### **Wisdom-knowledge empowerment**

The third empowerment, *wisdom-knowledge empowerment*, conferred on mind, is transmitted by a *wisdom-knowledge* (Tibetan, *rikma*) that is to say, a young woman, painted, for the sake of the ritual on a small card. This empowerment purifies faults and veils related to mind and bestows the power to meditate on the union of bliss and emptiness, and to ultimately achieve the absolute body (*dharmakaya*).

### **Empowerment of the precious word**

The fourth empowerment, *empowerment of the precious word*, does not use ritual objects but consists of an oral introduction to the mode of being of the mind and all phenomena. Its impact is located at the level of simultaneousness-simultaneous purification of faults and veils of body, speech, and mind. It also permit simultaneous meditation of one's body as the deity's body, one's speech as the deity's mantra, and one's mind as the state of absorption. Ultimately, it leads to the realization of the body of essence itself (*svabhavakaya*), the union of the three other bodies of Awakening.



For an empowerment to have real effect, it is necessary, of course, that certain external conditions be met. It is also necessary that the lama who gives it has received authentic transmission and executes the ceremony with accuracy, without adding or removing anything. Finally, it is necessary that disciples who receive it have full confidence in the lama, some understanding of the process, and conviction in its efficiency.

The sutra approach of Mahayana and the tantra approach of Vajrayana lead to the same goal, but with different time scales. It is said that the practitioner must practice three *immeasurable kalpas* before reaching Awakening through the sutra path. It is said that a maximum of sixteen lifetimes is necessary for obtaining the same result through the tantra path. As for a minimum, it varies according to texts. Some say six months, others six or twelve years, but in any case Awakening is realized in the framework of this lifetime.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

## SACRED VOWS AND COMMITMENTS

To understand sacred commitments related to Vajrayana empowerments, it is necessary to place them in the general context of Buddhist vows.

### **Refuge vows**

Those who follow Buddha's teachings begin the path by first taking the refuge vows, placing themselves under the protection of the Three Jewels, the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

### **Lay people and monks**

It is then possible, if the disciple has personal aspiration, to take the vows of a lay person (Sanskrit, *upasaka*; Tibetan, *genien*). There are five vows: not killing, not stealing, not lying, avoid sexual misconduct, and not consuming alcohol. They

can be taken at once or partially, for a complete lifetime or a definite duration of months or years.

Taking these vows is not an obligation. In many Buddhist countries, men and women, without taking them formally, try to respect the ethical ideal that they represent by avoiding the ten negative acts and by practicing the ten positive acts. Historically, it was often the case that kings governing these countries were eager to integrate the essentials of this ethic into their legislation.

On a more elaborate level, lay people will practice refraining from sexual misconduct by being chaste. The practitioner is then called *brahmacharya* (Tibetan, *tsangcho genien*). Then come the monastic vows: minor ordination (Sanskrit, *shramanera*; Tibetan, *getsul*) and major ordination (Sanskrit, *bhiksu*; Tibetan, *gelong*).

Traditionally, one counts seven different ordinations that allow one to observe perfect ethic: *upasaka* men and women, *shramanera* men and women, *bhiksu* men and women, to which the *women students* (Tibetan, *gelopma*) are added, representing a type of vows reserved for women.

### Temporary or definitive vows

In Tibet the monastic vows—*shramaneras* and *bhiksus*—were taken for life. It was not conceivable that the person who had taken monk's robe could leave it in his lifetime. In Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and in other Buddhist countries, the same vows can be taken for a lifetime, but also for limited periods of weeks or years. These two approaches are not contradictory, as both seem to have been envisaged by the Buddha himself.

In Thailand, the custom of temporary monastic vows has even been institutionalized. It is a duty for young men and women to devote at least few months of their existence to monastic life, by taking vows allowing them to live in a monastery. At the end of this period, those who wish can

renew their vows and definitively adopt monastic life. Otherwise, young people return to lay people's life and establish a family. This monastic period is looked at as a proof of the quality of the individual. Boys or girls who would not submit to it would have difficulty in getting married, because there would be a question as to whether they possess the moral qualities and necessary rigor to manage a family.

The different types of vows defined under the expression of *individual liberation vows* belong to the Hinayana. In the Mahayana, there is another type of vows called *bodhisattva vows*, that are transmitted by various authentic lineages.

### **Monks and yogis**

In ancient India, two types of people, in a Buddhist context, have been looked upon as examples deserving respect and worthy of the material support of anyone. They were monks and nuns, whatever the degree of ordination; they were perceived as observing perfect ethics and having a lifestyle entirely in agreement with the Buddha's teaching. There were also those whose meditation practice had produced states of realization. It is the state of an *arhat* in the framework of the Small Vehicle, achieving the nonself of the individual. In the framework of the great vehicle, it is the bodhisattva who realizes the absence of own reality of self and phenomena, and also the Vajrayana practitioner who achieves mahamudra. Reference to the ideal Buddhist was thus twofold: outer monastic commitments and inner realization.

Given that the first teachings of the Buddha focused on the *Four Noble Truths* and Hinayana in general, the first great historical disciples belong to this vehicle. Shariputra and Maudgalayana, two of the monks closest to the Buddha, the *Sixteen Elders*, or the group called the *Five Hundred Arhats*, are all looked upon as models of the small vehicle.

Later, there was a tendency to integrate the foundations of Hinayana and Mahayana in the same person, in other words,

the monastic and bodhisattva vows. The most remarkable beings representing this were the *Six Ornaments of This World* and the *Two Sublimes Ones*. Following this example, this approach spread throughout India.

In Tibet, all three levels were simultaneously introduced. There are the ordination in accord with the ideal of individual liberation, the bodhisattva vows, and the Vajrayana approach. Beginning with King Ralpachen, two groups, in spite of their differences, began to represent the Buddhist ideal. They are the group of the monks and the group of the lay *yogis*, characterized by their long hair and white clothes.

### **Importance of Hinayana vows**

Those who take the major ordination must respect 253 rules related to the life of a *bhikṣu*. Those who take the bodhisattva vows must practice the related precepts. As for the Vajrayana commitments, they are associated with and are given with empowerments.

Hinayana vows are, in a way, the basis on which the practice of the Buddha's teachings develops. For this reason, they have a great importance and are sometimes seen as indispensable for approaching other levels. The bodhisattva vows are transmitted through two lineages: the lineage of *vast activity* and the lineage of *deep wisdom*. In the framework of the first lineage, the bodhisattva vows cannot be received unless monk or *brahmacharya* vows have been previously taken. In the context of the Vajrayana, the importance of the Hinayana vows is also emphasized. In the Kalachakra tantra, for example, it is declared that to receive Kalachakra empowerment, the best condition is to be a *bhikṣu*, or at least a *śrāmaṇera*, this state being itself superior than the state of those who have no vow.

## Sacred Vajrayana commitments

The Vajrayana, as Hinayana and Mahayana, implies vows, or sacred commitments (Sanskrit, *samaya*; Tibetan, *damtsik*) related to the empowerments.

An empowerment carries in itself a great force, a powerful blessing, and an important manifestation of compassion. The benefit of the empowerment obtained by the disciple largely depends, however, on the observance of sacred commitments accompanying it. It is said that if commitments are respected, the disciple will obtain liberation, if they are transgressed, the disciple will fall into inferior realms. To understand how crucial these commitments are in the Vajrayana, it is said that a follower of this path is like a snake trapped in a bamboo stalk. There are only two possibilities, to ascend or descend; exiting on the side is impossible. In the same way, the Vajrayana practitioner, whether respecting or transgressing the *samayas* from the empowerments he or she has received, can only *ascend* or *descend* without choice of a third path.

From a certain point of view, the commitments of the Vajrayana may appear impossible to observe, because there are so many. The major monastic ordination already has a relatively important number of rules, 253 rules for the monks (*bhiksu*) and 440 for the nun (*bhiksuni*). Some tantric texts claim that there are no less than 10,100,000 *samayas* related to the Vajrayana practice! However, when one understands the function of the Vajrayana and even more when one is truly committed to its practice, things appear easier. Indeed, it is said that the identification of our *three doors* to the *three vajras*<sup>7</sup> of the deity is enough for the observance of the 10,100,000 *samayas*. This means that all commitments are maintained to the extent that one's body is assimilated to the deity's body,

---

<sup>7</sup>The three doors are the body, speech, and mind of ordinary beings. The three vajras are the Awakened body, speech, and mind.

one's speech to the mantra, and one's mind to the meditative absorption (Sanskrit, *samadhi*).

### **Drukpa Kunlek avoids an empowerment**

*Samayas* are important and are not to be taken lightly.

On this subject, the following story is told about Drukpa Kunlek.<sup>8</sup> While dwelling in the region of Lhasa, the yogi was told by a benefactor that a high-ranking lama was getting ready to bestow an empowerment and was asked if he would go.

"Certainly," replied Drukpa Kunlek, "it is an excellent idea." Then, thinking it over, he added, "There is a detail however. It would be necessary to know if the lama will request the respect of the *samayas*. If so, it is perhaps better that I abstain."

Someone hurried out with the mission to ask the lama. "Of course, it is necessary to respect the *samayas*!" said the lama. "In this case," Drukpa Kunlek said when one brought the lama's reply, "I believe that I will not go to this empowerment."

### **The four main samayas**

Ideally, as we have seen, it is necessary to know and respect 10,100,000 *samayas*. Nevertheless, in practice, one discovers that there are fourteen major *samayas* that may be broken by fourteen corresponding transgressions. This list gives them in degree of importance. We will consider only the first four essential *samayas*.

1 - always holding a respectful and confident attitude toward the lama from whom one has received an empowerment and never adopting a critical or negative position toward this lama

---

<sup>8</sup>A *yogi* famous for his whimsical conduct and his way of mocking the institutions.

2 - not placing oneself in contradiction to the teaching of the Buddha

3 - not entering into conflict with vajra brothers or sisters

4 - not abandoning love and compassion

### **First samaya**

Let us examine the relationship with the master. Generally, it is an extremely important point, even outside the Vajrayana context. It is said that from the moment when one has received a single word of instruction in the Dharma, one must consider the person who has given it with much respect and have no negative view of this person. In case one were to nourish such negative views, one would be exposed to rebirth one hundred times as a dog, and then rebirth in a painful human existence.

In the Vajrayana, commitment of respect toward the lama is even more rigorous. Any critical view of a master from whom one has received an empowerment must be totally disregarded. Even if we were to see a defect in the person of the master, we would have to think that it is in fact our mind that projects its own defects, as if it were our dirty face reflected in the mirror.

Perfect examples of what a disciple must be prepared to accept from the master are found in the way that Naropa underwent hardships with Tilopa, or Milarepa with Marpa. Of course, it would be difficult for ordinary disciples to follow such conduct, but we must, at least, strive to put into practice, with our best efforts, the teachings we have received. The lama who bestows empowerments and teaches does so with the hope that the practitioner will be able to purify all veils, be liberated from samsara, and reach Buddhahood. For us, it is enough to embrace these teachings; we must respect the master's body, speech, and mind.

## **Second samaya**

It can be difficult to not contradicting the teaching of the Buddha because this teaching requires complete rejection of all negative activity and the engagement in positive activity. However, we will not transgress this *samaya* if, at least, we avoid the most seriously negative acts and accomplish the most important positive ones.

## **Third samaya**

The third transgression consists of having a misunderstanding with our *vajra brothers and sisters*. Some texts see this notion in a extremely large way. Relying on the fact that we have woven connections with all beings in our past lives, these texts consider that all beings are our vajra brothers and sisters. This makes the observance of the *samaya* rather difficult. However, one may limit the idea of vajra brothers and sisters to a narrower field reduced to increasingly intimate circles in the following order.

- all those who follow the teaching of the Buddha under some form or another

- those who follow the Vajrayana teaching of any lineage

- those who have the same master as we do. It is said in this case that we have the same *father*, or those who have received the empowerment of the same deity, the same *mother*

- those who have received the same deity empowerment from the same master. We are in this case children of the same *father* and *mother*.

It is mainly to the last two categories that the third *samaya* is applied. Respecting this *samaya* consists of avoiding conflicts, misunderstanding, and resentment with vajra brothers and sisters, and instead maintaining harmonious relationships and helping each other.



## Fourth samaya

The fourth *samaya* requires one to have love and compassion for all beings. This commitment is identical to that of the bodhisattva vows, but Vajrayana envisages it with a stronger emphasis. We must reflect on the fact that all beings have been our fathers or mothers in past lives, and we should aspire that all be liberated from suffering and reach supreme happiness of Awakening.

## How Atisha maintained his vows

Atisha, the great Indian master who went to teach to Tibet, one day explained to his disciples how he kept his vows.

“Since I have taken the monk vows, I have scrupulously respected all rules that they imply without breaking them a single time. As for the bodhisattva vows, I realize that at least once a day I have a thought or accomplish an action violating them. Nevertheless, I never let more than few hours go by before renewing them. As for the Vajrayana commitments, if one considers them in detail, I believe that I almost constantly break them. It is like sand blown onto a plate of polished metal. Although you may try to wipe it away, the sand constantly piles up.”

The disciples were surprised by the implications of the last statement. They thought that engaging in Vajrayana practice was more harmful than beneficial, and that there was more chance falling into hell than reaching Awakening.

Atisha said, “This is not true, because the Vajrayana includes skillful means coming from the Buddha's compassion, allowing us to use the Vajrayana despite unavoidable violations of the *samayas*. It is said, for example, that if we recite even only twenty-one times a day the one-hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva (Dorje Sempa), this purifies us from these broken vows and preserves the efficiency of the Vajrayana.”

*Samye Ling, March 1983*



Naropa

# The Six Bardos and the Six Dharmas of Naropa

*The notion of bardo is vast, and as we will see, it applies, in a broad sense, to all existential periods of time to which one can assign limits. In a narrower sense, the term applies to the postmortem period between death and rebirth. Tibetan Buddhism presents a precise analysis of this bardo, thanks to descriptions made by the Buddha and various great lamas. Interesting in itself, the study of this state is of great interest in the West, and also appears to be beneficial from a spiritual point of view because the bardo provides opportunities for liberation.*

*This chapter combines four teachings on the bardos. Some aspects of the subject are, therefore, considered several times, but from different perspectives. We have preserved the different presentations here, because they allow a fuller and more precise comprehension.*

## THE SIX BARDOS

---

The Tibetan word *bardo* simply means interval and designates any existential period having sufficiently specific characteristics for its borders to be limited. We already have experienced some *bardos*, and we will have to live some other ones. Even now, we are in a *bardo*. One of the possible classifications lists six *bardos*.

*Taipei, April 1986*

Variants are encountered in the classification of the six *bardos*, but the fundamental idea is the same.

- *bardo* from birth to death
- *bardo* of dream
- *bardo* of moment of death
- *bardo* of nature in itself

- *bardo* of becoming
- *bardo* of gestation

In context of the meditative path, one also counts as a *bardo*, under the name of *bardo of concentration*, the period that goes from the beginning to the end of a meditation session. When one includes this *bardo* in the classification of the six *bardos*, the *bardo of the gestation* is no longer considered as a separate period, but is integrated in the *bardo of birth to death*.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

## THE BARDO OF GESTATION

The *bardo* of gestation includes the period beginning with the conception in the mother's womb to the actual birth. Its duration is nine month and ten days. We all have experienced this *bardo*.

*Taipei, April 1986*

## THE BARDO FROM BIRTH TO DEATH

The *bardo from birth to death* covers the span of life from effective birth to death. It is the *bardo* that we now are living. Some are at the very beginning of the path, others have reached half-way, while others are approaching the end. Among all the *bardos*, this one occupies a crucial place. What we make of it will result in happiness or suffering in our future lives. As reported by the Buddha,

*At best, this existence is the vessel of liberation,*

*At worst, this existence is suffering and anguish of the world,*

*This existence is a servant of good and evil.*

If we know how to make good use of our existence, it is a ship safely leading us to the ocean shore. If we make bad use of it, we are like a human being with a stone tied to the feet and thrown into the depths of the ocean. We accomplish acts that lead to future happiness or suffering with our present body. If we want to continue to endlessly be reborn in the cycle of existence and endure uncountable sufferings, it is

within our power to accumulate the karma that will lead us there. If we believe that we must attain liberation and the definitive happiness of Awakening, it is also within our power to accumulate the karma that will lead us there. We find ourselves in the position of the driver of a car parked on a slope. We can choose to drive up or down. This is as true for the lama who gives this teaching as for you who receive it. We all have at hand the possibility of choosing the direction we want to take.

### **Vast faith and compassion**

If we have good knowledge of the Dharma and the possibility of totally devoting ourselves to practice, it is a perfect situation. But if we have neither this knowledge nor this opportunity, we still possess what is the most essential by having faith and devotion for the master and the Three Jewels, and compassion for the beings of the six classes. Faith and compassion are extremely important.

Faith must be wide. It is a good to think "My spiritual tradition and my master are good." But if one has no faith or confidence in any of the other traditions and masters, this is just small faith, comparable to the light of a candle. Faith that opens without partiality to all traditions and masters is like the light of the sun and moon.

Compassion also must be wide. Compassion directed to a small circle of close people, relations, friends, or compassion whose range is limited to those whose suffering is obvious, is good in itself but it is small compassion. Compassion that embraces all beings as vast as limitless space, considering that all beings have been our fathers and mothers, and that all beings suffer in the endless ocean of the cycle of existence, is unlimited compassion.

*It has been said by the Buddha:*

*Without faith, human beings*

*Obtain no white quality.*

*What will be the green sprout  
Of a seed roasted by fire?*

You may plant a roasted seed in the ground, but it will never give a sprout. Similarly, without faith it is impossible to reach Awakening. And compassion is necessary as well. The Buddhas of the past and Buddhas of the present have reached Awakening by relying on compassion. In the future, innumerable beings will also reach Awakening. This will be done by developing great compassion.

Having faith and compassion, even if one has no great knowledge of the Dharma and no opportunity to practice much, the day will come when one ceases to wander in the cycle of existence. Awakening will then be attained.

*Taipei, April 1986*

The *bardo from birth to death* resembles a bridge on which we put a foot at birth, leave by dying, and presently are in the process of crossing. Different ages in our lives correspond to our progress across the bridge:

- childhood is from birth to our fifteenth year
- adulthood lasts to the fiftieth year
- then various stages of old age

We do not know the length of our bridge. Perhaps it will lead us to an advanced age, or perhaps it will be suddenly interrupted. I surely approach the extreme end of the bridge.<sup>9</sup> Most of you may have a longer journey, but it is impossible to know how long it will be.

When one is very young, because of lack of maturity, one has no possibility of truly practicing the dharma. When one is very old, even if one wishes to do so, one does not have sufficient strength or capability. Adulthood provides ideal conditions. We can study, meditate, purify ourselves, and accumulate merit with the result of being liberated in this life

---

<sup>9</sup>Kalu Rinpoche was born in 1904.

time, during the *bardo* of dream, *bardo* of the moment of death, *bardo* of the nature in itself, or *bardo* of becoming. What we do now will not only be beneficial for the time we remain on the bridge, but also when we have gone to the other side. It is necessary to take advantage of this period.

Brussels, November 1982

### Limited freedom

Among all the *bardos*, the *bardo of birth to death*, which we call *this life*, is the most important. The physical existence that we now have is the result of karma in our past lives. Among the totality of *bardos*, it is the longest, the one when we possess the most force and freedom. This freedom is far from being complete. It applies perhaps to 30 percent of our life. For example, we have some freedom of our movements or of the positive or negative acts that we accomplish, but we have no great freedom. The power we lack is due to the karma accumulated in past lives, to conflicting emotions that govern us and our thoughts. Fundamentally, absence of freedom comes from ignorance and the three other great veils that cover our mind.

The practice of Dharma that begins with taking refuge gradually leads us to dissipate these four veils. This practice implements a process of inner enrichment, gradual purification, and meditation leading to freedom. Preliminary practices allow us, for example, to place ourselves under the protection of the Three Jewels and open ourselves to their grace. Preliminary practices also permit *bodhicitta* to appear for the benefit of all beings—a single instant of *bodhicitta* allows us to neutralize *kalpas* of negativity. Faults and veils are purified by the practice of Vajrasattva (Dorje Sempa). Merit and wisdom can be accumulated by the *mandala* offering, and the grace of the master can be received by the *guru yoga*. All these methods function to provide freedom for the mind.

If one takes up meditation, the first step is mental calming (Sanskrit, *shamatha*; Tibetan, *shinay*). In its usual state, our mind is not free to be at peace (Tibetan, *shi*), stable (Tibetan, *nay*) for a single instant. *Shinay*, in its various forms, with or without support, functions to liberate us from the influence of thoughts and conflicting emotions and to allow the ability to keep our mind in nondistraction and concentration. The more we develop this capacity to pacify our mind, the more we experience physical and mental benefits. We can even gain supernormal powers and obtain a long life. After death, we will be born in superior realms, as those of the gods or human beings. We can see the great benefits deriving from this capacity to only maintain a peaceful mind.

On reaching a certain degree of *shinay*, one approaches superior vision (Sanskrit, *vipasyana*; Tibetan, *lhakthong*) by gradual progression, allowing us to see the mode of being of the mind directly.

### **A progressive discovery of powers**

In the Kagyupa lineage, the path of mahamudra is divided into four steps, each possessing three levels. The three levels of the first step, called *concentration*, refer to the development of *shinay*. The second step, *simplicity*, corresponds to *lhakthong*, and the third level is equal to the first bodhisattva stage, called *perfect joy* and characterized by twelve hundred-fold powers. Attainment on this level of realization in the present life does not mean that a person will immediately obtain these powers, such as the capacity to create one hundred simultaneous emanations of oneself, and so on. Rather, these extraordinary abilities will be fully manifested after death, when the mind is liberated from its physical envelope.

### **Doubts of Sakya Pandita**

A great number of people in the Kagyupa lineage are recognized as having reached the first bodhisattva stage,





**Sakyapandita**

without immediately having created one hundred emanations of themselves. In the past, this was doubted in particular by Sakya Pandita. He was surprised to see that the Kagyupas considered the third degree of *simplicity* as corresponding to the first bodhisattva stage and that they asserted that many had reached it, but the powers attributed to this state were not observed in any of them. According to Sakya Pandita, saying that these powers will be revealed after death is an absurdity like saying that the sun rises today but its light will only illuminate us tomorrow. Both phenomena must simultaneously occur. Lama Shang, one of the greatest Kagyupa lamas and a contemporary of Sakya Pandita, supported the validity of the position of his school by offering another comparison. When the sun shines in winter, nobody expects that it will warm the earth and make the snow melt. Nevertheless, no one denies that the sun is present in the sky. The conditions of winter do not allow all qualities of the sun to appear. Later, the summer will provide the conditions allowing the qualities of the very same sun to manifest.

The experience occurring on the third level of *simplicity* is the first stable vision of the mode of being of the mind. It is compared to the crescent on the first day of the new moon. As the moon increases until it is full, realization will increase in the course of the ten bodhisattva stages until completion.

### **Against our will**

We currently have little mastery of our situation. It is easy to observe that we have little freedom. All human beings want happiness to the exclusion of suffering. Nevertheless human beings have no power to acquire what they want and to bring suffering to an end. From the moment of birth until now, we have not controlled the development of our body, either. It has evolved from hour to hour, from instant to instant, until it reaches maturity and the peak of its strength. Then, its decline is irreversible, and there is nothing to do to stop it. We

do not want to get older, nevertheless we will age. We do not want to be in ill health, but we will be ill. We do not want to die, but we will pass away. The conditions of our existence are not selected by us but are imposed by the karma of our past lives.

### Free of any limitations

The teaching of the Buddha frees our mind of all limitations. If our mind becomes free, our body and speech will automatically become free. We now possess this existence and we have powerful energy to serve good or evil. We must apply our body, speech, and mind to positive acts. If we do, we will liberate ourselves during the *bardo* of dream, *bardo* of the moment of death, *bardo* of nature in itself, or *bardo* of becoming. Everything depends on what we do in this present life.

### Illusory body

Among the six dharmas of Naropa, when one practices the dharma of *illusory body*, one learns to perceive all appearances manifested in this life time during the *bardo* from birth to death as a magical creation, a dream, a rainbow, or the reflection of the moon on the water. In other words, all that appears lacks reality and is only the power of manifestation of the mind itself. Such a meditation, when it is perfected, allows the performance of miracles such as those of Milarepa or other accomplished beings. Some of these miracles are flying or sitting in space, passing through a cliff, transforming one's body into water or fire, and so on. These wonders arise from realizing the absence of reality of phenomena.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

## BARDO OF DREAM

All human beings need sleep. When one is asleep, all kinds of illusory appearances apart from those of the waking state are

manifested in the mind. For this reason, the interval between the moment when we fall asleep and when we wake up is called the *bardo of dream*. Among the practices used in the Kagyupa school, the six dharmas of Naropa occupy a privileged place. They are inner heat, illusory body, dream, clear light, transfer of consciousness, and *bardo*. The dharma of dream contains instructions on the practice that allows us to attain Awakening in the dream state.

Taipei, April 1986

The dharma of dream requires us to become conscious of the subjective nature of the dream world. This is easy to say as long as we are in the waking state, but it is more difficult to achieve in the dream itself, where we take for real all that appears. The methods of the *dharma of dream* first lead us to *seize* dreams, to become conscious that we are dreaming in the dream, then transform or multiply dream appearances, and travel within the dream. The purpose of these techniques is to use the dream for progressing toward liberation.

### Sangye Nyentonpa's hair

An anecdote concerning two Shangpa lineage holders, Sangye Nyentonpa and his disciple Sangye Tenpa, gives an idea of the power and extent of this technique.

Once, they were together in retreat, but resided in different small houses. Sangye Tenpa *grasped* his dream one night and decided to go to meet his master Sangye Nyentonpa. Arriving in front of the master, he decided to visualize him in the wrathful form of the bodhisattva Vajrapani. He transformed his master into a gigantic Vajrapani, the size of a mountain, with hair straight up like flames. To each hair point, he added the complete and detailed *mandala* of great tantric deities, Chakrasamvara, Guyasamaja, Hevajra, and others. Finally, he created an immense quantity of outer, inner, and secret offerings, which

he presented to his master, now present in the form of Vajrapani crowned by this multitude of deities. Not only did he feel great joy in this dream play, but he accumulated immense merit and underwent great purification.

The next day when he visited Sangye Nyentonpa, he was told by his teacher, "What pain you gave yourself with my hair last night!"

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

## BARDO OF THE MOMENT OF DEATH

### **Dissolution of elements**

At the moment of death, whatever the cause of death, the elements of our body and mind are reabsorbed into each other. This process gives place to various physical alterations associated with mental sensations.

- When the earth element is reabsorbed into the water element, externally the dying person can no longer stretch or fold the limbs. Internally, the dying person has the feeling of being oppressed by a huge weight, as crushed by boulders or a mountain.

- When the water element is reabsorbed into the fire element, the mouth and nose become dry externally. Internally, the person is convinced he or she is drowning or being swept away by the current of a river.

- When the fire element is reabsorbed into the air element, the body loses its heat, beginning with the fingers of the hands and toes of the feet. Internally, the person feels an unbearable heat such as one would feel in the middle of a fire or in a burning house.

- When the air element is reabsorbed into individual consciousness, breathing becomes difficult, sometimes gasping, sometimes suspended at the moment of expiration or inspiration. Internally, the dying person has the impression of being taken away by a wind storm.



Dancing Skeletons

At the same time of these reabsorptions, the senses gradually cease to function. The eyes no longer see, ears no longer hear, the nose no longer smells odors, the palate no longer tastes flavors, and the skin no longer feels contact.

If one becomes conscious that one is dying, that death is near and unavoidable, it is then that one must apply the technique of *powa* which was practiced during one's life time. It is also more beneficial if one is assisted by a qualified lama while practicing *powa*.

Brussels, November 1982

## **Powa**

Our body is composed of five elements. At the moment of death, they are reabsorbed into each other. This gives place to all kind of mental experiences that are often painful and frightening.

At this moment, one can practice *powa*, the transfer of consciousness. According to the capacities and purity of the person who does it, it has three results.

- at best, rebirth in a pure land
- if not, in a god realm
- or in human world, with good possibilities of practicing the Dharma

Sufferings of agony are then avoided.

Samye Ling, March 1983

A day will come when the first symptoms of the illness that will take us away will manifest. The illness gradually will worsen until the moment when breathing will cease and we will fall into a state of total unconsciousness, because of the mind separating itself from the body. The agonizing and final period of illness is called *bardo of the moment of death*. Several methods are used for this passage to be undertaken without suffering. The easiest and most efficient method to apply is *powa*, one of the six dharmas of Naropa.

This transfer may be performed in three ways.

- If one entrusts oneself to a lama whose grace is powerful and realization in this technique perfect, the lama, out of compassion, proceeds in transferring the consciousness of the disciple.

- One who is sufficiently trained and qualified can transfer one's own consciousness.

- The third possibility combines the two previous ones. The transfer is done by both the power and compassion of the lama, and by the disciple's power. The two forces supplement each other, thanks to the connection of master to the disciple. The present lama and the dying disciple do the visualization used in this technique together.

### **Who wants to go to the Land of Bliss?**

Once at the place of residence of the yogi Thangtong Gyalpo, a great gathering took place. Thangtong Gyalpo took advantage of the situation to address the crowd and said, "Today is a day of many favorable conditions. Those among you who wish to go to the Land of Bliss, tell me, and I will send you there."

Going to the Land of Bliss implies leaving this world and most of the people carefully pondered on this. The yogi directly asked each one of them, "You, do you want to go there?"

"Yes, of course, I want to go there! But now I must attend my father and I cannot leave him. Later."

"And you?"

"Well, I still have my mother."

"And you?"

"This would be wonderful, but who will take care of my children?"

In the end, only three people declared themselves ready to leave this world for the Pure Land. Thangtong Gyalpo





Thangtong Gyalpo

practiced the transfer of consciousness on their behalf. They immediately died and went to the Land of Bliss.

### **When false dead people become true dead people**

Another yogi of the Kagyupa lineage, Sherab Lodro Rinchen, remained famous for his mastery of the transfer of consciousness. When he was alive, he was famous and many people used to call on him. One day, someone came looking for him to lead him on horseback to the bedside of a dying person. Along the way, three men working in the fields saw him coming from the distance and recognized him.

"Is it not the famous Sherab Lodro Rinchen who is coming? We will see if he is as powerful as claimed."

Two men lay on the ground and pretended to be dead. The third man greeted the lama, who was riding, and simulating panic, the third man explained that his two companions had just died. He also requested the lama to practice the transfer of consciousness for them.

"Are they really dead?" the lama asked.

"Of course they are dead!"

"I have been requested elsewhere" answered the lama, "and I have no time to stop now."

However, while riding away, he performed the transfer of consciousness for the two men. The man thought that the lama had left because he was incapable of doing the transfer. His reputation was usurped and they would be able to make fun of him! Pleased with the trickery played on the lama, the man returned to his companions. He found his friends, indeed, dead in the field!

During the Chinese invasion of Tibet, in the sixties, suffering and terror spread throughout the country. Many lamas were imprisoned and tortured. Many of them performed then the transfer of consciousness for themselves.

These different facts illustrate how this technique is applied, whether by the master's compassion or by the disciple's own qualification.

### **Transfer of consciousness in Tibet**

In Tibet, practice of the transfer of consciousness was in all traditions. Nyingmapas, Sakyapas, and Gelukpas used it. But in the Kagyupa tradition, it was a specialty and many monks and lamas trained themselves to do it. Kagyupas established a great number of three-year and three-month retreat centers. Part of the program was devoted to the practice of the transfer of consciousness. Today, identical retreat centers have been founded not only in India and Nepal, but also in Europe and America, so the tradition can be continued.

In Tibet, the Dharma was accepted by everyone, with the result that when a person died, one always would invite the lamas to perform the transfer of consciousness. When signs of success appeared, the entourage rejoiced, knowing that the deceased person had attained favorable rebirth.

*Taipei, April 1986*

## **BARDO OF THE NATURE IN ITSELF**

### **Reabsorption of the ticles**

If it is not possible to do *powa* at the immediate moment of reabsorption of the elements, the individual consciousness dissolves into emptiness during a process of three steps.

- First, the white masculine *tigle* descends from the summit of the head to the heart. The dying person has the impression of a light similar to that of the moon. Simultaneously, the thirty-three forms of desire-attachment become inactive.

- Secondly, the red feminine *tigle* rises from the secret place to the heart. One feels a sensation of red luminosity at the same time that the forty forms of hatred-aversion become inactive.

When the two *tigles* move, the person who has a good practice of *tumo* can be liberated in empty bliss.

- Finally, when the two white and red *tigles* join in the heart, the mind usually falls into a state of complete unconsciousness, a total darkness which will last three and half days.

Brussels, November 1982

During the moments preceding death, three phases called *appearance, extension, and attainment* are, in succession, *reabsorbed* into each other.<sup>10</sup> When the appearance is reabsorbed in extension, thirty-three types of thoughts related to desire are blocked. Even if one is in the presence of a young god or goddess, despite their beauty and incomparable seduction, one feels no desire. When extension is reabsorbed in attainment, the forty types of thoughts linked to anger are blocked. Even if we were to see someone kill our own mother, we would feel no anger. Finally when attainment is reabsorbed in *total attainment*, the seven types of thoughts linked to blindness are blocked. At this moment all mental activity ceases and the mind falls into unconsciousness.

If one has the experience of clear light and mahamudra, instead of falling into the unconsciousness supposed to occur at this instant, the nature of mind in all its clarity will be revealed, just as an usually dark room is suddenly illuminated. There are texts comparing this state with the fifteenth day of the month, the day of the full moon, when the moon rises at the same time the sun sets. Both simultaneously shine in the sky. The clarity of the mind instead of ceasing, radiates a particular brilliance. The mind then knows extreme vivacity and luminosity that it can maintain for several days

---

<sup>10</sup>These three phases are another approach to reabsorption of the *tigles* previously explained. The terms, "*appearance, extension, and attainment*" have a technical meaning. They are used to describe the process of birth or cessation of a mental state, either at the moment of death or in some other circumstances like sleep or thought.

and that give it the possibility of reaching Buddhahood. Instructions on the *clear light* and mahamudra practiced in this life, prepare us for the moment of death.

The ultimate nature of the mind now presented to us is called *clear light as foundation*. Experiences reached by the practice of mahamudra or the *dharma of the clear light* are called *clear light as path* or also *clear light daughter*. Finally, the clear light manifesting at the very moment of death is the *clear light as result* or *clear light mother*. It is said that when the *mother* meets the *daughter*, liberation becomes possible.

If recognition of the clear light cannot be made, the second phase of the *bardo* of the nature in itself begins. It is very rapid. Then, the consciousness again begins to function, producing rays or forms of light organized as aspects of the deities.

Samye Ling, March 1983

### Attaining Awakening

At the moment following reabsorptions, the practice of the clear light or of mahamudra gives the opportunity to be liberated. During this time, the mind rests without distraction in the emptiness, clarity, and intelligence without obstruction characterizing the mind.

At the end of these three-and-a-half days, *going to the pure lands* no longer matters. Realization is complete; the pure lands manifest by themselves, proceeding out of the luminosity of the mind. In the three aspects of the mind, the three bodies of Awakening simultaneously appear.

- from emptiness, the absolute body (*dharmakaya*)
- from clarity, the body of perfect experience (*sambhogakaya*)
- from intelligence without obstruction, that is also empty and clear, the body of emanation (*nirmanakaya*)

Because the mode of being of the mind is also great bliss by nature, the fourth body appears, the body of essence itself

(*svabhavakaya*). Buddhahood is reached because the four bodies and the five wisdoms are actualized.

Brussels, November 1982

### **Clear light or darkness**

When the *bardo* of the moment of death ends, the mind enters the *postmortem* state that begins with a period of total unconsciousness, called *bardo of the nature in itself*. The practice of mahamudra is then extremely beneficial, as is one of the six dharmas of Naropa, the dharma of clear light. The *bardo* of the nature in itself, in ordinary cases, is comparable to a sunset followed by total darkness. To be able to apply the meditation of mahamudra or the clear light at this moment is like switching on an immense light in utter darkness. The mind then remains in a sharp and empty awareness. In general, however, this is only an approximate period of unconsciousness lasting for three days.

### **Appearing of the deities**

Then, consciousness again begins to function, just as one leaves sleep behind. One can consider this moment of the waking up of the consciousness as the conclusion of the *bardo* of the nature in itself. It is there that the forty-two peaceful and the fifty-eight wrathful deities are manifested. These deities are mentioned in the initiation of the *bardo*. If one has no spiritual practice, one feels attachment for peaceful deities and aversion for the wrathful ones that are frightening. This dual feeling has the effect of ending the vision of the deities and making one enter the *bardo* of becoming.

On the other hand, for the person who has received the initiation of the *bardo*, who has faith and has practiced the phase of creation, when the deities appear, it is like encountering familiar people. This person will recognize the deities received at the initiation and rejoice. This is the

opportunity to be liberated from the *bardo*. There are three possibilities of liberation:

- superior, one becomes one with the *yidams* and reaches full Awakening
- mediocre, one goes to the Land of Bliss or another pure land
- inferior, one is directed to favorable human rebirth or to rebirth in a divine world in which the practice of the Dharma is possible, such as the Tushita heaven. This liberation is made possible by the conjunction of three elements.
- the natural force of the mind .
- the power of latent conditioning
- grace inherent in the deities and empowerment

### **Shariputra's mother leaves hell**

The power of latent conditioning is great. The following story gives us some idea of this conditioning.

One of the main disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha was the monk Shariputra. The mother of Shariputra loved her son and trusted him, but was not interested in spiritual practice. As for Shariputra, he wanted to find a way to help his mother with her almost not knowing it. He wanted to give her a skill that would neutralize negative karmic potential after her death. One day while visiting her, he fixed a bell above the entrance door. It rang each time anyone opened or closed the door. "I have instituted a new rule in the house," he told his mother, "each time that the bell rings, you must say OM MANI PADME HUNG." The mother fulfilled the wish of her son. Has anyone entered the house? "Ding," rang the bell. "OM MANI PADME HUNG," recited the mother. Anyone go out? "Ding," "OM MANI PADME HUNG." This became habitual for the mother.

When she died, a bad karma from a past life effectively led to her rebirth in hell. Her torture was to bathe in boiling liquid in a cauldron that a horrible demon stirred with a iron ladle. Soon, the ladle knocked the edge of the cauldron.

"Ding," sounded the ladle. "OM MANI PADME HUNG" mechanically said the mother. Because of the conditioning of her mind and the force of the mantra, she was immediately liberated from hell.

Taipei, April 1986

The manifestation of peaceful and wrathful deities is not an external phenomenon, but the expression of the very dynamics of the pure nature of our mind, the *tathagatagarbha*. During our life, these deities are located in our body.

- the forty-two peaceful deities are in the *chakra of phenomena*, located in the heart

- the fifty-eight wrathful deities are in the *chakra of great bliss* at the summit of the head

The heart chakra is called *chakra of phenomena* because it has eight spokes that support experience of the eight consciousnesses. Consequently, the manifestation of all phenomena of samsara or nirvana is linked to this chakra. As for the chakra at the top of the head, it received its name *chakra of great bliss* because it is from there that the bliss of body and mind originates.

During the *bardo* of the nature in itself, because of the dual grasping of I and other, the deities, although none other than the radiance of pure mind, are taken for external phenomena, and the extreme radiance of their body creates an unbearable fright.

Brussels, November 1982

## BARDO OF BECOMING

The *bardo* of becoming begins when the *bardo* of the nature in itself ends and when the deities' manifestation ceases. It is a period similar to dreaming. Multiple appearances manifest and the mind interprets them as pleasant or unpleasant. The person who accomplished many positive acts in this life sees manifesting phenomena that bring joy. On the other hand, the



person who has accomplished many negative acts, experiences fear, anguish, and suffering.

### **Return to the previous life**

The first phase of the *bardo* of becoming is marked by many experiences linked to the previous life. Generally, we are strongly attached to the place where we live, our belongings, family, and activity. The force of this attachment constrains the mind of the deceased person to revisit familiar places, where known people and objects can be seen. This causes much suffering. For example, the deceased person sees members of the family or other people take what was once a personal possession. This person would like to hold these people back, grasp the objects, and say, "They belong to me." Not able to do so, the deceased person feels violent anger. Sometimes, the deceased person is invaded by immense despair, to the point of losing consciousness. Or the person becomes conscious of being dead. The shock and fright are so great that they provoke loss of consciousness, which is followed by a brief appearance of lights and luminous points. It is a kind of *small death*, occurring each week during the *bardo*.

Sometimes the mind of the deceased person, returning *home*, wants to communicate with relatives and friends. But no one answers and, sadly, there is no understanding of why. Sometimes, the deceased person stands in front of someone and tries to talk, but the living person is oblivious. The deceased person is convinced that he or she is being intentionally slighted. Once again, the deceased person confronts the living person, but again that person turns away. It is often through this type of reaction that the deceased person understands himself or herself to be dead. Sometimes, the deceased person becomes conscious of being dead by seeing his or her own corpse. This causes the deceased person profound anguish.

This period during which one wants to return where one has lived lasts one or two weeks and is the first phase of the *bardo* of becoming. It can also be used in a positive way. It is the moment, for example, when those who have prayed for rebirth in the Land of Bliss, will be able to go there. The mind of a deceased person, prepared by prayers and wishes, when it becomes conscious of its state, instead of being taken away by fright, thinks, "I am dead, now I will be able to go to the Land of Bliss." The deceased person prays to Amitabha and Avalokita, who appear as luminous and shining as the rising sun. The deceased person, filled with clarity, peace, and joy, goes toward the Land of Bliss and for rebirth there.

### **To future life**

For those who cannot take advantage of this opportunity, the *bardo* continues and, after the second or third week, the links with the past life become more and more tenuous. At this time, the deceased person forgets his or her country and family and begins to perceive phenomena in relation to a future life. It is the second phase of the *bardo* of becoming, at the end of which the place of rebirth among the six classes of beings is clearly perceived. The being who must assume a human rebirth, sees the future parents uniting. If the being must reincarnate as a woman, attraction to the father and aversion for the mother will be felt. If the being must reincarnate as a man, on the contrary, attraction for the mother and aversion for the father appear. The force of the dual feeling of attraction and aversion provokes the entry of the mind into the womb.

The *bardo* of becoming generally lasts forty-nine days, although it can be shorter or longer. The dharmas of Naropa contain instructions for liberating oneself during the first phase, as well as in the second one.

*Taipei, April 1986*

Appearances manifesting during the *bardo* of becoming have no reality. They are only projections of the mind. They exist nowhere. Although similar to the dream, this state is nevertheless different in that all thought produced in the mind immediately takes on a real appearance. If, for example, one thinks of India, one is immediately in India. If one thinks of England, one is in England. If one thinks of one's house, one is home.

During the first phase of the *bardo* of becoming, the practice of Avalokita that has been done in this life becomes extremely useful. If it is recognized that one is in the *bardo*, what has been learned with imagination can be applied. The external universe is visualized as the Land of Bliss. All beings are Avalokita whose body is the union of appearance and emptiness. All sounds, like an echo, are the mantra of six syllables, the union of sound and emptiness and all thought is the union of awareness and emptiness. The person who knows how to meditate may be liberated from the *bardo* at this very moment.

During the second phase of the *bardo* of becoming, as the moment of rebirth approaches, unless one has practiced well the instructions relative to the *bardo* during this life time, it is unlikely to have any affect on the situation. The person who practiced these instructions will be capable of visualizing his or her future parents in the form of deities in union. This permits contact with the Dharma in good conditions for practicing the Vajrayana, in the future existence.

### **Rebirth of the tulkus**

For the great beings who are *tulkus*, the process of the conception, gestation, and birth is different from that of ordinary beings. According to the realization of the *tulku*, various possibilities are envisaged.

- awareness of the process occurring in the *bardo* and during conception, then absence of consciousness during the fetal development and birth
- awareness of the process occurring during conception and the fetal development, but not at birth
- awareness with no interruption during conception, gestation, and birth

In the *secret biography* of the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, it is stated that, between the death of the Second Karmapa, Karmapakshi, and the birth of Rangjung Dorje, no discontinuity affected the awareness, at the moment of death, in the following period, during conception, during gestation, or at birth. In the *thangkas*, Rangjung Dorje is represented sitting on a lotus to symbolize that he was able to be born free of the veils that normally stain birth.

Although a fetus cannot articulate sounds, it happened that the mother pregnant with a great *tulku*, hear the latter recite a mantra, ask about her health, and advise her to avoid situations harmful to her pregnancy.

It is said that Shakyamuni Buddha, while he was still in the womb of his mother, could nevertheless liberate many gods and demi-gods by his teachings and the power of his mind.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

During the *bardo* of becoming, the reading of the *Bardo Thodrol* can be done by another person<sup>11</sup> for the benefit of the deceased person. This reading is particularly efficient during the first part of this *bardo* of becoming, when the links with the life just ended remain strong. In the second part, connected with the life to come, reading is less beneficial.

---

<sup>11</sup>*Bardo Thodrol* means exactly liberation by listening during the *bardo*. This text is known in English as The Tibetan Book of the Dead.

However, it is more beneficial if the reader unites three conditions.

- He must be a monk observing his vows without failure
- He must be animated by authentic *bodhicitta*, acting truly out of love and compassion
- He must do so in a state of meditation

Vajradharaling, 1983

### Cycle of the bardos

Beginning with conception, we again experience the *bardo* of gestation followed by the *bardo* of birth to death, and that of dream, then by the *bardo* of the moment of death, and so on. As long as liberation is not attained, this cycle continues. Liberation can take place in each of the *bardos*, but the methods that make this liberation possible have to be implemented now, during the *bardo* of birth to death.

Taipei, April 1986

Pleasant, painful, frightening, or attractive experiences that accompany death, *bardo*, gestation, and rebirth for ordinary beings depend on the karma of past lives. Positive acts result in happiness and negative acts in suffering. More particularly, the way our future death unfolds depends largely on what we did in this life.

When a being takes rebirth, a *bardo from birth to death* begins. This continual cycle of successive *bardos* constitutes the framework of samsaric existence in the six realms, each being beset with suffering by nature. This is explained in detail in texts like *The Ornament of liberation* by Gampopa, *The Progressive Way of the Three Types of Beings* by Taranatha, or *The Torch of Certainty* by Lodro Thaye. It is good to not only study these texts, but to become immersed in them, getting a clear and precise vision of our situation in samsara. It is not enough to read that suffering in samsara is without end, but we must understand, see, and reflect on this.

## Escaping when there is still time

In Tibet, for example, about twenty years ago, the sufferings were such that hell or the realm of hungry ghosts seemed to have been this world. A number of people predicted these events and, suspecting the development of this dramatic situation, chose to escape to India or to other places. They escaped the immense suffering and terror that destroyed their country. Most Tibetans, however, were not informed early enough, or although informed, believed that it was not serious. This is why they remained in the country and were not able to escape the drama of war and occupation later.

The general situation of beings is entirely comparable to that of the Tibetans. If they are conscious of the endless suffering implied in samsara, they are certain to liberate themselves. If they do not become aware, they do not seek ways of liberation, and cannot escape the torments awaiting them.

It is important, for oneself and for all beings, to establish definitive happiness and to suppress suffering. Holy Dharma is the only way. It is essential to study and practice the Dharma.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

We must effectively master our minds. Merely adopting a behavior appearing to be the practice of the Dharma will not lead us far. The Buddha said,

*Perfectly mastering one's mind  
Such is the teaching of the Buddha.*

## Milarepa and the Vinaya

In Milarepa's life, we learn of an episode where a geshe reproaches Milarepa for not respecting the *Vinaya*. According to the geshe, Milarepa pretends to be Awakened but does not even wear monastic clothes and keeps his hair long. Milarepa

simply replies that he may not know the texts on discipline, but that he knows perfectly the discipline of his own mind.

### **Milarepa and the monk who sold a yak**

Another time, a monk came to occupy a room next to where Milarepa was staying. This monk had a yak and he was thinking of butchering it and selling the different parts. He spent the night thinking about the best way to make a profit. Would it be better to sell the head to one person, ribs to this or that one, the skin to this person rather than to that person, and so on? In the morning, everything was arranged in his own mind, but he had forgot to think about what to do with the tail. Still more agitated by his calculations, he performed his morning practice very early and recited mantras, adopting a very pious appearance. At a moment, through the open door, he saw Milarepa apparently in deep sleep. The monk shouted, "Hey, *yogi*, this is not the time to sleep! You better practice, lazy one!"

"Usually, I do not sleep so late," replied Milarepa, "But I spent the whole night trying to think what I will do with my yak and I am tired."

And Milarepa, as if it concerned himself, repeated the same complete distribution of the animal that the monk had listed. Then, he added, "I do not know what to do with the tail!"

Milarepa wanted to show the monk that the appearance of practice or the simple observance of external rules was not enough. It is the mental attitude animating them that counts. The monk was so shocked to see that Milarepa had discovered his thought, that he conceived a great faith in Milarepa and became one of his main disciples.

*Brussels, November 1982*



Khyungpo Naljor



# The Six Dharmas of Naropa

The six dharmas of Naropa form a group of practices allowing one to integrate all existential situations with the path and transform them into opportunities for liberation. These situations are the state of wake, dream, deep sleep, the moment of death, and the intermediate period between death and rebirth. These six dharmas assume that many practices have been accomplished previously. The techniques allowing one to apply them are therefore never taught in public. Here Kalu Rinpoche gives an overview of their respective function.

The six dharmas of Naropa and mahamudra have been transmitted from Milarepa, who had received them from Marpa, up until this time.

## 1 - TUMO

---

The first of these six dharmas is *tumo*. This practice is based on the principle that our body is intimately related to the *nadis*, *prana*, and *bindus* that make up the material support of mind. By acting on the support of mind, one acts on mind itself. There exists indeed a reciprocal action of the mind with this subtle energy system. Instructions on *tumo* concern working with the *nadis*, *prana*, and *bindus*.<sup>12</sup>

The beneficial effects of *tumo* are on two planes. First, *tumo* provides beneficial heat to the body. This is why one often speaks of *yogis* like Milarepa who, even lost in the mountains and in the middle of winter, only wear a thin garment of cotton. Mentally, this heat is associated with a sensation of happiness that, in itself, opens up to the experience of

---

<sup>12</sup>See the chapter *Links between Body and Mind* in the volume, *Profound Buddhism*.

emptiness so that the practitioner finally attains realization of mahamudra, bliss, emptiness, and nonconcept.

Often, one makes a distinction between mahamudra seen as a *path of liberation* and the six dharmas called *path of means*. One should not see this as a separation but understand that the six dharmas are profound *means* for quick access to mahamudra. It is with this prospect that *tumo* is taught, as a means to achieve the bliss-emptiness of primordial awareness.

## 2 - ILLUSORY BODY

---

Right now, we believe that the world is real. We believe that "I" and "other" really exist, and that all experiences of happiness and suffering are also real. This notion of the reality of all manifestation is strongly anchored in us. What is called *illusory body* consists, on the other hand, of looking at all phenomena as a magical creation, a mirage, the reflection of the moon on water, or as a rainbow. There is a traditional series of twelve comparisons illustrating the lack of reality of appearances.

Khyungpo Naljor, the founder of the Shangpa lineage, remained especially famous for his realization of the *illusory body*. Several stories about him in the history of this lineage illustrate how his mastery over manifestation allowed him to magically produce all kinds of phenomena. One day he made visible for his disciples, first, the appearance of celestial worlds, then the appearance of hell. The disciples asked him if what they were seeing was real or a projection of his mind. Khyungpo Naljor explained that, by preserving the vision that all phenomena are illusory, one accomplishes an illusory practice leading to illusory liberation. Phenomena are not ultimately real, but just like a madman who sees imaginary things, we invest phenomena with a reality that they have not.

### 3 - DREAM

---

When we dream, we usually consider appearances in our dream to be real, exactly as they are during waking hours. Consequently, we feel reactions also *real*, such as joys, fears, sufferings, and so on. Instructions provided for the practice of dream allow us first to recognize, during the dream itself, that we are actually in the process of dreaming and to become conscious that anything appearing in the dream is only the dynamics of mind lacking physical reality. From there, the practitioner can increase control of the dream by voluntarily creating phenomena in the dream, multiplying them, or traveling within the dream. For example, the practitioner can go to pure lands like the Land of Bliss, meet Buddhas, or produce all kinds of miracles. Those who obtain perfect mastery of the dream can enlarge it to the waking world. Recognizing that the waking state is not fundamentally different from the dream state gives them the capacity to create miracles.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

Instructions on the dharma of dream are extremely profound. If one has the required qualities, they are easy to use.

Appearances of the waking state have no reality, yet we consider them as real. Although they are the basis of much suffering, we think that they bring happiness. They have no permanence although we perceive them as permanent. Every night, we have many dreams that we comprehend in the same way. They have no reality but as they unfold, we cannot recognize them as such and we take them as real. Although they have no permanence, we believe that they constitute an immutable world.

For these reasons, we experience a great variety of pleasant or unpleasant situations in our dreams, making us happy or miserable. In some nightmares, for example, we

have real fear. Why these reactions? Simply, we are sure that the dream, in the moment it occurs, is something tangible and real. Dream appearances, however, have no reality and are found nowhere. It is impossible to locate a landscape or a country from a dream because they exist nowhere other than in our own mind.

By the grace and instructions related to this dharma of dream, we can during the dream itself, recognize that phenomena in the dream are only a projection of our own mind having no reality in themselves. Because of this, they lose their compelling power. For example, if the sea or deep waters appear and one fears drowning, it is possible to perceive this water as a dream and to dive into it without fear. In the same way, one can also enter the flames of a fire without fear. One will not be burned to death. With this understanding of the dream, the recognition that it is only a manifestation produced by our mind, everything becomes possible, flying in the sky, going to the Land of Bliss, or traveling around the world. One also has the ability to create ten other people similar to oneself, perhaps a hundred, or as many as one wants.

When the ability to grasp the illusory nature of the dream becomes strong enough in our mind, it may be applied to appearances in waking state. It becomes then possible to produce the same miracles as in the dream, such as flying or making all kinds of extraordinary things as did Milarepa or Khyungpo Naljor. This accomplishment obtained in the dream state and in the waking state allows one not only to achieve a great number of miracles but to quickly progress to Awakening.

*Madrid, 1987*

#### 4 - THE CLEAR LIGHT

When we fall into deep sleep, without dreams, we are in total darkness, with no consciousness of what happens. The

practice of the clear light allows that, during deep sleep, either at the moment when one has just fallen asleep or in periods alternating with dreams, ignorance is replaced by knowledge and the mind dwells in a state of openness and clarity. It is said that the person who has been able, in his or her life time, to dwell at least seven times in the clear light is sure to obtain liberation during the first phase of the *bardo*, similar to deep sleep. Marpa said that when the mind sleeps, the sleep can be a meditation, and he added that he had the instructions of the clear light allowing this meditation.

## 5 - POWA, TRANSFER OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The verb *powa* in Tibetan carries the idea of leaving one place for another. For example, it is used to mean *moving*. In the case of the six dharmas, it is related to a technique used at the moment of death, which allows one to leave the six realms that compose samsara and go to a land of pure manifestation as the Land of Bliss. The person knowing how to apply this meditation can go where he or she wants by directing his or her thought at the right moment to one of the pure lands.

## 6 - THE BARDO

After death, during the period called the *bardo of becoming*, a multitude of phenomena appear that, while being productions of the mind only, are not recognized as such. The deceased person does not know in fact that he or she is in the *bardo* and passes through all kinds of pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Even if the person understands that he or she is dead, this discovery plunges him or her into such anguish and fear that the person falls again into a state of unconsciousness. The person who has practiced the instructions contained in the dharma of the *bardo*, immediately recognizes being in the *bardo* and from then on applies the methods allowing him or her to be completely liberated. Even if this person cannot

apply the methods, the capacity is present to freely move in the *bardo* and to go to the Land of Bliss or to another pure land. Instructions of the *bardo* open many possibilities.<sup>13</sup>

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

---

<sup>13</sup>One will find further explanations of *powa* and the *bardo* in the chapter devoted to the *Six Bardos*.

# The Land of Bliss

The Mahayana developed the notion of pure land, which is not found in the Hinayana tradition. This notion is close to the concept of paradise, but there are many pure lands. Created by different buddhas, the pure lands conform to their vows benefiting all beings and respond to the particular aspirations of these beings. The Land of Bliss (Sanskrit, Sukhavati; Tibetan, Dewachen), created by Amitabha Buddha, is the pure land that attracts the most people, not only in Tibet, but also in Japan and China. Pure lands are conceived on different levels. Here, Kalu Rinpoche describes them from the simplest point of view.

## A DIFFERENT TIME SCALE

Pure lands are domains of manifestation created by the Buddhas. Thus, the Land of Bliss was created by Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, in conclusion of his wish, formulated before attaining Awakening, for the manifestation of a pure land that is easy to access. The time scale there is different than ours. There, a day is equivalent to a *maha-kalpa* in an ordinary universe, a *maha-kalpa* consisting of eighty intermediary *kalpas*<sup>14</sup> which include the genesis, maintenance, and destruction of a universe as well as the empty period preceding a new manifestation. Its duration is nearly incalculable in earth years. The Land of Bliss was created ten days ago according to its time scale, that is to say ten *maha-kalpas* of our own measurement.

It is a pure land where all manifestations of the five elements and all sense perceptions are joy, pleasure, and beauty. The word "suffering" is unknown there. Things and beings have a luminous and immaterial quality and Amitabha's body emits a light brighter than the sun and

---

<sup>14</sup>The life of a universe is envisaged in the framework of an extremely long cycle called a *maha-kalpa*. This *maha-kalpa* is divided in four great periods each covering twenty intermediary *kalpas*: emptiness, genesis, maintenance, and destruction.

moon. It is always daytime but allowance is made for distinguishing the succession of days and nights. During daytime, the flowers open, at night, they close.<sup>15</sup>

## BIRTH IN A LOTUS

Gaining rebirth in the Land of Bliss is only possible after certain preparation in this life. One must receive Amitabha or Avalokita initiation (Tibetan, Chenrezig), recite their mantras, or make wishes and prayers. By the orientation given to our mind, once in the *bardo*, we become conscious that we are dead and we see Amitabha coming to welcome us. We will recognize him, and wish for rebirth in his pure land. This thought is enough to make us go there immediately.

It is the end of the *bardo* and spontaneous rebirth, without intermediary, in the Land of Bliss. Immediately, one is born in the heart of a lotus bud, endowed with a young adult body, well formed, and dressed in beautiful clothes. The lotus opens, one sees Amitabha and his entourage and one obtains the first level of a bodhisattva. This attainment bars all possibility for rebirth in the six classes of beings under the constraint of karma and entails an immense increase of the abilities of mind. The bodhisattva on the first level can produce one hundred simultaneous emanations of himself or herself, simultaneously go to one hundred pure lands, receive the teachings of one hundred Buddhas, concentrate his or her mind on one hundred objects, and so on. Thus, the bodhisattva on the first level then possesses twelve hundred-fold powers.

---

<sup>15</sup>One can consider this picture as faithfully describing reality or as a reflection giving us an idea within our reach.





Amitabha

## CONJUNCTION OF FOUR FACTORS

---

Generally, for rebirth in the Land of Bliss, it is necessary to collect four factors.<sup>16</sup>

1 - The support—imagining the field of accumulation. One inwardly imagines the Land of Bliss as a beautiful and pleasant place. One sees Amitabha with Avalokita and Vajrapani (Tibetan, Chana Dorje) at his sides, and, all around him are innumerable *arhats* and bodhisattvas. One imagines that they are all really present in front of us.

2 - The fundamental cause—accumulation and purification. In front of the support that one visualizes as said, one presents, in the imagination, infinite offerings. Homage is given with body, speech, and mind. One confesses faults committed during innumerable past lives and believes that one is purified.

3 - Auxiliary factor—engendering the mind of Awakening (*bodhicitta*). One develops compassion for all beings, particularly in connection with the Land of Bliss, by formulating wishes, always in the presence of the field of accumulation. *May all beings be free of suffering, and have happiness. May they all be reborn in the Land of Bliss. May I, myself, take rebirth in the Land of Bliss and lead all beings to it.*

4 - Operating condition—perfect wishes. Engendering deep aspiration, one thinks, *May I take rebirth in the Land of Bliss.*

To go somewhere by car, it is necessary to have a vehicle in good condition, a good driver, and to make the decision to go to a chosen place. Similarly, to go to the Land of Bliss, it is necessary to add the wish to go there to the favorable inner foundation.

---

<sup>16</sup>These are the four elements of a meditation done in this present life.

## NOT LOOKING BEHIND

---

When these four factors are gathered, it is almost impossible not to take rebirth in the Land of Bliss. However, there is the risk of an obstacle that may prevent us from doing so. Our egocentric grasping is strong and makes us very attached to our relatives, parents, children, husband, wife, or friends.

At death, our consciousness will experience the *bardo*, but because of the wish for rebirth in the Land of Bliss implanted within us, the aspiration will arise in our mind and we will think, "I am going to the Land of Bliss." This thought by itself gives the necessary impetus, and we will have the impression of flying in space to reach our destination. It is there that attachment to our close relations risks being a counterbalance. If our attachment is very strong, we will hear the voice of the person to whom we remain attached tell us, "Do not abandon me, do not go to the Land of Bliss." This voice will be very clear and convincing. The power of attachment will lead us then to look at the person who calls. We will turn back, and the wish to go to the Land of Bliss will leave our mind.

There is a method to avoid this danger. Let us consider from now on that our own body, belongings, and all to which we are attached form a *mandala*<sup>17</sup> that we offer to Amitabha. We think, "All this, I offer to you. Henceforth it no longer belongs to me, but to you alone."

The benefit of this offering is twofold, it allows us to accumulate merit and attachment decreases. Especially, when touched by fatal illness, we must think with great force, "I am going to die soon. My body is the support of the illness and sufferings that I now endure, but it no longer belongs to me. I have offered it to Amitabha. All those who are dear to me,

---

<sup>17</sup>The term *mandala* covers many meanings related to the notion of structure or order. Here, it simply means that the objects considered as offerings are gathered, by imagination, in a harmonious manner and respectfully presented.

parents, children, spouse, brothers, sisters, and friends, I have also offered them to Amitabha. I no longer need to take care of them. It is Amitabha who will care for them. This illness will lead me to death and I am happy, because I am going to leave this world of sufferings to go to the Land of Bliss." In this way, no obstacle will be able to prevent our rebirth there.

The power of the mind is great. Mind has the energy to achieve its goals, all the more if it relies on faith in the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and masters.

## THE CARPENTER'S DAUGHTER

A long time ago, there lived a brave old man, skilled in carpentry, but poor in intelligence, and having no knowledge of the Dharma. His daughter, however, had a great mind, which she applied to businesses in this world as well as to spiritual obligations. The carpenter loved her very much and his confidence in her was so great that he used to do anything she wanted with no questions asked.

As for the daughter, aware that it was time for her father to leave this world, she wanted to teach him at least some rudiments of the Dharma to help him to pass away, but she knew that he would not be able to understand much. How to help him? After deliberating, she discovered a way. One evening, she told her father that she had a great source of contentment that she wanted to share with him. She said, "Do you know, father, whom I met today? A man from a beautiful country, situated where the sun sets, called the Land of Bliss. He was sent by a good lama who lives there. Your fame as a carpenter is so great that it has reached the lama. He wants you to build him a house. Is it not wonderful? I did not hesitate to give your consent; you will be well paid." The date of construction was not yet fixed, but when the time arrives, she would let him know.

The father thought that the lama described by his daughter could only be someone very powerful ruling a great

country. And since his daughter gave his promise, he would go.

From time to time, she spoke again of this distant Land of Bliss, its enchanting parks, its mild weather, graciousness of the inhabitants, and greatness of the lama who governed it. The desire to go there evolved more and more in the mind of the carpenter.

The father soon became ill and his sickness rapidly worsened. "Be without fear," his daughter told him, "you will recover soon. The moment for you to go to the Land of Bliss to build the house approaches. Do not forget that I promised you must go there."

The father believed that he was going to recover. Nevertheless, his health continued to deteriorate. When he was very close to death, his daughter again told him, "Father, today is a great day. Time has come for you to go to the Land of Bliss. You must absolutely go. You will regain your health and go there."

Persuaded that it was true, he died with this thought. After the period of unconsciousness following death, when he woke up in the *bardo*, this same thought was the first to appear in his mind. "My daughter told me, I must now go to the Land of Bliss."

Amitabha and his entourage appeared then to him and he went where his aspiration guided him. The old man did not know the Dharma, but he had confidence in the daughter he loved and considered everything she told him to be true. He was therefore convinced of the existence of this delicious place called the Land of Bliss where a powerful lama resided. Thinking he would go to this country gave him great joy, and his aspiration to arrive there was very strong. With the absence of doubts and the determined orientation of his mind he effectively went there.

*Kaochong, March 31, 1986*

## BENEFIT OF THE LAND OF BLISS

Even if we cannot intensely devote ourselves to the accumulation of merit and purification, we can simply develop an aspiration for rebirth in the Land of Bliss. If we pray sincerely for that and recite texts that express this aspiration with great faith, at death, by the conjunction of our own wishes and those of Amitabha, we will be reborn in this field of pure manifestation.

Access to the Land of Bliss implies the automatic attainment of the first level of a bodhisattva. One is totally free of suffering there, since it is said that there is not even a single *strand of hair* of suffering. One acquires aptitudes greater than those we now have. We will possess the ability to produce one hundred emanations of ourselves, not under the constraint of karma, but freely, for the purpose of helping beings on Earth and other worlds.

## FROM ASSUMPTION TO CERTAINTY

The notion of the Land of Bliss is approached in an appreciably different way in the West than in the East. Tibetan, Chinese, or Japanese people are heirs of ancient Buddhist tradition, with the result that they spontaneously accept, without doubting, the reality of the Land of Bliss. Aspiration for rebirth there is a natural continuation of their faith. Westerners are in a different situation. Buddhism is not deeply rooted in their cultural environment and they have developed a strong critical mind during their studies. Even if they envision the possibility of existence of the Land of Bliss, they do it as an assumption rather than a certainty.

However, given their intelligence and powerful capability to study, Westerners can easily understand the teachings of the Buddha, including the one on the Land of Bliss. They grasp the authenticity and beneficial nature of these teachings.

They are able from then on to acquire the same conviction as Easterners.

*Question: As for the Land of Bliss, does it have an existence in itself or is it only a projection of the mind?*

**Kalu Rinpoche:** Pure lands are the result of the wishes of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to benefit all beings.

Rebirth in the Land of Bliss does not mean reaching Buddhahood but only the first stage of a bodhisattva. It remains to make progress on the ten stages leading to ultimate Awakening. One must also note that, from the moment one is in this field of manifestation, it is no longer possible to fall back into samsara.

*Brussels, October 1984*



ॐ म णि पद्मे ह्रं

Avalokita Mantra  
OM MANI PADME HUNG



# Mantras

The problem of mantras is particularly interesting to discuss because Europeans (or Americans) and Tibetans differ in their approach. In Tibet, the Buddhist tradition is ancient, the result being that everyone acknowledges reciting mantras has beneficial effects. As for Westerners, they often see the mantras only as words, just an activity of speech, and do not understand their effect. They do not clearly see how these words can act on the mind.

## POWER OF SPEECH

It is true, in a certain way, that words are only sounds getting lost in space. Nevertheless, they are vectors of great power. This power is obvious even in daily situations. Suppose that the person tells another, "You are truly fantastic. What you do is extraordinary," and so on. The person who receives the compliment is overjoyed, perhaps even feels a certain exaltation. On the contrary, if one criticizes the same person or makes unpleasant remarks, the person becomes angry. Joy and anger are provoked by words. This is a clear indication of how the power of words is widely experienced in many areas where it is easy to observe.

The importance words play in our studies is known; they are an indispensable vehicle. A Tibetan saying well emphasizes the power of speech.

*Words are neither sharp nor cutting,  
but they can cut the heart of a human being.*

## SUBTLE ANATOMY

Tantras teach that the human body contains a system of 72,000 subtle channels (*nadis*). It is said that the extremities of these channels are in the form of letters, more particularly the

sixteen vowels and thirty consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet. Winds<sup>18</sup> (*prana*) that circulate in the channels are influenced by these forms. This explains why human beings have the ability to produce a great variety of sounds whose combination makes up the wealth of a language. The structure of the system of subtle channels is less elaborate in animals. This is why animals have only few sounds to communicate.

## A SIXTH ELEMENT

The configuration of the subtle channels is not enough for the possibility of expressing oneself in a complex manner, however. Body and mind are composed of five elements, earth, water, fire, air, and space. Human beings have a sixth element that animals lack, and that is the element of primordial awareness (Sanskrit, *jnana*). Because of this sixth element, the human body is called the *six-fold vajra body*. Primordial awareness allows us to express ourselves with the assistance of a vast vocabulary and to understand the meaning of what is said to us. It also permits reflection, information, and knowledge.

## WHO CAN CREATE A MANTRA?

Mantras are aspects of the language that require particular capabilities for their creation. An ordinary being does not have, in any way, the ability to create a mantra. Let us consider someone who has reached a stage superior to common people, the first stage of a bodhisattva. This being possesses twelve hundred-fold powers, such as the ability of knowing events of one hundred past lives and one hundred future lives, to simultaneously visit one hundred pure lands, to simultaneously listen to the teaching of one hundred Buddhas, to dwell at the same time in one hundred meditative

---

<sup>18</sup>In tantric theories, subtle winds are intimately associated with speech.

states, and so on. Nevertheless, even such a being cannot create a mantra.

As soon as the bodhisattva crosses the next stage, the energy of the twelve powers is multiplied by ten. Arriving at the seventh stage, the bodhisattva is totally free of the veil of conflicting emotions. However, ability to create a mantra is still denied.

On the eighth stage, a new step occurs in the progression of a bodhisattva, conferring upon the mind the ten masteries on life span, states of meditative absorption, and so on, and, especially, mastery over the meaning of words. Once a being in this stage, the composition of mantras is possible.

Finally, at the end of the tenth stage, thanks to the *vajra-like meditation*, the bodhisattva reaches ultimate realization, Buddhahood. As a Buddha possesses omniscience, by definition, the ability to create all categories of mantras is granted.

It is only in the last three stages of a bodhisattva, the *three pure stages*, and with Buddhahood that the vision of all elements that compose samsara and nirvana is vast enough for the implications of sounds and words to be perfectly understood. This makes the creation of a mantra possible.

## FUNCTION OF MANTRAS

These created mantras carry the power of purifying the mind from faults and veils and making its true nature obvious. Their function is therefore extremely beneficial.

Let us take, for example, the mantra of Avalokita (Chenrezig), called the mantra of six syllables, OM MANI PADME HUNG. To each syllable one attributes the following powers.

- They close the door of rebirth in the six classes of beings in samsara.

- They eliminate the six basic conflicting emotions, desire-attachment, hatred-aversion, blindness, possessiveness, jealousy, and pride.
- They allow one to achieve the six wisdoms.
- They lead to perfect practice of the six *paramitas*, and so on.<sup>19</sup>

These extraordinary qualities of the mantra of six syllables have been described by the Buddha himself and by Guru Padmasambhava.

## AVALOKITA, HUSBAND OF THE OGRESS

A long time ago, an ogress lived in India. Her appetite was so great, because of her karmic tendencies, that she was never satisfied with the quantity of food consumed. Trying to diminish her hunger, she killed numerous human beings eating their flesh and drinking their blood. Avalokita, to divert her from this behavior, decided to incarnate on Earth and become her husband. He took the form of an ogre, married the ogress and they live together on good terms.

While his wife was frantically searching for food, Avalokita continually recited the mantra OM MANI PADME HUNG.

In the beginning, the ogress paid no attention, but she finally demanded, "You spend your time mumbling incomprehensible words. What use are they?" "What I recite is useful to me," replied Avalokita, "because of that I am never hungry and I feel well."

The ogress could not see how syllables would pacify her hunger, but she trusted her husband and wanted to believe that this was a solution to her bulimia. She decided to imitate her spouse and, soon, she had rid herself of the appetite that

---

<sup>19</sup>Implications of the mantra of Chenrezig are explained in detail in Bokar Rinpoche's book, *Chenrezig, Lord of Love, Principles and Methods of Deity Meditation*, published by ClearPoint Press.

used to torment her. Not only that, but by continuing recitation, she saw unknown feelings appearing in her mind, such as compassion and love. Later, she even achieved the truth of emptiness and could engage on the path of Awakening. All this happened because of the simple recitation of the mantra, without ever having the least idea of its meaning or spiritual extent.

If we do not know how to meditate, even the simple recitation of a mantra would bestow great benefits.

### UNTRANSLATABLE MANTRAS

Mantras were uttered by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas with the assistance of words and sounds in Sanskrit. This language is seen as the most ideal language on Earth, superior to any other one. As sound plays an important role in the use of mantras, Tibetans never translated them into their own language, but transcribed them with a system of transliteration, preserving the Sanskrit sounds while using the Tibetan alphabet. Sounds kept the spiritual power inherent in the Sanskrit resonance and in the original stating of the mantra.

### EASY AND BENEFICIAL

We are perhaps in a situation where we are physically exhausted by work and other activities. Perhaps we have no leisure to place our body in the service of the practice of the Dharma, as we are in a situation where our mind, thinking of what we must do, does not have time to meditate. At least, we have the opportunity to use speech to recite from time to time the mantra OM MANI PADME HUNG. We accomplish something of great value, with profound effects for ourselves and others.

It is said, for example, that when someone recites this mantra and an animal hears it, the latter will ultimately obtain

Buddhahood. When one recites the mantra and blows on the ashes or bones of a deceased person, the latter will be liberated from the suffering of inferior worlds, and then progress to Awakening. These results require no meditation on the part of the person who is benefited. They are effects of what is called *liberation by listening* or *liberation by seeing*. They are produced by the simple fact of hearing or seeing the mantra.

Let us trust the mantra. Let us allow the body to attend to its work and the mind to its reflections leading to result, but, at the same time, let us recite the mantra OM MANI PADME HUNG, without even being attentive. We will purify many karmic veils and finally attain Awakening.

It is also said that when we recite the mantra of Avalokita, the wind in contact with our body is charged with a blessing broadcasted to animals that it touches, sowing in them a seed that ultimately leads them to Awakening.

The effects of mantras are vast and powerful. Here, we can only approach the subject. Those who want to study mantras in detail should refer to texts on their nature and their benefits recording the teachings of the Buddha or of Padmasambhava. Students especially should refer to various tantras that express the benefits of the mantras of the deity from which these mantras come. Briefly, mantras bestow great purification as well as deep accumulation of merit and wisdom.

## CHASING OUR RETICENCES

Some Westerners, as previously stated, think that mantras are nothing but sounds without meaning, that reciting them is only wasting time, and that it is much better to meditate. It is true that mantras simply use sounds, but meditation seems serve nothing at all, not even on this subtle level of manifestation which is sound. In a way, meditation should

arouse even more doubts than mantras. One does nothing while meditating!

Reticence concerning the recitation of mantras come from two factors.

- ignorance of the function and benefit of the mantras described by the Buddha

- lack of reflection on the precious human existence, death and impermanence, law of karma, and on the unsatisfactory nature of samsara

Even if one has some knowledge of the Dharma, but is lazy, reciting a mantra seems a difficult exercise.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*



**Vajrasattva**



# Specific Preliminaries

*In the volume *Profound Buddhism*, we saw that the four common preliminaries, are four reflections common to all schools of Buddhism. Their function is to convince people that there is no other solution or necessity than practicing the Dharma. Specific preliminaries assume that the common preliminaries already have been assimilated. The specific preliminaries aim for a profound reorganization of our personality—placing us within faith, purifying our unconscious karmic obstructions, enriching us with positive potentialities and, finally, opening us to the force of the Awakened mind of the master. To engage the path of Vajrayana, each specific preliminary is performed one hundred thousand times.*

*- one hundred thousand recitations of the refuge prayer accompanied by one hundred thousand prostrations*

*- one hundred thousand recitations of the mantra of Vajrasattva*

*- one hundred thousand offerings of the mandala*

*- one hundred thousand recitations of the prayer of guru yoga*

*Therefore, one speaks of the four hundred thousand or the five hundred thousand depending on whether one considers the prayer of refuge separate from prostrations.*

*Although Kalu Rinpoche expounds on these different practices, obviously they cannot be approached without receiving at least direct instructions from a lama or at best an initiation for the practice of Vajrasattva.*

Previously, we have examined the *four common preliminaries* that turn us away from samsara.<sup>20</sup> The specific preliminaries progress more deeply in the practice.<sup>21</sup>

## REFUGE AND BODHICITTA

---

### The Three Jewels

Samsara contains an unceasing wave of suffering, difficulty, anguish, and fear. Our outer and inner resources appear

---

<sup>20</sup>See the volume *Profound Buddhism*.

<sup>21</sup>This second group of preliminaries is called specific and is unique to Tibetan Buddhism. Even within Tibetan Buddhism, there are variations from one school to another.

entirely insufficient to protect us.<sup>22</sup> Only the places of refuge, the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and the Three Roots (lamas, *vidams*, and protectors) can provide real protection.

## **Buddha**

Although our mind is fundamentally emptiness, clarity, and intelligence without obstruction, these pure qualities are covered by veils that prevent them from being expressed. The sun constantly shines, but, when there are clouds or fog in the sky, its splendor and light are obscured. In the same way, the fundamental purity of mind, although always present, is obstructed by veils. When the clouds and fog dissipate, the sun, which was always there, is visible. The process is identical for the mind. When the mind is totally purified (Tibetan, *sang*), its qualities bloom (Tibetan, *gye*) by themselves. From then on, it is called *Buddha* (Tibetan, *sangye*).

Although the qualities of a Buddha are innumerable, nevertheless, a certain number of qualities especially designate his body, speech, and mind.

- 112 qualities for the body, including 30 major marks and 82 minor signs

- 60 qualities for speech

- 32 qualities for mind

Shakyamuni Buddha, living in India long ago, had all these qualities. His existence on Earth was only for a limited duration, but the impermanence of a Buddha is different from that of an ordinary being. After death, a Buddha ceases to be visible for a certain number of people, but the activity for the benefit of all beings continues in the pure lands and in other worlds.

---

<sup>22</sup>To understand what Kalu Rinpoche explains here, it is necessary to remember that the expression translated by *taking refuge* traditionally means word by word and more simply *to place oneself under protection*.

A Buddha, because of infinite compassion, can help all beings, but not without their active response. They must be animated by faith and confidence. The compassion of a Buddha is compared to a hook. In order for the hook to be useful, it must encounter the ring of faith of the disciples.

### Dharma

The Dharma is an expression of the compassion of the Buddha, and represents the main implement for helping all beings. The Dharma is the second of the Three Jewels.

### Sangha

Those who teach the Dharma, the transmitters of the teaching of the Buddha, make up the Sangha. The Sangha is two-fold, the *superior Sangha*—members who have reached liberation, and the *ordinary Sangha* for those remaining. The Three Jewels consist of the Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha.

### The Three Roots

All these who follow the path of the Buddha, of whatever school, take refuge in the Three Jewels, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Nevertheless, the Buddha taught the swift path of Vajrayana for those with a particular karma. This path mainly relies on the practice of the *yidams*, as emanations of the Buddha. This *yidam* practice engenders *accomplishments*. To accomplish *yidam* meditation, it is necessary to first receive the transmission of the spiritual energy or grace linked to the *yidams*. This transmission is done by an empowerment, conferred by the lama. The *yidams* are, on this path, the *root* of accomplishments and the lamas, the *root* of grace.

The grace and power of the lamas and *yidams* are sufficient for the follower of Vajrayana to obtain liberation in a single life time. Obstacles and interferences may prevent or slow down the practitioner's progress, however. The *dakas*,

*dakinis*, and protector deities have the function of eliminating these obstacles.

Vajrayana supplements the Three Jewels with three other places of refuge, the Three Roots.

- the lamas, root of grace
- the *yidams*, root of accomplishments
- the *dakas*, *dakinis*, and protectors, root of activity

Confidence and faith are the basis for taking refuge in the Three Jewels and Three Roots. This is why we express taking refuge by performing prostrations or reciting the prayer of refuge. We will see now how the prayer of refuge is done in the framework of the Karma Kagyupa school during the specific preliminaries.

### The refuge tree

First, we imagine that we are on a beautiful and vast plain, embellished with flowers and trees. In front of us, there lies a limpid, pure, and fresh lake, and in the middle a magnificent and immense tree grows with a trunk divided in five main branches where the different aspects of the refuge are found.

- on the central branch the lamas
- on the front branch the *yidams*
- on the right branch the Buddhas
- on the back branch the Dharma represented by texts
- on the left branch the superior sangha

As for the protector deities, they are on a cloud slightly in front of the tree.

### Visualization of the lama

In the middle of the central branch, we imagine a throne supported by eight lions and ornamented by brocades. On this throne are an immense lotus flower, a sun disc, and a moon disc on top of each other. On this seat, Vajradhara (Tibetan, Dorje Chang) is seated. His essence is our own source lama. He is surrounded by a multitude of lamas. We more

particularly visualize, arranged above his head, our source lama with ordinary form, then the principal lamas of the lineage, Marpa, Naropa, Tilopa, and finally, Vajradhara again, this time representing the origin of the lineage.

We do not think of these lamas in terms of material reality. Their bodies, made apparent by the visualization, are the union of manifestation and emptiness; they are similar to a rainbow. Otherwise the weight of those above would crush those below! One is often given the example of a Tibetan meditator who had a material idea of the lama visualized above his head. As he was bald, he always feared that the lama would slip and fall to the ground. He ended up wearing a hat!

In the sky around the tree, lamas of other lineages, Nyingmapa, Sakyapa, Gelukpa as well as of others in the Kagyupa schools are present. Knowing that we belong to the Karma Kagyupa school, we express our confidence in all lineages, with no sectarian bias.

### **On the behalf of all**

Being on the shore of the lake, we think that on our right is our father from this life, accompanied by all our fathers in our past lives. On our left is our mother of this life accompanied by all mothers of our past lives. We imagine furthermore that, in front of us, our enemies are present, and behind us are spirits obstructing our practice. We take refuge on behalf of ourselves and everyone at the same time.

The place given to our father and mother in this life is explained by the recognition of the debt we owe them. Let us recall that our mother kept us for nine months in her womb, going through all the difficulties of pregnancy. Then, our parents fed us, washed, dressed, and provided us with necessities until we were able to care for ourselves. Because of the precious human existence obtained through them, we have the possibility of making progress on the path of liberation.

Why do we visualize in front of us our enemies and behind us the creators of obstacles? Those who now seek to harm us have been, in our past lives, many times, our father and our mother. They have taken care of us with as much care as our parents in this life. Their present malevolence toward us is caused by a past karma that links us to them and by the veil of ignorance that covers their minds. In a certain way, the father and mother do not recognize their own child. They especially deserve our love as they accumulate bad karma by their actions, which will lead them to greater suffering.

### **A complete and constant attitude**

Taking refuge, in the preliminary practices, implies the participation of the whole person. The mind engenders faith and devotion by thinking of the qualities of the places of refuge as well as their power of liberating us. The body accomplishes prostrations, and with speech we recite the prayer of refuge including six verses corresponding to the six places of refuge, the Three Jewels and the Three Roots.<sup>23</sup>

When we prostrate, it is most important to keep in mind the feeling of devotion and respect. From time to time, we also imagine that the Three Jewels and the Three Roots emit very bright lights touching us, purifying us of our faults and veils, and conferring on us their grace that we receive with great joy.

When we are not meditating, when we sit, we think of the places of refuge as above our heads. When we lie down, we think of them on the pillow, above us. When we eat, we

---

<sup>23</sup>"I take refuge in the glorious and holy masters. I take refuge in the deities gathered in a *mandala*; I take refuge in the lord Buddhas; I take refuge in the holy Dharmas; I take refuge in the supreme Sangha; I take refuge in the celestial warriors (*dakas*), the ladies of space (*dakinis*), protectors, and guardians of the Dharma, endowed with the eye of wisdom."

imagine them in our throat and we offer them our food. At the moment of falling asleep, the simplest way to recall the places of refuge consists of thinking that all aspects of refuge are united in the lama and that the lama is very luminous and dwelling in our hearts.

### **Engendering bodhicitta**

After prostrating, we sit, join hands, and recite the words by which we take the bodhisattva vows. To do this, we think of the past Buddhas who have generated *bodhicitta* in the same way, and have put it in practice until Awakening. We now engender *bodhicitta* and commit ourselves to practice it until Awakening.

After reciting the bodhisattva vows, we think that the places of refuge (Three Jewels and Three Roots) greatly rejoice of our attitude. They melt into light and this light is absorbed into us. Considering that our body, speech, and mind are one with theirs, we dwell as long as we can in this natural state of mind.

### **Meaning of suffering and happiness**

From the perspective of the refuge, we must learn to see our suffering and happiness being under the protection of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. When we suffer or are ill, let us not think that it contradicts the protection granted to us by the objects of refuge. On the contrary, let us think that, through the objects of refuge, we meet these difficulties now. They are indeed the result of past bad karma, and it is best for this karma to mature in this life rather than resulting in far more painful conditions of existence in future lives. This is why we consider suffering as a gift from the grace and compassion of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots.

On the other hand, when we are happy, and our projects are successful and we obtain what we wish, let us not be proud and vain, simply let us think that it is also because of

the grace of the objects of refuge. Let us be thankful, and hope that this situation will last.

### **The four levels of refuge**

The notion of refuge can be envisaged with different levels of depth.

- outer, the Three Jewels
- inner, the Three Roots
- secret, the three bodies of Awakening
- very secret or ultimate, the essence of our mind

### **End of the session**

When one ends a session, after the period of meditative absorption, one dedicates the merit for the benefit of all beings.

## **VAJRASATTVA**

---

The second specific preliminary consists of the purifying practice of Vajrasattva (Tibetan, Dorje Sempa).

The fundamental purity of our mind is hindered by veils and faults. Veils refer here to what prevents us from recognizing the real nature of our mind. Faults designate negative karma we experience with painful consequences, as if we were beating ourselves.

### **The four veils**

The totality of disturbances affecting our mind is described in the notion of the four veils.

- The simple fact of not recognizing the nature of our mind, not recognizing that it is Buddha, forms the veil of ignorance.
- Onto this lack of recognition, the notion of an "I," which engenders at its conception the notion of "another," is grafted. Our mind is from then on conditioned to function in dualistic mode, and this forms the veil of latent conditioning.



- Between the poles of "I" and "other," there exist 84,000 conflicting emotions. The main ones are desire-attachment, hatred-aversion, blindness, jealousy, and so on. They form the veil of conflicting emotions.

- Finally, under the influence of conflicting emotions, we accomplish negative acts, or *faults*, which create the veil of karma.

Given that the veil of conflicting emotions and that of karma directly create our suffering, they are sometimes gathered under the unique designation of *bad veil*.

If it were possible to give a material form to the veils and faults weighing on our mind, the whole universe could not contain them. Buddhahood requires that we totally rid ourselves of them. It is the function of Vajrasattva practice, which, in the Vajrayana, is specifically applied to purification.

### **Immaterial but effective veils**

Some people doubt the reality of the veils covering the mind, because these veils are not obvious; they are immaterial. It is true that veils are formless, just as the mind itself, in which they manifest, is formless but exists. There are others who admit that veils exist but argue that, due to their immateriality, one cannot dissipate them, or do anything to reach them.

In fact, all this relates to the fact that mind is without form, but this does not imply nonexistence or the impossibility of modification.

A person, after studying for a long time, has accumulated much knowledge. Where is this knowledge? In some ways, it is nowhere. If knowledge had form, all of France would not have sufficient space to hold it. Although this knowledge is immaterial, it remains at our disposal and we can use it if needed. Let us take the example of thoughts that pass through the mind of a single person from morning to evening. If it was necessary to materialize them, we would need an immense

space to store them. But luckily thoughts are immaterial, otherwise, what a burden it would be to carry them on our shoulders!

Our mind has no form, no more than the thoughts and karma that are inscribed in it. As long as we have not attained ultimate emptiness, thoughts and karma continue to produce beneficial or harmful effects stemming from the mind where they are stored. Let us suppose that a person decides, in the month of September, to go to India the following year in September. This project is only a thought and as such has no material reality. However its invisible force is sufficient for that person to implement steps that will transform the thought into reality. The journey to India in September of the following year will be the physical result of the immaterial thought conceived in September of this year.

### **Vajrasattva practice**

For the purpose of purifying ourselves from faults and veils, when we practice Vajrasattva, we imagine that Vajrasattva is above our heads, sitting on a lotus and a moon disc. His body is white. He holds in his right hand, placed in front of his heart, a gold vajra (Tibetan, *dorje*) and in his left hand, posed on the groin, a silver bell. He is adorned with silks and jewels characteristic of the body of perfect experience. We think of him as undifferentiated from our source lama. In his heart the white syllable HUNG shines, surrounded by the one-hundred syllable mantra.

To strengthen in our mind the conviction that Vajrasattva is truly present above our heads, we think of his heart emitting a luminous radiance that rises in space to invite the Wisdom-Vajrasattva<sup>24</sup> to melt into the Vajrasattva visualized

---

<sup>24</sup>In Vajrayana meditations relying on deities, the deities are conceived on two levels. The image of the deity produced by our imagination (Tibetan, *damtsikpa*) and the real deity or *wisdom-deity* (Tibetan, *yeshepa*).

by us. We imagine this fusion occurring and making the presence of the deity real.

In the next phase of the meditation, while we recite the mantra, we visualize that from the heart of Vajrasattva flows a white and luminous nectar that enters us at the summit of the head and fills our body. This nectar has the effect of clearing away our faults, veils, and causes of illnesses. We imagine the nectar going out of our body in the form of a black and thick liquid exiting through all the pores of our skin.

At the end of meditation, we think that we are entirely purified and that our body has the same nature as light. We then recite the mantra, thinking of our body as a crystal envelope filled with milk or as a rainbow.

### **Factors of the purification**

By the grace and compassion of Vajrasattva, the visualization of his body, and the recitation of his mantra, as well as our own devotion and aspiration, the purification is accomplished. All these factors are necessary for purification, just as it takes several elements—water, soap, hands to rub, and will—to wash a dirty cloth.

In this process of purification, it is the mind that works, just as it is the mind that has accumulated faults and veils.

The mantra of Vajrasattva has its own power. Even if we are distracted while reciting it, there will be certain benefits. But this beneficial effect would only be small. If we recite it without distraction, however, the power of meditation will supplement the power of the mantra and the grace of the deity with the result that we will derive maximum benefit. To be able to fully invest ourselves in the meditation, we must be convinced of the reality of grace released by Vajrasattva and his mantra. We must develop confidence and devotion.

## End of session

At the end of the session, we think that Vajrasattva is happy with our purification. He smiles at us and says, "Child of noble family, you are from now on purified of all harmful acts, faults, and transgressions." And then, the body of the deity above us is reabsorbed into a light that melts into our hearts. Thinking of our body, speech, and mind as undifferentiated from the body, speech, and mind of Vajrasattva, we remain for a moment in silent meditation.

We conclude the session with the dedication and auspicious aspiration.

## OFFERING OF THE MANDALA

---

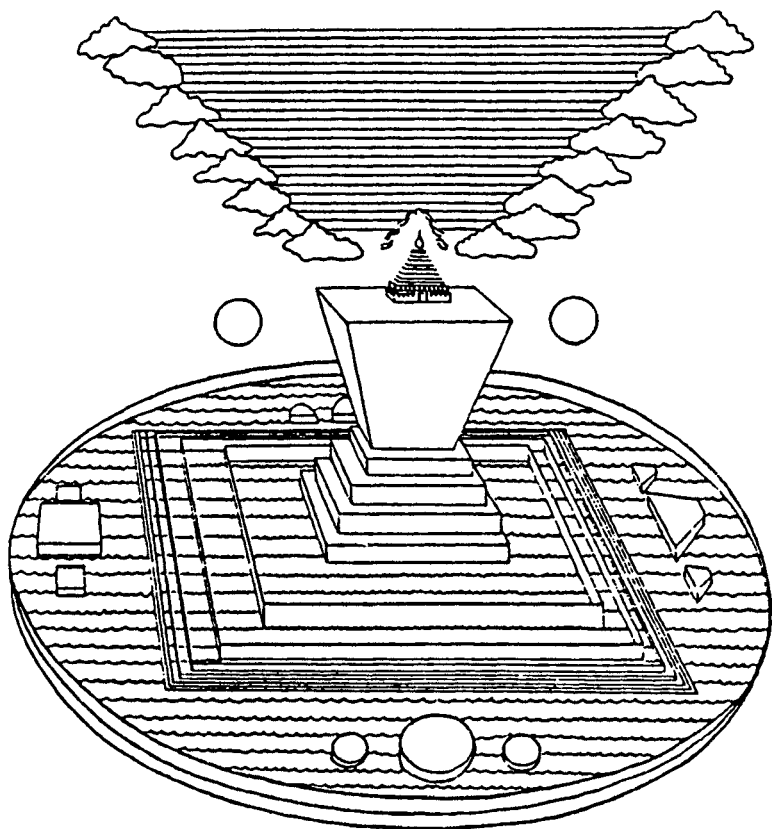
After the practice of Vajrasattva, there is the third specific preliminary, the offering of the *mandala*.<sup>25</sup>

The basic visualization will appear easier if we have correctly applied ourselves to the refuge prayer. We again find in the *mandala* offering, the Three Jewels and Three Roots. The difference is that instead of being placed on the branches of a tree growing in the middle of a lake, they are here, in front of ourselves in the space, within an *invaluable palace*. This is a residence perfect in its proportions, composed of the most precious materials. In the presence of the Three Jewels and Three Roots and to their intention, the *mandala* offering will be presented.

In the practice of Vajrasattva, we rid the mind of all negativity which encumbers and alters it. The *mandala* offering enriches the mind as it proceeds into the accumulation of merit made possible through the offering.

---

<sup>25</sup>The term *mandala* offers a great variety of meanings. The best known meaning in the West is a painted representation of a group of deities within a palace drawn in two dimensions. In the *mandala* offering, *mandala* refers to the *mandala* of the universe, in other words, the arrangement of the universe as it is described in this teaching.



Mandala of the Universe

Indeed, we offer the whole universe, endowed with a precise structure, an axial mountain surrounded by four continents, each of them flanked by two subcontinents.

### **Structure of the universe**

It is not possible to describe the universe in terms that are valid for everyone. The universe is not absolute reality, but a projection of the mind of beings. Its form and perception are conditioned by individual karma. Some beings will see the universe as a square structure, others as round, linear, or some other shapes. It is not possible to say that the vision of some people is right and that of others is false, as explained by the Buddha. Nevertheless, among the infinite number of possible visions of a universe, the most harmonious and most beautiful is that in which the universe is perceived as resting on a foundation of gold. It is also organized around an axial mountain in the form of an inverted pyramid, Mount Meru, surrounded by four continents, each with its own geometrical form, separated by oceans. Everything is delineated by a circle of high mountains.

Our karma is now sufficiently positive to make us able, if not capable of seeing this, to at least imagining the universe under this perfect aspect and mentally offering it. This is why the liturgy of the preliminary practices describes it like this.

### **An infinite offering**

Our mind is both empty and endowed with dynamics without limitation. This provides us with the ability to imagine the universe in any form, size, and multiplied as many times as we want. In the same way that anger or desire replace thoughts of an infinite variety, our mind can create an infinite number of universes and offer them to the lama and the Three Jewels. We offer them to the Three Jewels and the Three Roots in all their beauty, splendor, and preciousness. We can also

think that we offer our body, speech, and mind, as well as possessions, flowers, jewels, and all that we find beautiful. Even outside of practice sessions, each time we see something that touches us with its beauty, a landscape, a building, a monument, a flower, and so on, we also offer it in thought.

### Three kinds and four levels of offering

Offerings can be of three kinds.

- material offerings as, for example, bowls of water, lights, and flowers placed on the shrine

- mental offerings, mainly the universe that we imagine

- offerings of what *primordially exists*, which has not been manufactured by human beings, such as mountains, water streams, ocean, forests, and landscapes

All these offerings are equal from the point of view of the merit they allow us to accumulate.

Differing in what it contains, the *mandala* offering can also vary according to how it is envisioned: outer *mandala*, inner *mandala*, secret *mandala*, and *mandala* of suchness.

- Outer *mandala* is the universe, such as the one we have just described, with the axial mountain, the four continents, and so on.

- Inner *mandala* refers to the offering of our body. Its different parts symbolically represent the universe. The trunk is the axial mountain. The four limbs are the four continents, the two eyes, the sun and the moon, and so on. This visualization is particularly used in the practice of *chod*.<sup>26</sup>

- Secret *mandala* can be understood by an example. At night, when no cloud stains the limpidity of the sky, a multitude of stars scintillates in the sky. In the same way, within our mind, the multiple thoughts that arise are sparkling in it. When one recognizes that, and one offers it, it is the secret *mandala*.

---

<sup>26</sup>See the chapter, *Chod*, devoted to this practice in this volume.

- The *mandala* of suchness consists in offering one's own realization of the ultimate nature of mind, with no alteration and no restraint.

### End of session

When we end a session of *mandala* offering, we think that, by our practice, the accumulation of merit is realized for ourselves and all beings. We imagine that the lama and the Three Jewels are satisfied. They are reabsorbed into a light that melts into us. Our body, speech, and mind become one with their bodies, speech, and minds. Then we dwell for a moment in meditation without support, and conclude with the dedication.

## GURU YOGA

---

In the practice of *guru yoga*,<sup>27</sup> the fourth preliminary, the source lama is visualized in front of us, in space, or above our heads, in the form of Vajradhara (Tibetan, Dorje Chang) or in his or her real form, surrounded by a multitude of lamas of the lineage. Although the basic visualization is very close of that of the refuge or *mandala* offering, the way in which it is undertaken is different. In previous practices, each of the Three Jewels and Three Roots were seen as possessing its own qualities, while in the perspective of the *guru yoga*, one considers all the objects of refuge and their qualities to be collected in the lama.

In the presence of the lama, we first recite the Seven Branch Prayer.

- making homage
- presenting offerings

---

<sup>27</sup>In the expression *guru yoga*, the term *yoga* has no physical connotation, but its first meaning is union. The *guru yoga* is the practice by which we unite our mind with that of our Master.



- confessing faults
- rejoicing in the merit of realized and ordinary beings
- requesting Buddhas not to pass into nirvana
- requesting them to teach the dharma
- dedicating the merit

Then, there is the *cycle of the four ma nam*, the prayer of four verses each beginning with the syllables *ma nam*, meaning *our mothers*. We think that all beings, our mothers in our past lives, whose number is infinite, address their prayer to the lama at the same time as we do.

### The lama, activity of the Buddhas

After that, we recite many times a short prayer, *Karmapa chenno*, meaning "Karmapa, think of me." If we have a great devotion for the Karmapa,<sup>28</sup> if we have directly received empowerments or meditation instructions from him, we take the prayer with its literal meaning and address him directly.

But the prayer can also be seen in its etymological aspect. *Karmapa* means indeed *He who implements the activity* (of the Buddhas), and this can be applied to all masters. We find a similar case in the prayers addressed to Padmasambhava under his usual Tibetan name of Guru Rinpoche. The expression means *Precious Master* and is applicable to Padmasambhava himself or any other master. If one has no particular connection with the Karmapa and has received no empowerments or teachings from him, one considers the prayer to be addressed to one's own source lama. Reciting *Karmapa chenno* one keeps in mind its first meaning, "(Master), you who are the activity (of the Buddhas), think of me."

---

<sup>28</sup>The Karmapa is the chief holder of the Kagyupa lineage.

## The seven main verses

The next section of the practice consists of reciting as many times as possible the main prayer of the *guru yoga*. It is recited a total of one hundred thousand times, and composed of seven verses.

First of all, we pray, "To you, precious master, I address my prayer. Grant your grace so that my mind may reject the grasping of 'I' (two first verses)."

This "I" is the center of a multitude of needs that seem indispensable for its happiness. For *me*, good food, beautiful clothes, comfortable house, friends, and so on are necessary. This is why the third verse says, "Grant your grace so the absence of need may appear in the stream of my mind."

During the daytime, our mind is encumbered by an immense crowd of thoughts unrelated to the Dharma. Therefore, we pray, "Grant your grace so mundane thoughts may cease."

The source of all suffering resides in the belief that our mind exists as a real object, while lacking beginning, end, and location. Mind is empty, materially nonexistent. The fifth verse summarizes this nature of mind emphasizing its unborn characteristic, "Grant your grace so my own mind may be realized as unborn."

Because of the disturbances of desire, attachment, hatred, aversion, jealousy, blindness, and so on, we are taken into the play of illusory appearances. These appearances govern our present life. They manifest in dreams and also happen during the *bardo*. Therefore, we pray, "Grant your grace so all illusions may dissipate by themselves."

The realization of the empty nature of the mind—the mahamudra—is also realization of the absolute body, the *dharmakaya*. The *dharmakaya* however is not dissociated from manifestation. When one refers to its relation with forms, one speaks of *empty forms*. In the same way, one speaks of empty sounds or empty mental activity. This emptiness of all

phenomena is fully experienced only with Buddhahood. In the seventh verse, we pray, "Grant your grace so all appearances may be realized as *dharmakaya*."

The first verse of the prayer is calling the lama; the six others concern our spiritual progress and realization. The realization is only possible through the grace of the Three Jewels and specifically by the lama's blessing. This is why these six verses ask for grace. But we must be receptive and open. We must pray from the bottom of our heart, animated by complete sincerity. There is a Tibetan story illustrating this power of devotion and faith.

### **The Buddha's tooth**

An old Tibetan woman had a son, a merchant, who often went to India selling and buying goods. The old woman had deep faith in the Buddha, so her dearest wish was to acquire one of his relics. During one of his trips to India, the son, in describing the itinerary to his mother, mentioned that he would pass through Bodhgaya. Bodhgaya! The place of Buddha's Awakening!

"Since you are going to such a sacred place," the mother said, "Try to bring me a relic of the Buddha, or at least something that has belonged to him."

"I promise!" replied the son.

The merchant went to India, trading in the various cities he had planned on going to, including Bodhgaya, but engrossed in the concerns of purchase and sale, bargaining, calculation of profit, and evaluation of the quality of the items, he completely forgot about any relic of the Buddha.

As soon as he returned to his village, the first question his mother asked, was,

"Did you think of my relic?"

"Sorry, no." The son forgot everything!

The following year, the son undertook another trip to India. The mother urgently renewed her request, only to see

her son return some months later empty-handed just as he had the previous time. Business was so demanding!

A third business trip was planned, and the mother presented a third request. With devotion to the Buddha and with despair over having such a negligent son, she told him, "If you forget my request this time, when you return, I will kill myself in front of you."

And the son, very impressed, made the promise with even more solemnity.

On the roads of India, he thought of his promise. But the days passed swiftly and the fever of trade possessed him each week even more. He returned to Tibet without giving the least thought to the relic. Being a day away from home, he was eating lunch, when suddenly he thought of the promise made by his mother. He knew that she was capable of killing herself. What to do?

His eyes focused on the corpse of a decomposed dog that was not far away. A thought struck his mind, "Dog tooth, human tooth, the difference is not so great." He would bring his mother a "tooth of the Buddha!"

A sacred object like this could not be presented without packaging suitable for its greatness. Our trader covered it with a precious white brocade, then with a yellow, and a red brocade. The gift was ready.

When he appeared in front of his mother, he waited for her question without concealing his joy. "Did you have a good trip? Did you not forget my request again?"

"Mother, how could I have forgotten while your life depended on it? I brought you a tooth of the Buddha. Look!"

With tears in her eyes, the old woman received the precious package and, with infinite respect, unfolded the brocades one by one until this extraordinary, incredible, unheard-of gift was revealed, a tooth of the Buddha!

She hurried to place the tooth in a shrine and had a reliquary chiseled in gold to contain it. Each day, she recited

prayers and made offerings in front of the holy object. People from the neighborhood joined her in great numbers to show their devotion.

After some time, the vulgar dog tooth began to produce holy pearls (Tibetan, *ringsels*). As for the old woman, when she died, her body disappeared in a rainbow with a shower of flowers falling from the sky.

The tooth was only a dog's tooth. The old woman was mistaken, but the power of her devotion was so great that it produced such miracles.

Remembering this example, we must cultivate similar devotion when relying on the practice of *guru yoga*. We will be able to do it only by avoiding too many external distractions, by not falling into laziness, and by not letting any doubts disturb us. Only in these conditions are we able to open up ourselves to grace.

### **Final consecration**

After reciting the seven-verse prayer, we think that the lamas surrounding Vajradhara, or our lama in his or her real form, dissolve in a light that is absorbed into Vajradhara.

Then, we visualize a four-fold process.

- From his forehead, marked by the white syllable OM, is emitted a white light touching our own forehead, purifying us of all faults committed by the body, and conferring on us the possibility of ultimately actualizing the body of emanation (*nirmanakaya*).

- From his throat, marked by the red syllable AH, is emitted a red light touching our own throat, purifying us of all faults committed by speech, and conferring on us the possibility of ultimately actualizing the body of perfect experience (*sambhogakaya*).

- From his heart, marked by the blue syllable HUNG, is emitted a blue light touching our own heart, purifying us of all faults committed by the mind, and conferring on us the

possibility of ultimately actualizing the absolute body (*dharmakaya*).

- From the three syllables, white, red, and blue lights are simultaneously emitted, simultaneously purifying us of faults committed by the body, speech, and mind, and conferring on us the possibility of ultimately actualizing the body of essence itself (*svabhavakaya*).

### **End of session**

Finally, Vajradhara or the lama melts into light and is absorbed into us. We keep the mind at rest for a moment and are convinced that our body, speech, and mind are united with theirs. We then recite the dedication.

*Vajradharaling, September 1984*

# Chod

*The origin of the chod practice is traced to the Tibetan yogini Machik Labdron. When it is done in public, the chod practice presents a strange and compelling ritual, rhythmized by the regular clinking of bells, the flicker of the whipping balls of the damarus, and the mysterious and clear call of the kanglings fashioned out of thighbones. Beyond this external aspect, as moving as it is, chod is a profound practice using special methods to uproot the ego. In this chapter gathering two teachings, Kalu Rinpoche reveals the essential functions of chod, after recalling with much pleasure, the whimsical greatness of its founders and their contemporaries.*

## ORIGINS OF THE PRACTICE

Why practice the Dharma? We profoundly believe in the reality of an ego. We think that there is truly a limited "I" to which we identify ourselves. Suffering is derived from this, because this feeling of ego, pushing us to desire satisfaction and rejecting what it does not like, creates too many conflicting emotions. The Dharma leads us to knowledge that realizes the absence of an "I" and transforms emotions into primordial awareness.<sup>29</sup>

### **Intelligence and realization**

To reach these objectives, the Dharma proposes different approaches, that of the Small Vehicle, of the Great Vehicle, and of the Vajrayana which includes four classes of tantras: *Kriya* tantra, *Charya* tantra, *Yoga* tantra, and *Anuttarayoga* tantra. In total, it is considered that the Dharma of the Buddha comprises 84,000 kinds of teachings. An intelligent person approaching the study of these teachings, either the teachings of the listeners in the small vehicle, or the teachings of the bodhisattvas in the great vehicle, easily understands that these

---

<sup>29</sup>Processing conflicting emotions is largely explained in the volume *Profound Buddhism*.

teachings fundamentally have the same function and all propose profound spiritual approaches. Intellectual comprehension, however, is not everything. The person who teaches the Dharma by relying only on studies done without having reached a certain level of realization, teaches only according to his or her own understanding. Lacking the power of clear view and direct vision of the nature of phenomena, he or she can make mistakes. Whereas the person who has reached the realization of a bodhisattva or even of an *arhat*, has direct vision allowing him or her to teach without error. As for the being who has attained Buddhahood, having covered all levels and paths, he or she has reached the ultimate state. He or she knows perfectly what ordinary beings are, what a Buddha is, and what Awakening and the ways to reach it are. Nothing lies outside of the field of his or her knowledge and vision. This is why this being is called *omniscient*.

In Tibet, propagation of the Dharma has been carried out through two channels covering the two methods of teaching we have just mentioned. There is a type of transmission relying more on theory, conveyed by ten lineages called, *The Ten Pillars of Knowledge*. On the other hand, eight great schools have emphasized the practice of the teachings. They are called *The Eight Great Chariots of Practice*. It is to one of these eight schools that the *chod* tradition belongs. We are going to introduce this tradition.

*Karma Migyur Ling, 1984*

### **Cutting the ego at the root**

*Chod* means *cutting*, in Tibetan.

All our suffering stems from the effects of the three poisons: desire-attachment, hatred-aversion, and blindness. These three poisons are themselves the product of the identification to an "I". *Chod*, *cutting*, refers to the fact of completely cutting, at the root, this identification, with the



result that the problems deriving from it are automatically eliminated. Let us take the example of a poisonous tree. To get rid of it, you can try stripping away its leaves and fruits, or pruning its branches, but most likely, branches, leaves, and fruits will appear the following year. If you uproot it, however, you are sure that it will not grow again. *Chod* relies on this same principle, cutting the root of all our problems.

### **A practice inspired by Prajnaparamita**

*Chod* belongs to the second cycle of the Buddha's teachings on the absence of characteristics. In this cycle, the Buddha has largely developed the notion of emptiness, showing that it could be seen in eighteen different ways: outer emptiness, inner emptiness, both outer and inner emptiness, emptiness of emptiness, superior emptiness, inferior emptiness, and so on. These teachings were recorded in the *Prajnaparamita* sutras, which exist in shorter or longer versions.

- *Prajnaparamita* in one hundred thousand verses comprises twelve volumes in the Tibetan canon

- *Prajnaparamita* in twenty thousand verses, four volumes

- *Prajnaparamita* in eight thousand verses, a single volume

These teachings have been brought out again, in order to make them more accessible, by the great Indian masters, Nagarjuna, who codified them in the form of the *madhyamika*, and Asanga who wrote the *Five Treatises of Maitreya*.

Machik Labdron, initiator of the *chod* practice, was herself well-versed in the *Prajnaparamita* texts, which constituted an essential factor in her spiritual development. For this reason, she was called *Machik Dronma, Accomplished One of the Buddha's Speech*.

As for the Indian yogi Padampa Sangye, he was the depositary of a cycle of instructions on emptiness. As a tight bond of master to disciple existed between Padampa Sangye and Machik Labdron, the cycle of teachings of the Padampa Sangye, *shije*, and Machik Labdron, *chod*, became one. In this

framework, the meditation proposed by *chod* relies on two fundamental principles of the Mahayana.

- emptiness, the realization of the absence of *me* where we believe there is a *me*

- compassion for all beings who suffer because they lack this realization.

Samye Ling, March 1983

### **Padampa Sangye**

Coming from India, a holder of knowledge (Sanskrit, *vidyadhara*) called Padampa Sangye (Sanskrit, Kamalashila) arrived one day in upper Tibet.<sup>30</sup> He was more precisely known as *vidyadhara of long life*, that is to say that he possessed mastery over the duration of life. It is said that he was 200 years old when he arrived in Tibet.

Padampa Sangye proposed a teaching called *shije*, pacifying. Its particular function was to dissipate external obstacles, physical suffering, and illness as well as inner turmoil, conflicting thoughts, and emotions. This is why this system was known under the name of *shije that pacifies all sufferings*.

Padampa Sangye visited Tibet during the lifetime of Milarepa. Both had reached full realization and enjoyed great fame. An equally accomplished master called Dharmabodhi lived somewhere on the border between India and Tibet. Therefore, at the same time and in the same area, were three exceptional beings, Milarepa, Padampa Sangye, and Dharmabodhi.

### **Milarepa and Dharmabodhi**

Milarepa was Marpa's disciple. He received all instructions and initiations necessary, so he did not bother to seek teachings from another lama, as great as the lama could be.

---

<sup>30</sup>Western Tibet.

Milarepa was the disciple of a unique master. However, his own disciples, especially Rechungpa, asked him, "Dharmabodhi now resides in a place nearby. Why would you not go see him?"

"I have no need to address him," replied Milarepa. "I do not think that he has anything to ask me either, what would be the purpose of visiting him?"

"Your realization is great." said the disciples, "It is certain. However, are you not expressing vanity?"

"No," replied Milarepa, "I have no pride. I simply do not see the usefulness of this visit. However, if it is important to you, I am willing to meet with Dharmabodhi." He told Rechungpa, "You, go ahead with a few disciples. I will join you on the road."

Therefore, Rechungpa and the other *yogis* went on their way. They arrived near Dharmabodhi's residence, without having been joined by Milarepa. They then saw a crystal stupa appear in the sky, and it carefully landed before them. It was Milarepa. All went to Dharmabodhi who installed Milarepa on a seat like his and the two masters exchanged teachings.

When they finished, Dharmabodhi prostrated in front of his famous visitor. This increased the faith of everyone in Milarepa.

### **Padampa Sangye kicks Milarepa**

Another time, Milarepa agreed to meet Padampa Sangye. As Padampa Sangye approached the meeting place, Milarepa, who knew of this approach because of his supernormal abilities, said, "I am going to see if the famous Padampa Sangye really has all these powers attributed to him." Milarepa took the appearance of a small bush at the edge of the path. Padampa Sangye arrived, passed the bush as if he noticed nothing and continued on his way. "He has no power," said Milarepa, "He did not even recognize me!" At this precise moment, Padampa Sangye turned back, kicked the

bush and said, "You would do better, Milarepa, not to stay here. Anyway, you have not long to live, I have offered your life force to the *dakas* and *dakinis*. They now have completely absorbed it. This is why you are going to die today."

"It is true," said Milarepa who had resumed his usual appearance, "I believe you are right, I am going to die today, because I feel very sick."

"Ah? And what do you suffer from?"

"Well, in the back, I am afflicted by the *maha-ati*, in the front, my chest is affected by the *mahamudra*, and inside, I feel gnawed at by the *madhyamika*. It is certain that I am going to die soon. My death will be like that. The ego is going to die in the wisdom of *nonego*, emotions are going to die in primordial awareness, and thoughts are going to die in emptiness."

Then, Milarepa added, "I believe that you are truly accomplished. You come from India and at this time reside in my country. Let me honor you with a meal."

"I will be happy to be your guest," replied Padampa Sangye.

The Indian *yogi* then multiplied himself seven-fold and the seven Padampa Sangyes each occupied the point of a blade of grass.

Milarepa prepared the meal. He took his own skull apart, held it in his hand, and deposited his brain, which was transformed into a wonderful nectar. From the hearth of his navel, he made a fire of *tumo* spray to warm the precious food. This finished, he made appear seven Milarepas who also installed themselves on the points of seven blades of grass. The seven Padampa Sangyes and the seven Milarepas shared their meal, improvising one after the other sacred songs. After that, they separated, overjoyed to have met each other.

Padampa Sangye remained for a total of one or two hundred years in Tibet. Then he went to China where it is considered that he still lives on a mountain called Riwo Tse-nga, *the Mount of the five peaks*. Those who have enough

merit and privileged karmic connections can meet with him to this day.

### **Padampa Sangye and the Chinese master**

While he lived in Tibet, Padampa Sangye had another famous encounter, one with a *Ch'an* master<sup>31</sup> who came from China, had the name Mahayana, and taught nothing other than emptiness. "Everything is emptiness," he said, "Consequently, it is useless to abandon negative acts or accomplish positive acts, it is enough to reside in emptiness."

Many Tibetans were interested in a path apparently so easy to follow. The result was that Buddhism imported from India was being threatened by this new tendency from China. Those who remained connected to pure Buddhism were anxious. Having heard about Padampa Sangye's presence in Tibet, they asked him to refute the false views of the Chinese master. "If this master is intelligent," replied Padampa Sangye, "A debate can be useful. If he is stupid, our confrontation will be sterile."

Other Tibetans said that they ignored who the Chinese master exactly was, but it seemed to them that only Padampa, because he was both a great scholar and a realized master, could solve the difficulties of Buddhism in Tibet. Padampa Sangye agreed therefore to go where Mahayana was.

As Mahayana approached to welcome him, Padampa Sangye, raising his stick, made three circles above his head in the air, then three circles on his right, and three on his left, followed by a certain number of movements. Through these signs, without using a word, he asked, "What is emptiness? What is relative truth? What is ultimate truth?" The *Ch'an* master understood the messages and replied. Padampa

---

<sup>31</sup>*Ch'an* is the Chinese ancestor of Japanese Zen. The story related here does not question *Ch'an* as a tradition, but solely the personal positions of the master called Mahayana.

Sangye knew that he had found a person deserving his attention.

The two masters agreed to organize a great public debate. The most famous scholars and all authorities of Buddhist philosophy residing in the area were invited. They fixed the stake. The defeated would have to return to his country of origin, Mahayana to China, or Padampa Sangye to India.

The debate, long and subtle, occurred. Finally, the victory went to Padampa Sangye with the result that the *Ch'an* master returned to China. However, the victorious one paid homage to his adversary, "When an intelligent man embarks on a wrong path, he can recognize his error if it is explained to him and he can abandon his error. But a stupid opponent will remain deaf to all attempts to explain and will persist in treading his wrong path."

Tibetan Buddhism feels an immense gratitude for Padampa Sangye who re-established the right view and allowed the perfectly pure Dharma to bloom again in Tibet.

*Karma Migyur Ling, 1984*

Since the Chinese master Mahayana was a true scholar—someone who sincerely sought the truth—he was able to recognize that he was mistaken. An unintelligent person, on the contrary, never questions his or her opinions. This person always believes that what he or she thinks is definitively true, and locks himself or herself within these ideas.

### **Sakyapandita and the two ignorant monks**

A Tibetan story illustrates the difference between open intelligence and stupidity.

Two monks came to see the great scholar Sakyapandita. "Do you know well the texts you have studied?" asked Sakyapandita.

"We have perfectly assimilated them," the two monks replied. "Can you tell me the kind of activity to abandon (*pang-ja*) and which activity is necessary to adopt (*lang-ja*)?"

He expected an uncomplicated answer from them, that is, which acts are negative and which ones are positive.

But the two dullards took the two terms for names of birds and proudly replied that *pang-ja* was a certain species and *lang-ja*<sup>32</sup> another. Then they began to talk about the habits of these birds like experts. According to them, the *pang-ja* lived on the plains and the *lang-ja* haunted the mountains.

Sakyapandita, not knowing if the two monks had misunderstood his question, if they were teasing him, or if they were truly stupid, again asked them an easy question. "What are the eighteen hells?"<sup>33</sup>

"Let us see," the two monks said, "We have the eight hot hells and the eight cold hells, that makes sixteen." They were missing two of them. They could not think of an answer when two words unexpectedly popped up in their memory, with not the least idea of their meaning. "And we also have *sha-nak* and *sha-mar*!" *Sha-nak* and *Sha-mar*, *Black Crown* and *Red Crown* were in reality two expressions naming the Karmapa and Situ Rinpoche, the two most famous Kagyupa lamas of the time.

Sakyapandita was so saddened by the ignorance and stupidity of the two monks that he began to cry. And the two dull ones thought, "Poor thing, he did not begin his studies in his youth, as we had, and he cries out of ignorance!"

Samye Ling, March 1983

---

<sup>32</sup>This story relies on words in Tibetan, because in the mentioned expressions the word *ja* means activity, while the two monks take it for a homonym meaning bird.

<sup>33</sup>Traditionally, one counts eight burning hells, eight freezing hells, occasional hells, and peripheral hells, therefore eighteen types of hell, in all.

### Exceptional gifts

At the same time, in the region of Lab, at the edge of the province of Kham, lived a young girl who had all the best qualities. She was beautiful, had an extremely pleasant voice, and was endowed with great intelligence. She had received the foundation of her spiritual education from a master called Ngushechen, known as the first *terton* of Tibet. Then, she became the disciple of Padampa Sangye for whom she conceived great faith even before meeting him, by simply hearing about him.

This young girl was exceptionally gifted in oral reading. It was usual in Tibet for monks or lamas to read aloud the *Kangyur*, the Tibetan translation of the Buddhist canon. For many mendicant *yogis*, it was a way to earn their food. In the *Kangyur*, the twelve volumes of the *Prajnaparamita* in one hundred thousand verses are found. They are the most developed explanation of the second cycle of the Buddha's teachings on the lack of characteristics. The young girl of Lab was able to read the twelve volumes in a single day, while fifteen days were necessary for an ordinary reader. Not only was she an expert in reading technique, she also had accessed the deep meaning of what she read, assimilating subtle notions such as the eighteen kinds of emptiness. This young girl was called Dronma, *Blazing One*. Because she was born in the region of Lab, she was called Machik Labdron: *Unique Mother, Blazing One from Lab*.

### Machik Labdron and Thopa Bhadra

One day she was invited to give a reading of the *Prajnaparamita* and met a great accomplished one, called Thopa Bhadra, who was also doing this kind of reading. They bonded and apparently lived as an ordinary couple. Some people were offended, "It seems that this man and this woman are great masters, yet they live as common mortals!"



However, one day someone saw a great light inside the house of the couple. The person peeped in and saw something like the sun and moon united. This sun and moon, in fact, were Machik and Thopa Bhadra.

They had several children. Thopa Bhadra cared for them while Machik traveled. Two of their sons were particularly well-known, Gyelwa Samdrup and Thonyen Samdrup, as was their daughter Dorje Drolma. All three reached realization.

The great erudition of Machik, her exceptional talents, and great intelligence made her reputation spread quickly throughout Tibet and India. When she met Padampa Sangye, she received from him the complete cycle of the teachings of the *shije* lineage from which the practice of *chod* is derived.

### **Fast reading**

One day, some Indian scholars proposed a fast reading contest to Machik. She accepted, although she hardly saw its usefulness. Tibetan texts printed in the sense of the length, are composed of independent sheets that generally comprise six lines each. An ordinary being reads one line at a time. Machik read six lines simultaneously! She easily won the contest, and talked about her past lives on this occasion.

### **Memory of a past life**

She revealed that she was a *yogi* in India and that the remains of this past body were in a specified cave. Among the Indian *yogis*, some had various powers and could walk a hundred miles a day. One of them accompanied Padampa Sangye to India and quickly verified Machik's words. They found traces of her past life according to the indications she had given. They then understood that Machik was truly a fully realized being, and developed total faith in her. Machik's fame again increased.

## The conversion of the bad son

Among Machik's children, one was following a wrong path. He stole, associated with bandits, killed animals, and refused to listen his father and mother. Not far from him a *ngakpa* lived, a *yogi* who wears long hair, a little like the saddhus of India. He had the power to cast spells. He owned an ox that he used every day to get water from a distant source. One day, Machik's bad son went to the *yogi's* house, robbed him, and killed his ox. When he realized who his victim was, he was terrified. "He will use magic against me. He will certainly kill me," he thought. He ran to Machik's and begged her, "Mother, I have stolen from a *ngakpa*. I have killed his ox, and he is going to take revenge! Mother, you must protect me!" "Have no fear, I will help you," Machik assured him. "For my protection to be efficient, you must practice the Dharma, otherwise I will be unable to do anything for you." "I will do anything you want, mother, I will practice."

Machik then bestowed the necessary empowerments and instructions to her son and installed him in a cave, magically sealing all exits.

In the cave, the young man devoted himself to *chod* practice for many years, meditating with no distraction. His only link with the external world was a ray of light filtering into the cave through a tiny crack and on which *dakinis* made food and drinks slide. After several years of practice, Machik's son also became a realized being.

*Karma Migyur Ling, March 1984*

## FUNCTION AND ASPECTS OF THE PRACTICE

---

### Fear is empty

The *chod* practice leads to realization of emptiness and compassion. At the same time, it is especially helpful in ridding ourselves of fear and notions of material purity or impurity. For example, when fear arises or danger occurs, one trains to think, "Who feels fear? It is mind. Outside mind,

there is nothing that could feel the fear. Since mind is empty, fear is also empty." No longer is there anything frightening. To make training more efficient, Machik recommended seeking for the most frightening places to practice *chod*, like haunted places populated by demons and deserted by human beings, and repulsive sites like carnal grounds littered with corpses. Machik herself frequented one hundred and eight of these places and her realization was considerably increased.

### **Sangye Nyentonpa and the collapsing cave**

Machik mainly transmitted *chod* practice to eighteen great disciples. One was the Karmapa Rangjung Dorje of the Kagyupa lineage. In the Shangpa Kagyu lineage, it was Bepol Neljor, *the Hidden Yogi*, also known by the name of Sangye Nyentonpa, who received this transmission.

To practice *chod*, he frequently went to terrifying places for the function we just mentioned.

One day, while sleeping in a cave, he woke up with small pieces of earth falling onto his face. Looking upward, he observed that the rock above him was in the process of disintegrating. His first impulse was to run to the cave's exit. However, at the moment he was going out, he remembered that he had practiced *chod* to learn how to overcome fear. He went back in, placed himself again under the threatening boulder and remained there for three days, practicing *chod* and meditating on emptiness. At the end of three days, he left the cave free of fear. As soon as he crossed the threshold, the boulder collapsed.

### **A remedy to madness**

*Chod* is a profound practice allowing one to quickly reach Buddhahood if one can practice it perfectly. It is also especially beneficial for beings in grip of the fear, anguish, illness, or affected by madness. Let us suppose that a person is under the influence of neurosis that makes him or her

unable to remain in one place and keeps this person restlessly wandering through nature. An expert practitioner in the practice of *chod* will have the power to terminate this desire for escape.

Tibetan medicine lists 404 kinds of illnesses, among them 101 are due to bad spirits. To cure them, there is no more efficient way than the practice of *chod*.

### **Essence of the practice**

Five verses of the ritual permit us to understand the essential function of this practice.

The first of these verses says, "Grant your grace that I may avoid becoming involved in the activities of the illusory world." Indeed, *chod* allows us to recognize that all external objects are only illusory appearances and by this recognition we detach ourselves from them.

Secondly, it is said "Grant your grace that I may rid myself from attachment to this illusory body consisting of the four elements." The powerful methods taught by Machik lead to disentanglement from our attachment to the body, and to our ceasing to think of it in terms of "I am this body."

The text continues, "Grant me to welcome as one taste adverse circumstances, illnesses, bad spirits, and obstacles." The practice allows us to be unafflicted by adverse circumstances, to be rid of fears, dangers, illnesses, and sufferings by residing in their essence.

The fourth verse states, "Grant your grace that I may recognize my own face in the manifestation, which is only an expression of mind." *Chod* is an efficient way for all appearances to liberate themselves, which means that they are recognized as production of the mind. The mind itself is perceived as empty, all appearances are liberated in emptiness.

Finally, it is said, "May I obtain the freedom of the three bodies, self-knowing, existing in and by themselves." By this

practice, we can obtain inner freedom, mastery of our own mind recognized as being ultimately the three bodies a Buddha. Its emptiness is the absolute body (*dharmakaya*). Its clarity is the body of perfect experience (*sambhogakaya*), and the union of both, the body of emanation (*nirmanakaya*).

Let us now look at some points which, in the process itself of the ritual, are specific to *chod*, and give it a unique characteristic.

### Offering of the mandala

Many practices include what is called a *mandala offering*.<sup>34</sup> One thinks that one offers to the Buddhas and deities, the axial mountain of the universe surrounded by the four continents, the circles of iron mountains, and so on. The *mandala* offering in *chod* is not the usual offering of the universe as such, but the practitioner offers his or her own body as a *mandala*. Each part is visualized as having a correspondence with a part of the universe. The chest symbolizes the axial mountain, the head corresponds to the different worlds of the gods, eyes are the sun and the moon, the four limbs the four continents, and so on. In this way, the body itself becomes the *mandala* of the universe.

*Karma Migyur Ling, 1984*

The notions of *me* and *mine* are deeply embedded in us, covering three aspects, first, *me*, second, *my body*, and thirdly, *my businesses, property, house, and so on*. Of these three objects, the first is the most demanding, the body comes in second, and our belongings are third in importance. One way to undo these fixations, while accumulating merit and purifying ourselves, is to practice offering of the *mandala*. Generally, this practice focuses on the external world and on the third aspect.

---

<sup>34</sup>On the *mandala* offering, see chapter on "The specific Preliminaries."

We offer, by imagination, the universe, all it contains, and all our personal belongings. In *chod*, however, we offer our own body, placing ourselves at a more demanding level of cutting up our attachment.

Samye Ling, March 1983

## Powa

The practice of *powa*,<sup>35</sup> ejection of consciousness, done in the context of *chod*, also has its particular characteristic. *Powa* follows three variants, outer *powa* with symbols and support, inner *powa* with symbols and without support, and secret *powa* without symbol or support.

Karma Migyur Ling, 1984

The ego identified with the body, is a belief deeply ingrained in us. To rid ourselves of it, *chod* integrates the practice of *powa*, during the ritual of which, mind and body are seen as separate.

Accomplishing *powa*, the meditator visualizes that the "I," or ordinary consciousness, is sent into the sky and melts in the emptiness of space. The meditator then remains in the state where the mind is omnipresent as space, knowledge is omnipresent as the mind, and the *dharmakaya* is omnipresent as knowledge. This *powa*, called *opening of the door of the sky*, is said to be one hundred times superior to ordinary *powa*.

Samye Ling, March 1983

## Offerings

In any ritual, one make offering of water, flowers, and incense to the Three Jewels and imagine that these offerings are innumerable. In *chod*, they are done according to a particular procedure. Gods and demons coming from the different sensory organs present them. From the eyes, gods and

---

<sup>35</sup>On *powa*, see the chapters *The Six Bardos* and *The Six Dharmas of Naropa*.

goddesses emanate and offer forms; from the ears, there are those who offer sounds; from the nose, those who offer perfumes; and so on.

Rituals in general include an offering of *torma*. In *chod*, it is our own body, flesh and blood, that we offer as a *torma*. A variation consists of thinking that the universe is a container containing the *torma* and that beings who inhabit it are the *torma*. Another possibility, in *chod*, is to visualize the skin as the container, while flesh, bone, and blood are the *torma*. Finally, it is possible to consider that, on the support of the external appearances, is offered, as a *torma*, our ability of thinking.

When dealing with demons or harmful spirits, we make even more special offerings to them. We give them love, compassion, our flesh, and our blood.

*Karma Migyur Ling, 1984*

### **The four types of guests**

Among the different kinds of offering done in the ritual, the main ones, using the body under various forms after having ejected the mind by the practice of *powa*, are called *white feast* and *red feast*, and are presented to the four categories of guests.

- The *guests of honor*, gathering the Three Jewels, the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and the lamas. We offer them our body transformed into different offerings, outer, inner, and secret.

- The *guests of capacities*, protectors of the Dharma as well as gods or spirits. Although not liberated, they have turned to the Dharma, animated by motivation of benefitting beings and have taken commitments to Shakyamuni Buddha, Padmasambhava, or Machik Labdron. We think that our body is transformed into what pleases them.

- The *guests of compassion*, beings of the six classes. All these beings have all been our fathers and mothers. Therefore, we

owe them gratitude that we show to them by thinking that our body becomes all what they can wish.

- The *guests of whom we are obliged*, composed of spirits seeking to harm us. They do so because of karmic debt that we have incurred in relation to them in our past lives. We have committed harmful acts toward them, perhaps even killing them. To make it up to them, we now offer them our own flesh and blood on which they feed.

*Karma Migyur Ling, 1984*

Once the mind has been ejected out of the body, the body is transformed by the visualization, into a great variety of offerings corresponding to those to whom they are addressed.

First of all, the body takes the form of a multitude of pleasant and beautiful objects, offered to the source lama and all the lamas of the lineage. This offering is called *nine-fold*, because it includes, for each of the three elements of the personality of the lamas—body, speech, and mind—the three degrees of outer, inner, and secret offering. In this phase of meditation, offering is extended to *yidams*, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas, under four forms, outer, inner, secret, and ultimate.

In the second step, the substances of *repair* and *accomplishment* are offered to the protectors and guardians of the Dharma, always following the transformation of the body.

The third step is aimed at the six classes of beings. Gifts in the form of beautiful things to see, pleasant sounds to hear, delicious dishes to taste, subtle perfumes, and so on appear.

Finally, offerings are addressed to a fourth category of beings, the karmic creditors.<sup>36</sup> For countless past lives, we have accomplished acts that have caused suffering for others.

---

<sup>36</sup>Those with whom we have a karmic debt. The karmic creditors mentioned here do not refer to human beings but to those having resumed birth in different categories of spirits.



We have killed them or inflicted various pains on them. Karmically, we are in debt to them. This debt allows them, for example, to cause us illness. In the cycle of offerings that we are envisioning, we present them with our own flesh, blood, bone, or any part of our body to please them.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

## CONTINUITY OF THE PRACTICE

---

### **Giving our body**

Generally, when a follower of the Dharma is prey to fear, anguish, or danger, the remedy is to pray to the Three Jewels. But the *chod* practitioner will consider that these unpleasant experiences are produced by harmful spirits and will think, "These beings, although harmful today, were in the past my fathers and mothers. They showed me the greatest kindness. If they now wish to feed on my body, I gladly offer it." Addressing them, the *chod* practitioner thinks, "This body is mine, do whatever seems pleasant to you. It is more pleasant for me to give it to you than keep it for myself."

*Karma Migyur Ling, 1984*

### **Complete acceptance**

In the perspective of *chod*, illness can be integrated into practice. When illness occurs, rather than wanting to reject it, we think, "It is good. May I, thanks to this illness, take on myself all illnesses and sufferings of all beings!" At the same time, we consider that this illness may be provoked by karmic creditors. Whether they originate it, maintain it, or lead it on to its end, we tell them, "Come! Welcome! If I have to be sick, may I be sick. If I must die, may I die!" Whatever happens, everything is perceived beyond appearances in the emptiness of the situation.

Generally, when we are sick, we seek treatment by the intermediary of a physician, various prescriptions, and even rituals. In *chod*, the approach is totally different. We

completely accept the illness and death. The body is integrated in the notion of emptiness and is no longer an object to worry about. It is simply offered to those who desire to see a sick body.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

### **Not forgetting the essential**

If one has received the empowerment and instructions for *chod*, has well understood the meaning of the practice, and has practiced it efficiently, it is said that one can then adopt any kind of conduct. Behaving in a strange way or being considered as mad, has no importance.

The essential part of practicing *chod* is to understand the ultimate nature of mind and to realize that the mind is empty. At the same time, one develops great compassion for all beings, knowing that they suffer because they are still ignorant of the nature of the mind. *Chod* includes both the ultimate aspect, the realization of the nature of the mind, and the relative aspect, the practice of compassion. Practicing *chod* allows one to develop these two facets, which are the foundation of the Dharma. It is toward this, for example, that the offering of our body as *mandala* to the Three Jewels and other visualizations of the same type contribute.

*Karma Migyur Ling, 1984*

Machik Labdron said that the accumulation of merit of the *chod* practitioner is superior to one hundred accumulations of ordinary merit; the practice of the *red and white feasts* is superior to one hundred other practices; a terrifying place is superior to one hundred hermitages; and gods and demons who are our karmic creditors are benefactors superior to a hundred others.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

*Question: Can a layperson practice chod?*

Kalu Rinpoche: Yes, of course. For this practice, it is sufficient to have received the empowerment and have full confidence in it. If you wish to practice it, you must receive explanations from a qualified lama.

In the Vajrayana, it is said that what we receive greatly depends on the view we have about things. If we consider the lama as a Buddha, we truly receive the grace of a Buddha. If we consider the lama as a bodhisattva, we receive the grace of a bodhisattva. If for us a lama is good but an ordinary human being, the grace of a good person will be given to us. Finally, if we have no faith in the lama, we receive nothing at all.

The practice of *chod* includes the lineage of the *father tantras*, coming from Shakyamuni Buddha, passed on by Manjushri, and the lineage of the *mother tantras*, lineage of the knowledge, coming from Yum Chenmo (The Great Mother), then passed on by Tara, and the *dakini* Sukkhasiddhi. Finally, *chod* integrates the lineage of the nondual tantras.

*Question: Is it necessary to go to cemeteries to practice chod? The problem is that there is no cemetery in Montchardon.*

Kalu Rinpoche: If you feel like going to a cemetery, fine, but this is not necessary. A cemetery is a place where corpses and frightening and repulsive things are found. Milarepa said that we permanently have a corpse at our disposal, it is our body! There is even another cemetery, the greatest of all cemeteries, it is the place where all our thoughts and emotions come to die.

*Question: Is it necessary to have done the preliminaries before practicing chod?*

Kalu Rinpoche: Yes, it is necessary to do the preliminary practices first. There are also specific preliminaries for the practice of *chod*. If one finds this practice in all the Buddhist schools, Sakyapas, Nyingmapas, and Gelukpas, it is even more

closely linked to the Kagyupa school. This is why, if one has accomplished the preliminaries of the Kagyupa school, it is not really necessary to engage in the specific preliminaries of *Chod*.

*Question: If the practitioner is not qualified, can this practice be dangerous?*

Kalu Rinpoche: If one has sufficient comprehension of emptiness and compassion, there is no danger. Then, even what are called adverse causes—demons, obstacles, fears, and all negativity—can be transformed.

Machik Labdron said, "If you have an enemy and you decide to use a knife to destroy this enemy, perhaps you will succeed. Perhaps, it will be the enemy who will get rid of you. If you make a friend from this enemy, your enemy will disappear." If, similarly, you are ill and wish your health to be restored but have doubts about whether you will be successful, the result is uncertain. If you think that this illness itself is a good thing, then you are healed right there by the fact that there is nothing to reject.

### **The heart offered to the demon**

One day, a horrible demon with a knife approached someone doing the ritual of *chod*. The demon struck the chest of the practitioner and pulled out the heart. Still alive, the practitioner was first terrified, "Alas, I am going to die!" Then he thought, "I am in the process of practicing *chod*, there is no fear to have! This demonic being was my father or my mother in a past life. Today, he has taken my heart, it is wonderful! So it is better I die!" After he meditated about twenty minutes, the demon came back and replaced the heart in the chest. "I do not need it," said the *yogi*, "You can keep it!"

## The practitioner terrorized by the damaru

Even so, a certain habit of practice is necessary before putting oneself in delicate situations. One example is the relatively mediocre practitioner who decided one day to practice *chod* in a cemetery. As long as it was daylight, things went almost well, but when night came, he no longer felt confident. Nevertheless, he began to blow his *kangling* and playing the *damaru*. Suddenly, a ball of the *damaru* stuck his cheek. Believing himself to be in the presence of a demon and becoming terrified, he abandoned everything and ran away!

## The sacred syllable

In the *One Hundred Thousand Songs* of Milarepa, precious explanations to this ritual are found because Milarepa answers, in a precise manner, a woman who asks him many questions on the personality of the lama instructor, the empowerment, practice itself, its benefits, and so on. Milarepa also gives very precise explanations on the meaning of the syllable *phat*,<sup>37</sup> which is used several times in the ritual of *chod*. In this passage of the *One Hundred Thousand Songs*, according to Milarepa, the force of this syllable is three-fold.

- from an external point of view, it releases the mind from torpor
- from an internal point of view, it has the power to stop a excessive wave of thoughts
- from a secret point of view, it makes the mind liberate itself into its own nature, which is emptiness, clarity, and intelligence without discontinuity.

In this song, Milarepa also explains the three levels in which an empowerment can be understood. Placing the *bumpa* on the head constitutes the external empowerment. The contemplation of our body as the body of the deity is the

---

<sup>37</sup>In Sanskrit *p'at*.

inner empowerment, and the recognition of the essential nature of our mind constitutes the ultimate or real empowerment.

*Question: What is the relationship of chod and Prajnaparamita?*

Kalu Rinpoche: There is a close relation because *chod* is based on the understanding of emptiness and compassion. This is also the essential point of all the Vajrayana. *Prajnaparamita* is concerned precisely with understanding emptiness.

*Question: How is chod practice reconciled with yidam practice?*

Kalu Rinpoche: It is automatic. In the practice of *chod*, when we do *powa*, we think of mind leaving the body and transforming into the deity Vajra Yogini (Dorje Pamo). Therefore, we become a *yidam* and we are this *yidam* during the entire practice. As for our body, which is no more than a corpse, we offer it to the different guests we have mentioned.

*Karma Migyur Ling, 1984*

# Tibetan Medicine

In his early years, Kalu Rinpoche studied Tibetan medicine with his father, who was a famous lama physician. After the three-year retreat, however, he exclusively devoted himself to the Dharma and did not practice medicine. Whenever he responded to certain requests, he approached Tibetan medicine in a way that would clearly show its spiritual implications.

We included this chapter in the volume Secret Buddhism. Although medical art in Buddhism is not covered by a secret seal, it has its origin in a revelation of tantric type.

## THE FIVE SCIENCES

---

The Buddha, because of his omniscience, had the complete vision of what is useful to human beings and what human beings were capable of understanding. In this perspective, he expounded the *five traditional great sciences*.

- the grammar, particularly the Sanskrit grammar
- the arts, painting, sculpture, and so on
- logic which, by reasoning, allows us to establish the validity of a theory of spiritual or philosophical nature. The stronghold of this science in Tibet was the great monastery of Ganden, close to Lhasa. One of the fundamental exercises of this science is the art of debating.
- medicine
- the science of *inner meaning*, the Dharma

## A REVEALED MEDICINE

---

Traditional Buddhist medicine was revealed by the Buddha while residing on Mount Malaya in southern India, a region famous for the abundance of its medicinal plants, particularly the *arura*. At this time, the Buddha took the form of Sangye Menla (Sanskrit, *Bhaishajya Guru*, the Buddha Physician), then created two emanations, appearing in the form of two *rishis*<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup>Sages of ancient India.

dressed in white. From the Buddha's heart the *rishi Wisdom of Science* went out and took his place in space, and from the Buddha's throat *Born of Mind*, who sat on the ground facing the first *rishi*. *Born of Mind* then put a knee to the earth and, joining hands, asked *Wisdom of Science* to expound the medicinal science for relieving all suffering beings. Acceding to his request, the *rishi* in the sky then expounded the Four tantras of medicine including the eight branches of therapy.

*Vajradharaling, August 1984*

## ILLNESSES AND MIND

We can assign a quality called *divine* or *demonic* to everything that occurs in the world. What is beneficial, useful, and good has a divine quality. On the contrary, what is harmful and destructive has a demonic quality. Divine quality is presented under two aspects: the *temporal divine* and *extratemporal divine*. The temporal divine aspect gathers what is beneficial in the framework of the necessities of this life. The extratemporal divine aspect applies to the presence and influence of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and *yidams*. Medicine is inscribed in both temporal divine and extratemporal divine aspects.

Our organism is submitted to a great variety of illnesses that entail much suffering. Their primary cause is the notion of ego with which we identify ourselves. The Buddha said, "The identification to a me is our greatest enemy in the universe." It is our greatest enemy because it is the cause of all our sufferings. On the notion of "I" is grafted the notion of "other," which in turn entails two reactions: attachment if this other is perceived as pleasant or gratifying, aversion if the other is perceived as threatening or unpleasant. Moreover, because we do not recognize the empty nature of the situation, we take it as real, and so we are in blindness. Attachment, aversion, and blindness form thus the fabric of our behavior.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*



Through the body, the medicine affects the mind. Suppose that you suffer from a painful illness of the hand. The hand does not feel the pain. It is the mind that feels it and thinks, "I suffer." Healing the hand is easing the mind. Suppose now that your hand was severed, the hand itself no longer feels anything because it is no longer related to the mind.

Illnesses affect the body and the mind. But as the body is only a product of the mind, it is first of all the mind that is involved. Assimilation to an "I" is the source of all our difficulties and all our sufferings. Without this assimilation to an "I," the notion of illness will be null.

*Karma Migyur Ling, August 1987*

## THE THREE HUMORS

"I," attachment, aversion, and blindness are nothing more than the mind functioning in a mode called *individualized consciousness*, which is also considered to be the vital force or *great subtle energy* (Tibetan, *lung*; Sanskrit, *prana*). When this *prana*-mind is in the *bardo* and approaching human birth, it sees its future parents uniting and, under the influence of desire enters the womb.

As the body develops, the three conflicting emotions—attachment, aversion, and blindness—serve as the basis for the formation of the three humors—air, bile, and phlegm.<sup>39</sup> The three emotions can therefore be seen as a cause and the three humors as the result. A fully formed organism, consequently, is animated by these three humors, each having its seat in a region of the body.

- pneuma (air) in the pelvic basin and belt
- bile in the middle part of the trunk, more particularly in the liver and bile vesicle

---

<sup>39</sup>Bile and phlegm do not exactly correspond to what the same Western terms defined.

- phlegm in the brain

In context of Tibetan medicine, illnesses are looked on as being provoked by a dysfunction of these three humors, that can be of three kinds, excess, insufficiency, or disturbance. This last term indicates that one of the humors has the tendency to control a region of the body normally under the influence of another humor. The disturbance of humors can touch a single one, sometimes two, or even the three simultaneously.

## ANATOMY AND MICROORGANISMS

---

Tibetan anatomy gives a quantified description of what has to be a perfectly constituted organism. A perfectly constituted organism has weight equal to 300 handfuls of flesh (the measure being the handful of the patient), 900 ligaments, 16 tendons, 72,000 subtle channels, 360 main articulations, and so on.

The number of microorganisms inhabiting an organism is said to be 84,000. A part of them participates in the life of the organism by consuming certain material. Others use the body only as their habitat just as we reside in a house. Others, by reason of their karma, have to accomplish all kinds of functions. Whatever their category, we bond to them with the result that we suffer from the disturbances affecting them.

The *nyung ne* practice implies total fasting, refraining from solid food and drink for 24 hours. This fast is broken in the morning by taking a thin soup. This soup is in fact prescribed by the texts to bring an appropriate relief to the microorganisms that may have suffered during the fast.

## 404 TYPES OF ILLNESSES

A total of 404 main illnesses are categorized in four groups.

- 101 benign illnesses, which are cured by themselves when one is a little careful or which necessitate only a very simple treatment
- 101 illnesses due to harmful spirits treated by medicine and specific rituals
- 101 serious illnesses, which if correctly treated by medicine can be cured, but which otherwise end in death
- 101 illnesses due to ripening of karma. They result from karma of past lives and whatever remedies one tries will be of no avail.

## THE EIGHT BRANCHES OF MEDICINE

Confronting this totality of 404 types of illnesses, the Buddha revealed a traditional medical science divided into eight branches.

- general pathology
- pediatrics
- gynecology
- demonology
- toxicology
- traumatology
- geriatrics
- *rotsawa*

The first branch, general pathology focuses on diagnosis and treatment of illnesses affecting the organism without entering into any category of the other seven branches. The second one, pediatrics, treats the illnesses of small children. The third one is specifically related to women's illnesses. The fourth one treats illnesses caused by different kinds of harmful spirits. The fifth one treats problems caused by poisons, natural or prepared by human beings. The sixth one particularly treats injuries inflicted by weapons. The seventh

one relates to pathologies associated with old age. Finally, the eighth one, *rotsawa*, treats states of anemia. These eight branches are considered as covering all possible cases.

Samye Ling March 1983

## EMBRYOLOGY

---

Tibetan medicine also includes a well-developed embryology. Before birth, the mind resides in the *bardo* and has a mental body giving to the faculties more flexibility than the physical body. Because of that, mind sees its future parents uniting, and this releases emotional reactions. If its destiny is to take rebirth as a man it feels attraction for the future mother and aversion for the future father. If its destiny is to be reborn as a woman, it feels, on the contrary, attraction for the future father and aversion for the future mother. By the power of karma and also under the influence of these emotions, like a magnet attracting a needle or like the ear perceiving a sound, the mind instantaneously enters into the womb. Conception is the meeting of the three components: the sperm of the father, ovum of the mother, and the mind of the *bardo*. Between these components, there is a common structure since the mind and the two material supports include the five elements in their nature.<sup>40</sup>

The embryo then begins its development. In the first week, its consistency is compared to soft fresh cheese. Then it hardens, flesh and bone form, the head becomes distinct from the body, in the beginning resembling that of an ant, then arms, legs, and genital organs take form, as explained in detail in the *Sutra of the Five Reliquaries*. Sufferings of the embryo are considered great. When limbs appear, it feels the same pain as a tortured victim being quartered. When eyes and ear orifices

---

<sup>40</sup>See in the volume *Profound Buddhism* the chapter entitled *Mind, Elements, and Aggregates*.

form, it is as if someone incised its body. Being unable to move, seeing nothing, feeling excessive heat or cold are many added discomforts.

When the time of birth approaches, under the influence of inner winds, the fetus, feeling frightened, turns over. Finally, birth properly is said to be very painful. We do not remember but without even relying on statements in the sutras, we know well that babies are born shouting and crying. Personally, I have never seen a child coming into the world laughing.

*Karma Migyur Ling, August 1987*

## DIAGNOSIS

In making a diagnosis, first of all, we take into account the part of the body that is affected. The body is divided into seven parts, the four limbs, the head, and the upper and lower parts of the trunk. To diagnose an illness affecting one of these seven parts is relatively easy. Things are more complex when it concerns the internal organs, which are divided into two groups comprising the six hollow organs and five full organs.<sup>41</sup> Three methods are then used to make the diagnosis, observation, feeling the pulse, and asking questions.

Observation here is limited to a visual examination of the tongue and urine. The interview consists of questions about external circumstances, such as the weather or the diet, that may have played a role in causing the illness.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

## OBSERVATION OF THE TONGUE

A red, thick, and nonflexible tongue will indicate a disorder of the pneuma. Sickness affecting the bile will give a tongue an orange color. A streaked and grayish tongue presenting an

---

<sup>41</sup>The five full organs are, the heart, lungs, liver, spleen and kidneys; the six hollow organs, the colon, small intestine, stomach, bladder, bile vesicle, and the *samtseu* (see the note later devoted to this organ).

excess of saliva is the sign of an imbalance of the phlegm. Examination of the tongue gives precious indications, which are usefully complemented by the observation of the urine.

## OBSERVATION OF URINE

The urine to be examined has to be from a patient who has an empty stomach, because a recent consumption of a beverage or of food will interfere with the diagnosis. Three elements are taken into consideration in testing the urine: color, sediments, and foam. Observation of the urine is particularly helpful in determining illnesses that are traced to the influence of a harmful spirit. The analysis of urine helps determine the category of spirit. To do this, one asks the patient to face toward the East and urinate into a bowl on which four sticks have been intersected, delimiting thus nine spaces. If the bubbles rapidly ascend to the surface and crackle with a small dry noise, that confirms, first, the activity of a harmful spirit. Secondly, the site where they ascend in the checkerboard formed by the sticks indicates which category of spirits has provoked the illness.

*Vajradharaling, August 1984*

## EXAMINING THE PULSE

When one proceeds to taking the pulse, it is necessary to consider a certain number of factors that, if neglected, would cause errors in the diagnosis. It is necessary to know, first of all, that each individual naturally has a pulse that can be of three qualities: masculine, feminine, or *mind of awakening*. This has no direct relationship with the sex or spiritual level of the person. The season in which the person is, carries signifying characteristics in relation to the four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Each season lasts 90 days. The first 18 days of each season are under the sign of the element earth and the next seventy-two days are successively marked by one of the other elements. The physician must know, at the moment of

taking the pulse, the dominant element exerting an influence on the pulse to avoid a wrong interpretation.

### THE THREE BASIC PULSES

The pulse of masculine type is characterized by sharp and powerful beats. If it is not recognized as such, the therapist may mistakenly think that the patient has a blood problem. A feminine pulse will present weaker and more rapid beats. Wrongly interpreted, it will seem to be a bile problem. As for the pulse *mind of awakening*, slow and regular, if misdiagnosed, it could suggest a sickness of phlegm.

The basic quality of the pulse, aside from pathological considerations, gives a number of general indications. It is said, for example, that a man with a feminine pulse without doubt will have a long life. A woman with a masculine pulse will be able to bear many children, mostly boys. When a couple, if both the man and the woman have a pulse of type *mind of awakening*, they will have a harmonious relationship with their superiors but problems with subordinates. It is probable that they would have no children.

One of the first indications given by the pulse comes from its relationship with breathing. Ideally, a breath corresponds to five pulsations. A faster pulse that indicates an illness called *hot*, a slower beat, a *cold* illness.

### ORGAN EXAMINATION BY THE PULSE

Nevertheless, taking the pulse allows to obtain far more signifying indications. For this procedure, the therapist uses three fingers on each hand: index, middle, and ring fingers. Each finger has two points of taking the pulse, its upper part relating with the full organs and its lower part related with

the hollow organs.<sup>42</sup> We have a total of twelve points of taking the pulse on the radial artery, corresponding to twelve organs.

First of all, when the physician uses the left hand to take the pulse on the right wrist of the patient, information on the following organs is obtained.

- with the upper part of the index, lungs; with the lower part, large intestine

- with the upper part of the middle finger, liver; lower part, bile vesicle

- with the upper part of the ring finger, right kidney; with lower part, bladder

Then, using the right hand to take the left pulse of the patient, the physician examines the functioning of the remaining organs.

- with the upper part of the index, heart; with the lower part, small intestine

- with the upper part of the middle finger, spleen; with the lower part, stomach

- with the upper part of the ring finger, left kidney; with the lower part, *samtseu*<sup>43</sup>

The radial artery is called the *physical artery*, but the physician can also feel the ulnar artery, called the *divine artery*, to get some general indications. If the physician, for example, can count one hundred beats with no alteration of rhythm, he or she will deduce that this person will probably enjoy long life and good health. On the contrary, if there are irregularities—whether pauses or groups of faster beats—this indicates, according to the case, future illnesses, troubles caused by harmful spirits, or accidents. On an even more

---

<sup>42</sup>The upper part of the fingers lies in the direction of the thumb, the lower part in direction of the little finger.

<sup>43</sup>The *samtseu* is defined as the container of the feminine and masculine sexual principles. It probably corresponds to the gonad.



subtle level, the therapist can take a so-called *secret pulse*. Feeling the pulse of a son or daughter, the physician is able of discerning the health state of the father or mother. Children may by also diagnosed by taking the secret pulse of the parents, whatever the distance separating parents from children.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

These latter findings derived only from taking pulses can appear unbelievable to us. Nevertheless, they are possible because phenomena do not exist independently but are interconnected.

When one examines the pulse of children to determine the state of health of the parents, one takes the pulse on a point corresponding to the *lung*. When one wants to know the health of children by feeling the pulse of parents, one trusts a point corresponding to the heart. This is because the parents' feelings toward their children are the strongest. The heart, more sensitive, implies a stronger bond than the *lung*, just as we react more forcibly to a sting to the eye than to a sting to the ear.

*Vajradharaling, August 1984*

## TREATMENTS

---

To treat illnesses in Tibetan medicine, there are various techniques but mainly medicines are used. It has been said by the Buddha that there is no mineral, vegetable, or animal substance on earth, when properly used, that could not serve as a remedy. There are seventeen ways to prepare medicinal substances in pills, powders, ointments, infusions, decoctions, mixed with *tsampa*,<sup>44</sup> and so on.

---

<sup>44</sup>Flour of roasted barley.

Metaphors are sometimes used to describe the use of a medicine. If it is used alone for curing a illness, it is called a *hero*, comparing it to the single warrior that confronts a group of enemies. In the case of a simple fever, camphor functions thus as a hero. Conversely, some combinations of remedies are called, *the king and his ministers*. There is, for example, a remedy called *agar 35*, a compound of a main substance (the king) accompanied by thirty-four secondary components (ministers).

The most famous substance in Buddhist medicine is the *arura*.<sup>45</sup> Each part of this plant is considered as being endowed with specific healing virtues.

- roots for the bones
- the trunk for muscles
- branches for joints
- the bark for the skin
- leaves for hollow organs
- fruit for full organs

Five kinds of *arura* are used in medicine. They possess seventeen qualities, six flavors, eight powers, and three general virtues. They constitute a remedy for all kinds of illnesses.

The *giwang*, a concretion extracted from some organs of the elephant, is seen as the queen substance from the animal world. It has not only the ability to affect the three humors but also the three conflicting emotions which are their roots.

Beside the pharmacopeia, Tibetan medicine, in some cases, uses bleeding that can be practiced on 72 different points, or hot applications administrated with woods, iron, copper, or heated stones applied on 360 points. There was also in Tibet a certain surgery, which remained rudimentary because of a lack of technical means.

---

<sup>45</sup>Various species of *myrobolan*.

## THE FUNDAMENTAL UNITY OF MEDICINES

Although traditional Buddhist medicine is considered to have been revealed by the Buddha, it does not mean that the value of other medical arts is neglected. On the contrary, Tibetan medicine considers them as inspired by the Buddha for those of another faith, for example, ayurvedic medicine in the vedantic culture of India, or even in the interest of atheists. In this way, modern Western medicine is related to the expressed activity of compassion of the Buddha.

## PHYSICIAN AND PATIENT

The possibility of curing an illness depends on many factors, including the availability of remedies. Nevertheless, one essential factor is the karmic connection linking the physician and the patient. If this connection is good, it will have a great role in the establishment of a correct diagnosis and in the efficiency of the treatment. A bad connection will not permit an efficient therapeutic relationship.

Medicine is one of the five great traditional sciences taught by the Buddha. It belongs to the temporal sciences and also to the spiritual science that is the Dharma. It is spiritual if the person who practices it, having recognized all beings as his or her parents in past lives, is motivated to liberate all beings from their suffering. Guided by compassion, the physician follows the fundamental teaching of Buddhism. The physician unites temporal and spiritual activities within him or herself. In contrast to this, a person who only works for profit or fame in medicine, practices only the temporal side of medicine without spiritual implication. It has been said by the Buddha that the negative or positive quality of an action depends in fact on personal motivation.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

## A HAND WITH TWO CUTTING EDGES

A famous physician, treating many patients, sometimes earns a lot of money, which according to the Buddha, is entirely legitimate, especially if the physician uses the gains to perfect his or her art and to always bring greater benefit to ill people. As for the patient, he or she should be as generous as possible with the physician. It is a duty for the patient to express gratitude toward the person who has helped him or her to avoid many sufferings, perhaps preserving his or her most precious possession—life. This does not mean that a physician should refuse a patient who cannot pay. On the contrary, the physician has the duty to treat destitute people and even to give them money in order for them to acquire the necessary medicines. Acting with love and compassion, the physician fulfills his or her role.

The physician has a responsibility in the recovery of patients, but this responsibility also has its human limitations. A Tibetan saying tells us.

*Show me a hand that has taken one hundred lives,  
it is that of a physician.*

*Show me a hand that has saved one hundred lives  
it is that of a physician.*

There are two factors that engage and limit the responsibility of the physician: his or her motivation and competence. The physician must be animated by a real solicitude for the patient through which he or she implements all available means. But it is also necessary to have acquired complete medical knowledge through solid studies accomplished to their term. Armed with these two qualities, the physician does not commit a negative act, even if the patient dies. The physician's attitude was entirely good and his or her activity can be only virtuous. The physician who would not adequately treat a patient, either through a lack of compassion or because of not having the necessary training,

and who has misled people concerning his or her capacities, commits a serious negative deed.

The competent physician acting out of love totally follows the teaching of the dharma. If the physician practices giving love and security, medicine can be made more efficient.

*Vajradharaling, August 1984*

## THE MEDICINE BUDDHA

The spiritual aspect of medicine is also emphasized by the practice of Sangye Menla, the medicine Buddha. The practice includes the visualization of Sangye Menla's body and the recitation of his mantra and his name. This practice is considered as one of the most efficient means for treating physical or mental illnesses. Furthermore, this practice brings the purification of our karma and a decrease in our conflicting emotions. Sangye Menla's practice also prevents the manifestation of illnesses in our future lives.

It is said that Sangye Menla has formulated very powerful wishes for the benefit of beings, with the result that the simple fact of hearing his name is enough to avoid rebirth in inferior worlds. The person praying to Sangye Menla will see attachment, aversion, and blindness decrease within himself or herself. As these three poisons are the fundamental cause of illness, their suppression will automatically eliminate illness itself.

The manner of approaching the practice of Sangye Menla affects the results. If we pray to Sangye Menla and do his meditation for ourselves and all beings to be definitively liberated from all sufferings, the effects will be, at term, as vast as our motivation. When an illness affects a particular part of our organism, we are encouraged to visualize Sangye Menla in the painful part while reciting his mantra. We imagine that his body emits a luminous radiance that dissolves the illness like the rising sun dissipates the night

frost. This is also very beneficial although in a more limited perspective.

The sutras related with Sangye Menla give an idea of the power of his mantra and meditation. It is said that the person who had committed serious negative acts, the breaking of monastic ordination or transgressing commitments to the Vajrayana, but engages in the practice of Sangye Menla, would initially fall into inferior realms. By the grace of Sangye Menla, however, this being would almost immediately leave this lower state and assume birth in a higher existence.

## THE FOUR MEDICINE TANTRAS

The traditional Buddhist medicine is an extremely vast subject. We have given here only a brief overview. Those who wish to deepen their knowledge must study the texts constituting the foundation of this medicine, that is, the *Four Medicine Tantras*.

- the Root Tantra
- the Explanatory Tantra
- the Tantra of Particular Instructions
- the Tantra of Conclusion

The Root Tantra is compared to a seed potentially containing all elements of medicine, just like a vegetable seed virtually contains the entire plant. The Explanatory Tantra, on anatomy and diagnosis, is similar to the sun and moon illuminating the world, because it does not leave any of the necessary elements in the dark. The Tantra of Particular Instructions expounds the treatment of illnesses. It is compared to the *jewel that accomplishes wishes* because it responds to the needs of the therapist for remedies. As for the Tantra of Conclusion, it is similar to the diamond and gives complete mastery of medicine.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

# The Kagyupa Lineage

I myself belong to the Kagyupa school and, because of that, I have studied and practiced all aspects of the Buddha's teaching contained in the sutras and tantras.

The most characteristic approach of the Kagyupa school is definitely the *six dharmas of Naropa* and mahamudra, transmitted uninterruptedly since Buddha Vajradhara.

## SHAKYAMUNI AND VAJRADHARA

---

The sutras—the texts recording the teaching of the Hinayana and Mahayana—have their origin in Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha. Tantras—the texts containing the Vajrayana teachings—have been revealed by the Buddha Vajradhara (Tibetan, Dorje Chang) as an expression of the *dharmakaya*. One should not think because of this that Shakyamuni and Vajradhara are two different beings. They are two manifestations of a unique essence: one expounding the sutras, the other appearing in the form of multiple tantric deities (Hevajra, Chakrasamvara, and many others) and teaching their respective tantras. The term Kagyu is allusion to this origin of the tantras, since it means *lineage* (Tibetan, *gyu*) *issued from Speech* (Tibetan, *ka*). The Kagyu lineage is therefore a transmission of the direct revelation of Vajradhara.

## KAGYUPA LINEAGES

---

In Tibet, the Vajrayana instructions are said to lead to the complete Awakening in the present lifetime, or else in the *bardo*, or within seven consecutive lives. These Vajrayana instructions have rapidly spread through the various lineages whose eight principal ones are known as the Eight Great Chariots of Practice. Given that all these lineages have their

origin in the *dharmakaya* word, in the form of Vajradhara or in another form, all may be referred to as *Kagyü*. One may speak of the Nyingma Kagyü, Lamdre Kagyü in the Sakyapas, Ganden Kagyü in the Gelukpas, Shangpa Kagyü, Jonang Kagyü, and so on. However, in a more limited way and in current use, when one speaks of the Kagyü lineage, one refers to the school whose founder was Marpa the Translator, in Tibet.

The Kagyü lineage in its strict meaning does not refer to a unique entity but to a great number of subdivisions that have occurred over the course of history. The first subdivision occurred among Gampopa's disciples. The four main disciples created their own lineages.

- the Karma Kagyü school originated with the first Karmapa Tusum Khyenpa
- the Barom Kagyü school issued from Barom Dharma Wangchuk
- the Tselpa Kagyü school issued from Tsondru Drakpa
- The Pakdru Kagyü school issued from Pakmo Drupa

Following Pakmo Drupa, eight new divisions developed:

- Drikung Kagyü
- Taklung Kagyü
- Drukpa Kagyü
- Yelpa Kagyü
- Yazang Kagyü
- Shukseb Kagyü
- Marpa Kagyü<sup>46</sup>
- Tropu Kagyü

---

<sup>46</sup>Homonym not related to Marpa the translator. In Tibetan, the two spellings differ.



## VARIOUS PRESENTATIONS

These two groups have been listed as forming the *four great* and the *eight small* Kagyu lineages.

All proceed from Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa. They share the practice of the six dharmas of Naropa and mahamudra. This does not preclude slightly different instructions. For example, the Karma Kagyu tradition presents the mahamudra by *The Introduction to the Three Bodies* (Tibetan, *ku sum ngotro*). The Drikung school uses *The Unique Thought* (Tibetan, *drikung gong chik*) in the presentation of the mahamudra, and the Drukpa Kagyu lineage uses the *Six-fold Cycle of One Taste* (Tibetan, *ronyom khor druk*). The expressions differ, but the meaning is the same.

The lineage particularly referred to here is the Karma Kagyu lineage. It was founded by the first Karmapa, a disciple of Gampopa, whose main disciple was Situ Drogon Rechen. They were the first two representatives of the incarnation lineages later to be known as Black Crowns (Karmapas) and Red Crowns (Situpas). Their activity, with that of other masters, formed the Karma Kagyu school that still exists in its integrity today.

## DISTANT AND CLOSE LINEAGES

As we have said, the origin of the lineage goes back to Buddha Vajradhara. He revealed his teachings to the Indian *yogi* Tilopa, who transmitted them to Naropa. Naropa entrusted them to his Tibetan disciple Marpa. This transmission, comprising the six dharmas of Naropa and the mahamudra, is called the *close lineage*.

There is, however, another transmission, called the *distant lineage*, which includes human masters from whom Tilopa received instructions. Thus the distant lineage does not rely only on the revelation made by Vajradhara. Concerning the six

dharmas of Naropa, this distant lineage lists four practice systems that were orally transmitted to Tilopa and that he united as four tributary streams, coming from the North, East, South, and West into a single river. This *distant lineage* includes, among others, Saraha, Shawaripa, Lawapa, and Sukkhasiddhi.

The close lineage is considered more important than the distant lineage, because it is more directly related to Vajradhara. Tilopa said,

*I have no human guru,  
My guru is Vajradhara.*

In a short prayer often recited in the beginning of practice or meditation,<sup>47</sup> one addresses the close lineage like this, Vajradhara, Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, and Tusum Khyenpa, the first Karmapa.

In the framework of this close lineage, two texts are considered the basis of reference on which the transmission of the six dharmas and mahamudra rely.

- *The Criteria of Authentic Speech* (Tibetan, *Ka yangdakpol tsenma*) recording the word of Vajradhara and Vajrayogini and codifying the six dharmas of Naropa.

- *The Inconceivable Dharma of Mahamudra* (Tibetan, *Chagya chenpo sangymikyappa chod*), which represents the foundation of the approach to mahamudra.

In the context of the distant lineage, the transmission of mahamudra also has its origin in the Buddha Vajradhara, but, before reaching Marpa the Translator, it was passed to the bodhisattva Lodro Rinchen, the *mahasiddha* Saraha, then to Nagarjuna, Shawaripa, and Maitripa from whom Marpa received it in India. In the Preliminary Practices to Mahamudra, mention of this distant lineage is found.

---

<sup>47</sup>Prayer called in Tibetan *Dorje Chang Tungma*.

## MAITRIPA, THE BELL AND THE BOWL

It is well known that Naropa was the main master of Marpa. This is why Marpa, referring to Naropa says, "Naropa, my father, is for me like the sun and moon." Nevertheless, Marpa had many other masters in India as we have seen, like Maitripa, who comes second to Naropa.

Maitripa was a resident of the great Buddhist university of Nalanda. He was one of the main scholars there. His approach to the Dharma included all levels. He had taken the monk vows, committing himself to perfect external conduct according to the Hinayana, to the inner vows of the bodhisattva in the framework of the Mahayana, and to the secret commitments in the Vajrayana. For this reason, he was called the *bhiksu* endowed with the three vajras. Mahamudra was his main practice.

One time, to broaden his inner realization, he used alcohol and had a relationship with a woman companion. Of course, he kept these practices secret. One of the monks in charge of discipline at Nalanda was nevertheless puzzled by sometimes seeing rays of light coming out of Maitripa's cell. One day to see what was happening, the monk suddenly opened the door of Maitripa's cell, but Maitripa had heard him coming. By his magical powers, Maitripa transformed his bowl of alcohol into a bowl of milk and his woman companion into a ritual bell. The spying monk, observing nothing out of ordinary, however remained suspicious. Another day, he approached the cell with more caution, and this time Maitripa did not hear him coming and was caught in blatant violation of monastic rules. Neither the use of alcohol nor keeping a young woman were acceptable for the life inside of Nalanda.

The monastery's authorities had a council and made a quick decision. Maitripa would be expelled from Nalanda.

When the judgment was handed down, Maitripa made no objection. He gathered up his belongings, took a small mat, and went to the shore of the nearby river. He placed the mat

on the water, climbed onto it, and crossed the river as if he was on a boat! Nalanda authorities, witnessing this spectacle, understood that Maitripa was not a simple monk having broken his vows as first believed, but a *mahasiddha*, a being with exceptional realization.

### ATISHA, TARA, AND TIBET

At the time, one of the abbots of Nalanda was Atisha. When he learned that Maitripa, the person he had decided to expel was a *mahasiddha*, he thought that he had committed a serious negative act by chasing Maitripa out of Nalanda as a bad monk, rather than honoring Maitripa for his realization. Atisha did not know how to purify himself when the deity Tara appeared to him and said, "Your attitude toward Maitripa is regrettable. One of the best ways to purify yourself would be to go to Tibet to teach the Dharma to these difficult people." It is said that Tara's intervention was one of the decisive reasons for Atisha coming to Tibet.

### SHAWARIPA, PEACOCKS, AND LICE

Without forsaking alcohol or his woman companion, Maitripa went into the mountains to continue his practice. He then had a vision of a *yidam* revealing that the *yogi* Shawaripa had been his master during his past lives, and that he should again request instructions from Shawaripa which will allow him to obtain complete realization of mahamudra. Maitripa visited Shawaripa who conferred on him empowerments and instructions. The behavior of Shawaripa, however, was so strange and so contrary to all conventions that Maitripa could not keep himself from being shocked. For example, Shawaripa killed peacocks and used their feathers to make skirts which he wore, acting out all kinds of fantasies. Shawaripa also killed small pigs, cut them in two and hung the two parts on the upper and lower extremities of his bow when he was

going to hunt deers and other peaceful animals. When Shawaripa received Maitripa, two young women sat on the right and left sides of the master. They were concentrating on munching lice extracted from his long, dirty, and oily hair. Doubts arose in the mind of Maitripa on account of this conduct, especially as it implied the act of killing. For a long time, this conduct prevented Maitripa from completely realizing mahamudra. Nevertheless, Maitripa overcame his reticence with the final result that Shawaripa's realization of mahamudra was able to *light* the realization of mahamudra in the mind of Maitripa, just as the flame of a candle will light another candle.

These two masters are from the distant transmission lineage of mahamudra.

Maitripa had many Tibetan disciples. Among them, as previously mentioned, was Marpa the Translator to whom Maitripa transmitted all the instructions on mahamudra. There was also Khyungpo Naljor, founder of the Shangpa Kagyu lineage, who received from him a complete cycle of empowerments and instructions relating to the protector deity Six-Arm Mahakala.

In summary, the distant lineage as described in the *Preliminaries of Mahamudra*, was passed from the Buddha Vajradhara to the bodhisattva Lodro Rinchen, then to the *mahasiddha* Saraha, to Nagarjuna, Shawaripa, and Maitripa, from whom Marpa received it in India. In Tibet, it passed from Marpa to Milarepa, then to Gampopa, Tusum Khyenpa, the first Karmapa, and all the lamas in the lineage until the Sixteenth Karmapa, Rangjung Rikpol Dorje. This full transmission is called the *Golden Rosary of the Kagyu Lineage*. It has preserved the continuity of empowerments, readings of scripture, explanations, words, meanings, and grace until the present day.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

## NAROPA PAYS HOMAGE TO MILAREPA

Marpa was Naropa's main disciple. He made three journeys to India and spent a total of sixteen years and six months with Naropa.

When Marpa came to his master for the third time, the master asked him the reason for his visit. Marpa answered that he had come less for personal needs than in response to the request of his disciple, Milarepa Thogawa—Happy News.<sup>48</sup> In a dream, Milarepa had the vision of a *dakini* who advised him to receive instructions called *The Direct Transmission of the Dakinis*. Milarepa had asked for these instructions from Marpa, but Marpa searched all texts that he knew, and found no trace of the so-called transmission. Therefore, he came to Naropa for them.

Naropa, hearing these words, immediately said:

*How wonderful!*

*In the profound darkness of the northern regions,*

*Like the sun that rises on the mountain tops,*

*He who is called Happy News has come*

*Before this holy being, I prostrate.*

Turning then toward the North, in direction of Tibet, he prostrated three times. It is said as he prostrated, all the trees bowed to the North and that, even today, the trees of that region lean in that direction.

## MARPA'S MISTAKE

Marpa had several children. Among them was Dharmadode, his eldest son, for whom Marpa had great love. Marpa planned to make his son the heir of his temporal properties, and also the holder of his spiritual lineage.

---

<sup>48</sup>"Happy News" is the name that Milarepa's father joyously gave to his son when he received the message announcing the birth of his son.

Once, when Marpa was staying with Naropa, Naropa called him early in the morning to quickly look outside. Marpa's *yidam* had appeared in the sky! Marpa hurried and contemplated the deity Hevajra accompanied by his entourage appearing in front of him in space.

"You have in front of you your master and your *yidam*," Naropa told him. "To whom do you prostrate first?"

"Well," thought Marpa, "I see my master every day, while the appearance of the *yidam* is extraordinary." Therefore, he chose to prostrate in front of the *yidam*.

"The *yidam* is only a manifestation of the mind of the master," remarked Naropa, and immediately, Hevajra and his entourage melted into Naropa's heart. "By choosing to prostrate before the *yidam*," he said, "you made a mistake that will have consequences on your descendants on earth. They will last no longer than a flower in the sky. However, your spiritual descendants will not be damaged, they will continue to flow like a large river. Your successors will resemble lion's cubs, each one superior to its predecessor."

Dharmadode, Marpa's son, died in an accident. Marpa had four great disciples on whom he conferred part of his spiritual inheritance. As for Milarepa, he received all the empowerments and instructions concerning the six dharmas of Naropa and mahamudra. He himself transmitted them to Gampopa, and the transmission has to this day remained uninterrupted.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

## SITU DROGON RECHEN AND THE MELTED SNOW

The biographies of the first masters of the lineage, Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa, and the First Karmapa are well known and it is perhaps unnecessary to recall them here. As a less known example of the great Kagyupa masters, we could mention Situ Drogon Rechen.

The First Karmapa was given the name of Tusum Khyenpa emphasizing his realization of the ultimate nature of all things permitting him to know past, present, and future phenomena. His fame was widespread in Tibet.

Situ Drogon Rechen, who was to become his main disciple, had acquired remarkable ability in the practice of *tumo*, one of the six dharmas of Naropa, during which a great physical heat is produced. In all seasons, including winter, he only wore a white cotton cloth. This gave him the name of *Rechen*, the Great One (*yogi*) with Cotton Cloth. Although he had reached a certain level of realization, he had not rid himself of pride. He was especially proud of his knowledge and inner experiences, particularly of his results with *tumo*. The fame of Tusum Khyenpa annoyed him, and to prove that he was his peer, maybe even superior to Tusum Khyenpa, he decided to challenge him to a contest.

Tusum Khyenpa resided then in a cave carved in eternal snows on a high mountain. Obviously, he had neither good food nor comfort. When Situ Drogon Rechen arrived, he told him, "You come from far away and have taken a lot of trouble to get here. I will prepare a good soup for us."

He put some meat in a pot along with the various ingredients at hand. Then, he used an old human finger bone which was there to mix everything and mischievously said, "Usually, I stir only once, but since today I have a remarkable guest from far away, I must stir this three times."

Situ Drogon Rechen overcame his disgust, ate the soup, and told of his reason for coming. He wanted a *tumo* contest with Tusum Khyenpa to determine which of the two had the greatest mastery of the subtle channels and winds. "Why not?" replied the First Karmapa. "However I am getting old and it is better for you to challenge one of my disciples, Batsa Tadelwa, who practices in a neighboring cave."



Situ Drogon Rechen left to visit Batsa Tadelwa. When he arrived at the cave indicated by the Karmapa, he found no one there. He returned to Tusum Khyenpa.

"Yes, I am sure he can be found there," replied the Karmapa. "Go back!"

The visitor again returned to the cave. He only saw a tiger there. He was sent back again by the Karmapa, and he saw on the third time a fire burning in the middle of the cave. The fourth time, he saw a large puddle of water. Finding these successive appearances strange, Situ Drogon Rechen distractedly threw a stone in the puddle.

Although his guest never found the person he was looking for, Tusum Khyenpa assured him that his disciple could be nowhere else since he himself had sent him to this cave to meditate. The fifth visit was better. The yogi was sitting there, in meditation posture. Curiously, the stone thrown by the visitor was posed on the pleats of his robe.

Situ Drogon Rechen explained his visit. He wanted to compare his skill in *tumo* with those of Tusum Khyenpa but the latter, judging himself too old, had send him to challenge Batsa Tadelwa, his disciple.

Since this was the wish of his master, Batsa Tadelwa accepted. The contest would take place at night.

"However," he said, "This is my permanent residence, I am accustomed to the weather. This gives me a certain advantage I should not have. For the contest, I will meditate a little higher up on the mountain, where an icy wind makes the practice more rigorous. You will remain here, near the cave."

Each one took his place as agreed and began to practice *tumo*. During the night, Situ Drogon Rechen released enough heat to make the snow melt for six or nine yards around him. Although the snow was transformed into water, the water was cold and the *yogi* was exposed to the icy night.

As for Batsa Tadelwa, higher up on the mountain, not only had he been able to make the snow melt by a shooting

ray equal to the flight of an arrow, but he bathed in a lake of hot water and splashed the waves over his body.

When dawn came, the Karmapa flew through the air to see the winner. When he observed the situation, he asked Batsa Tadelwa to show compassion and let a stream of hot water shower his competitor and warm his freezing body.

This defeat allowed Situ Drogon Rechen to eliminate his pride. "If those are the skills of the disciple," he thought, "what are those of the master!" Since that time, Situ Drogon Rechen considered the Karmapa as his source lama.

## THE FEAST OF TUMO

The practice of mahamudra and the six dharmas of Naropa was passed on by Milarepa and has continued to this day, notably in Kham, in the framework of collective retreats of three years and three months. During the second and third year of these retreats on the occasion of the anniversary of Milarepa's departure from this world, traditionally fixed to the fourteenth day of the first Tibetan month,<sup>49</sup> the retreatants decorate the retreat center in a special way and dress in simple cotton cloth. Then, they gather to spend the night in practice. They first exert to produce the heat of *tumo*, then they ritually chant the songs of realization composed by Milarepa and the great Kagyupa masters of the past. At dawn, they practice physical exercises related to the six dharmas of Naropa.

At the end of the retreat, always scheduled in the middle of winter, the meditators go out in procession, wearing the same white cotton cloth, and circle the monastery. Despite biting cold, because of the power acquired by the practice of *tumo*, they release enough heat to feel perfectly at ease. The effects of this heat are visible as light steam floating around

---

<sup>49</sup>About the beginning of March.

their bodies. Many Tibetans from the surrounding areas come to assist in the spectacle. They pay homage to the realization of the retreatants by prostrating themselves before the line of procession.

During his exile, the Sixteenth Karmapa again established a retreat center at the monastery of Rumtek, in India. He wished to fully preserve the traditions of Tibet and gave the mission of directing the retreat center to Bokar Tulku Rinpoche. When the first retreat ended in Rumtek, the retreatants, with Bokar Rinpoche leading them, went out in procession, just like in Tibet, dressed in white cotton cloth and practicing *tumo*. Witnesses were impressed.

### PROGRAM OF A THREE-YEAR RETREAT

In the Kagyupa tradition, the *phase of completion* is mainly represented by the two practices we already mentioned, - the six dharmas of Naropa, constituting the "path of means" - mahamudra, constituting the "way of liberation"

The *phase of creation* relies on three main deities, Chakrasamvara, Vajrayogini, and Gyelwa Gyamtso.

Before performing these practices, those who accomplish a three-year retreat must first accomplish the common and specific *preliminary practices*. Retreatants later approach the *guru yoga* in connection with Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa, then accomplish the *practice of the lama* of Karmapakshi, the second Karmapa. During the period devoted to prostrations, the first specific preliminary, the end of each session is devoted to the bodhisattva vows, which already help to develop compassion. However, to give a greater vigor to this feeling, after the practices devoted to the lama, there is a period when the retreatant concentrates on *lojong* (*training of the mind*) particularly aimed for the development of *bodhicitta*.

The *lojong* practice represents the essence of the teachings of the Kadampa lineage. It is specific to one of the eight great original lineages. However, Gampopa, before meeting

Milarepa, belonged to this Kadampa school, and it is said that he joined in his person the two rivers of the Kadampas and mahamudra. Since this time, the Kagyupas have considered *lojong* as one of their main practices.

During the practice of the preliminaries in retreat, when one approaches the offering of the *mandala*, one begins the practice of *chod*. *Chod* regroups in fact two traditions in one: that of *chod*, properly said, coming from Machik Labdron, and that of *shije* coming from Padampa Sangye. The totality forms the Shije Kagyu that is one of the Eight Great Chariots. *Chod* practice is incorporated in the Karma Kagyu tradition and is specifically related with the offering of the *mandala*. In the ordinary practice of the offering of the *mandala*, one places oneself at an external level and imagines offering the whole universe and all the wealth it contains. In *chod* practice, offering of the *mandala* reaches a deeper inner level as it is the different parts of our body that are presented in an offering to the *four kinds of guests*:

- places of refuge, guests of honor
- protectors of the dharma, guests of capacities
- the totality of beings, guests of compassion
- creditor guests

Begun during the practice of the *mandala* offering that it completes, *chod* practice is then continued daily for the duration of the retreat as a method of accumulation and purification.

Because the foundation of the practice of the Vajrayana relies on the phases of creation and completion, the retreatants accomplish the practices—implying recitations of mantras, visualizations, and rituals—of the *yidams* Chakrasamvara, Vajrayogini, and Gyelwa Gyamtso, successively concentrating on the external, internal, and secret levels of the practice.

## PRINCIPLES OF THE YIDAM MEDITATION

In the Small Vehicle, the Buddha teaches that mind is empty

and that the essential of the practice aims to know this emptiness by remaining concentrated without distraction. In the Mahayana, not only is the mind considered as empty, but the mind has the ability of knowing, which is its element of clarity called clear light. It is therefore said that the essence of mind is emptiness and its nature is clarity. Finally, one cannot ignore a third element, which is the awareness of emptiness and clarity. If there is no awareness, there is no mind. A third factor is then defined, called intelligence (Tibetan, *rikpa*), awareness (Tibetan, *shepa*), or nonobstruction (Tibetan, *magakpa*). In the Mahayana, there is a complete description of the mind, its essence is emptiness, its nature is clarity, and its aspect is unobstructed intelligence.

The mind, understood like that, is the potential of Buddhahood. It is also its actualization. At the causal level or at the level of result, the mind is the same. Whether it is impure or pure is the only difference. It is said,

*All beings are Buddha,*

*But their mind is obscured by adventitious impurities.*

*Once the impurities dissipate, beings are truly Buddha.*

The way to envision the mode of being of the mind in the Mahayana and in the Vajrayana is practically the same. However, there is a difference in the manner of conceiving the real nature of the body. The Small Vehicle considers the body as a compound of thirty-two impure components that one must reject. Arriving at the conclusion that the body is, in the last analysis, only composed of atoms, the Hinayana considers the body as nonexistent in and of itself, being nothing other than a conglomeration of atoms. The great vehicle, declaring that all phenomena are the product of dynamics of the mind, concludes that the body is similar to a mirage, a reflection of the moon on the water, or a magical illusion. Finally, in the Vajrayana, the body is looked upon as having a divine nature.

To acquire the capacity to perceive this body as being in reality the body of the deity and to make this divine nature

evident and clear, the phase of creation is implemented. This is the reason that before to accomplishing the six dharmas of Naropa, one practices the meditation on the deities Chakrasamvara and Vajrayogini. As for Gyelwa Gyamtso practice during the three-year retreat, it can be done either before or after the six dharmas of Naropa.

After the phase of creation, emptiness must be realized. To reach this realization, the phase of completion comprised of two aspects—with symbols or without symbols—is necessary. The phase of completion with symbols corresponds to the six dharmas of Naropa. The phase of completion without symbols corresponds to the mahamudra.

The practices we evoke can be approached successively in the framework of various levels, or separately, as each of them may lead by itself to Awakening.

We have a great opportunity to be in an actual situation where these teachings are available. They can be approached by all those who wish. We have arrived at the Island of Jewels. All Buddha's teachings, those of Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana are immediately before us. We should rejoice and choose what appears to us to be the most appropriate method for our personal situation.

*Samye Ling, March 1983*

# Khyungpo Naljor and the Shangpa Lineage

*The Shangpa lineage, which once blossomed autonomously, is today, as an institution, linked to the Karma Kagyu lineage. Nevertheless, it preserves a corpus of its own practices which continue to be taught, particularly in the framework of retreats. Kalu Rinpoche had the highest position in the hierarchy of the Shangpa lineage, having received its transmission during the three-year retreat he accomplished at a very young age under the direction of Lama Norbu Tondrup. Since Kalu Rinpoche's death, Bokar Rinpoche, his main disciple, has succeeded as the head of the lineage.*

*Kalu Rinpoche does not paint here a full picture of the Shangpa lineage, nor does he retrace the history of this lineage in the meaning we usually give to history. Rather, by a succession of stories, he introduces us to its mystery and to its "perfume."*

## THE SOURCE OF THE TEACHINGS

---

### The kalpa of one thousand Buddhas

An age in which Buddhas appear is called a *luminous kalpa*, in contrast to a *dark kalpa* during which there is no spiritual teaching. The cosmic era in which we now live, is called the *good kalpa*, belonging to the first category, and will eventually see a total of a thousand Buddhas. Four of them have already come, Krakukandra, Kanaka Muni, Kashyapa,<sup>50</sup> and Shakyamuni from whose teachings we have benefited in the present.

When a Buddha manifests, he always teaches on three levels, the Vehicle of the Listeners, the Vehicle of the Solitary Buddhas, and the Great Vehicle. Teaching of the Vajrayana is,

---

<sup>50</sup>The Tibetan names of these first three Buddhas are respectively Korwajik, Sertub, and Osung. Their presence on this earth is not located within our historical epoch but is seen as belonging to civilizations from an extremely distant age. The one thousand Buddhas are those who play the historical role of initiating a new tradition, but many other beings, without occupying this function, may reach Buddhahood in the same *kalpa*.

on the other hand, very rare. Among the one thousand Buddhas of our *kalpa*, only Shakyamuni Buddha has transmitted Vajrayana on a large scale. During the times of other Buddhas, the word Vajrayana itself will not be mentioned. Even if this vehicle is taught, it is only in a confidential way, limited to small circles.

### **Very rare teachings**

The prophecies give some idea of the exceptional characteristic of the *kalpa* in which we live. It is said that at the end of this *kalpa* of one thousand Buddhas, our universe will be destroyed, according to the logic of the cosmic cycle.<sup>51</sup> Then an empty *kalpa*, with no manifestation, will be followed by seven hundred *kalpas* during which there will be no Buddhas and no Dharma. Then again, a *good kalpa* will return during which ten thousand Buddhas will come. The luminous *kalpas* happen rarely and are separated by a long succession of dark *kalpas*. In these luminous *kalpas*, the Vajrayana teaching is even more rare. The Dharma will not be revealed for an infinite number of *kalpas*, until the Buddha Jampeipal arrives and propagates the Dharma as did Shakyamuni Buddha. Before this, preceding Buddhas, if they teach the Vajrayana at all, will transmit it only to a very small number of disciples.

### **Advancing toward liberation**

We have taken birth in a luminous *kalpa* and we have access to all the levels of teachings delivered by Shakyamuni Buddha. This is only possible by conjunction of the grace of the Three Jewels and an immense personal positive potential accumulated during innumerable *kalpas*. Our human existence is, in this sense, very precious.

---

<sup>51</sup>A complete cosmic cycle comprises four phases: genesis, maintenance, destruction, and emptiness. Each phase has an equal duration of twenty *intermediary kalpas*.



We are able to distinguish five steps in our lives: childhood, youth, maturity, old age, and illness and death.<sup>52</sup> Most of you are in the stage of maturity. When will sickness and death come? We have no certainty on this point. Perhaps, we can last until old age, but we are not sure. Whatever happens, part of our life has already flowed away, and it is necessary for us to make good use of the years remaining to us. We should practice the Dharma that we have encountered, advance toward our liberation from suffering in samsara, and try to help an infinite number of beings. We must use, without spoiling them, the potentialities of our precious human existence.

### Facets of Buddhism

Among the teachings, as we have seen, three levels are distinguished, the Vehicle of the Listeners, that of solitary Buddhas, and the Vehicle of the bodhisattvas, or Great Vehicle. This Great Vehicle itself offers two facets, the sutras that constitute the Dialectic Great Vehicle, and the tantras that constitute the Vajrayana. At the present time, all these aspects are at our disposal.

In ancient India, many beings gained status as outstanding examples of their tradition. There are the *Sixteen Shtaviras* and the *Five Hundred Arhats* in the sutra framework, the *Eighty-four Mahasiddhas* in the tantric tradition, the *Six Ornaments of this World* and the *Two Sublimes Ones*, representative of the approach both of the sutras and tantras.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup>Illness refers here to the mortal illness that will take us away. This explains why it is together with death.

<sup>53</sup>The *Sixteen Shtaviras* (Ancient or Elders) and the *Five Hundred Arhats* constitute two groups of individuals who, at the time of the Buddha, have reached realization in the Small Vehicle and whose examples have remained to this day. The *Eighty-four Mahasiddhas* are a line of Buddhist yogis of ancient India  
(continued...)

Originating in India, Buddhism gradually spread to neighboring countries in one form or the other. Tibet has the peculiarity of offering the totality of the teachings of the Buddha, the sutras of the Small and Great Vehicles as well as the tantras.

### Origin of the lineages

Buddhism was first introduced into Tibet by King Songtsen Gampo who invited the abbot Shantarakshita, a representative of the sutra path, and Padmasambhava, holder of the tantra path. The Vajrayana expanded in a profound way, constituting the Old School, the Nyingmapas, which produced a great blossom of realized beings. The Nyingmapa school was like the sun for Tibet.

With the passing of years, a certain number of its members emphasized in their speeches a high philosophy and claimed to practice less meditation, while having a behavior stained by negativities. This created some degeneration. At the time, King Yeshe Od,<sup>54</sup> looked upon as a divine emanation, sent the translator Rinchen Zangpo to India to ask the Indian master Atisha, to come to Tibet. The efforts that Rinchen Zangpo as well as other scholars and translators deployed in Tibet to revive the Dharma gave place, in the framework of the Vajrayana, to the *new tradition*.

Atisha emphasized the importance of the three levels of practice.

---

<sup>53</sup>(...continued)

living around the 6th and the 7th century C.E. They are famous for their realization, and also for their behavior outside of all conventions. The *Six Ornaments of This World* and the *Two Sublime Ones* are famous as the greatest scholars of Buddhist India. They are Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dignaga, Dharmakirti, Gunaprabha, and Sakyaprabha.

<sup>54</sup>11th century.

- the external level represented by the vows of individual liberation, those taken by monks, nuns, and lay people
- the internal level equal to the vows of the bodhisattva, insisting on love, compassion, and having the motivation of benefitting others
- the secret level of the Vajrayana relying on the phases of creation and completion of deity meditation

This tradition of Atisha, in which many scholars and realized beings are found, was known by the name of Kadampa school.

Later, a monk of the region of Tsongkha, known as Tsongkhapa, came and gave a new impetus to the Kadampa teachings. Learned and endowed with great realization, he established himself in Ganden monastery,<sup>55</sup> with the result that his school was first called Gandenpa. It is the same school known today as Gelukpa school.

Marpa the Translator, a contemporary of Atisha, founded the Marpa Kagyu lineage. This school originated with Vajradhara Buddha (Tibetan, Dorje Chang), who revealed his teachings to the Indian master Tilopa. Tilopa transmitted them to Naropa. Marpa came to India, searched for these teachings, and received them from Naropa. The *path of skillful means* is represented by the *six dharmas of Naropa* and the *way of liberation* by mahamudra. Marpa had as a main disciple, Milarepa whose two eminent spiritual sons, who were compared to the sun and moon, were Dhagpo Rinpoche (Gampopa) and Rechungpa. The four main disciples of Gampopa founded four subsections in the Kagyu lineage, known as the *four great Kagyupa schools*, and because of additional subsections, *eight small schools* are listed.

Another of the great lineages was introduced by the Indian master Padampa Sangye. According to the tradition, he

---

<sup>55</sup>Close to Lhasa.

lived two hundred years and proposed a system known as *shije*. His main Tibetan disciple, Machik Labdron, an incarnation of Tara, developed the *chod* practice within this system. The union of *shije* and *chod* constitute one of the great Tibetan traditions.

As for Kunga Nyingpo, he collected a great number of Indian Buddhist traditions in a corpus called *Lamdre*, whose main source was the *mahasiddha* Virupa. Given that his monastery was established in a place called Sakyapa, in the province of Tsang, his school was known as Sakyapa school.

The Jonangpa lineage relies on any teachings of the Vajrayana, especially the cycle of Kalachakra. This cycle was introduced in Tibet by three translators, Re Lotsawa, Dromo Lotsawa, and Tsemo Lotsawa. This cycle became particularly famous with Dolpo Sangye and Jetsun Taranatha.

Drubtop Orgyenpa, a disciple of Karmapakshi, the second Karmapa, had the power to visit any place on earth, including the Northern kingdom of Shambala. He codified under the name of *Dorje Naljor* the teachings he received from many *dakinis*. His lineage is generally known under the name of *Dorje sum gyi nyendrup*.

The Shangpa Kagyu lineage<sup>56</sup> that holds our interest here is traced to Khyungpo Naljor. At a very young age, Khyungpo Naljor studied the sutras and tantras, then went seven times to India and Nepal where he received instructions from one hundred and fifty masters.

---

<sup>56</sup>The eight lineages—Nyingmapa, Kadampa-Gelukpa, Kagyupa, Shije, Sakyapa, Jonangpa, Dorje sum gyi nyendrup, Shangpa Kagyu—reviewed here are known as the *Eight Chariots of the Practice*.

### **A predestined child**

Just when Khyungpo Naljor was born, an Indian master called Amoga, using his miraculous powers, flew to the birth place. Hovering in the sky, Amoga prophesied for the parents that the extraordinary child who was given to them would go to India several times, meet one hundred fifty masters there, and would obtain great realization. Amoga identified the various characteristics of Khyungpo Naljor's personality as the expression of five great tantric deities.

- his body represented Guyasamaja
- his speech, Mahamaya
- his mind, Hevajra
- his qualities, Chakrasamvara
- his activity, Vajrabhairava

Amoga added that the child would live a hundred and fifty years and following his death, he would be born into the Land of Bliss.

### **Khyungpo Naljor meets Niguma**

When Khyungpo Naljor went to India, he set himself the goal of meeting a master who had direct vision of the *dharmakaya* Vajradhara (Tibetan, Dorje Chang). He roamed everywhere, continually praying for his objective. During his wandering, he met a number of gurus who told him that he would find what he was searching for in the person of the *dakini* of wisdom Niguma, who resided in a forest of sandalwood. "She has truly obtained the vision of *dharmakaya*," they asserted. "Perhaps you will be able to meet her."

After undergoing many difficulties, Khyungpo Naljor finally discovered the forest of sandalwood. As he was passing through it, Niguma appeared in front of him in space. She had dark skin, wore various ornaments, and danced in the sky, holding in her hands a *damaru* and a skull cup. Her aspect was terrifying. Khyungpo Naljor prostrated in front of

her and asked for empowerments and instructions. As an offering, he presented her with gold he had brought with him. The *dakini* took the gold, but immediately threw it away, tossing it into the forest.

Khyungpo Naljor hesitated. Was this really Niguma? Or was this rather a flesh-eating *dakini*? He believed he was in danger. At this moment, a mountain surrounded by a crowd of *dakinis* appeared in space. On the summit, in the four directions, were four rivers of rolling waves of gold. "What is this mountain?" He asked himself. "Is it truly somewhere in India or is it only your creation?"

"If one has a pure view, everything is gold," replied the *dakini*, "Without pure view, there is no gold anywhere. I have no need for your gold." She then opened her hand and returned all his gold, which she had earlier thrown away.

Khyungpo Naljor understood that he was truly facing Niguma and, prostrating again, he uttered his request for empowerments.

Producing the appearance of the deity Chakrasamvara and his *mandala*, Niguma conferred on him a complete cycle of empowerments and instructions, notably the *six dharmas of Niguma*.<sup>57</sup> Khyungpo Naljor also received instructions on the mahamudra known with the name of *Reliquary of the Mahamudra*.<sup>58</sup> Khyungpo Naljor received this transmission first in a waking state, and then again during a dream.

### Encounter with Sukkhasiddhi

Later, on a journey to India, Khyungpo Naljor met thirteen *siddhas* from whom he received empowerments and teachings. The *siddhas* suggested that he seek another *dakini* of wisdom,

---

<sup>57</sup>Fundamentally similar to the six dharmas of Naropa, but using slightly different methods.

<sup>58</sup>In Tibetan, *chachen gauma*.

Sukhasiddhi, who, having achieved rainbow body,<sup>59</sup> also lived in a forest. "If your karma is pure," they told him, "you will be able to meet her. If it is impure, it will be impossible."

Beginning his quest once more, Khyungpo Naljor effectively met Sukkhasiddhi, who appeared in the form of a sixteen-year-old woman, with pure white skin, who was very beautiful and was adorned with jewels and silks. As had Niguma, she remained in front of him in the sky. She conferred on him instructions of the *six dharmas of Sukkhasiddhi*, as well as instructions on a practice bringing together the master and four deities.

### **Niguma**

Niguma was Naropa's sister. Because of pure karma from her past lives, she had the vision of Vajradhara Buddha from whom she directly received instructions. She immediately obtained the eighth bodhisattva stage and became a *dakini* of wisdom.

### **Sukkhasiddhi**

Sukkhasiddhi was originally a simple laywoman and mother of a family. She lived in Kashmir, in Western India, with her husband and five children. At this time, a terrible famine ravaged the region. To find a little food, her husband and children went begging everyday. The mother waited for them at home. She was a person of great faith. One day, when only a small pot of rice remained, a monk appeared at her house begging for food. The faith of the old woman was great, and she immediately offered him the rice, thinking that her husband and children would bring something more to eat. In

---

<sup>59</sup>The rainbow body refers to the body of some realized beings dissolving into a rainbow at the moment of leaving this world. Cases of rainbow bodies are relatively varied. Concerning Sukhasiddhi's body, it is immortal and immaterial and can make its presence last forever on Earth.

the evening, however, they returned empty-handed and exhausted, and asked the mother to prepare the meal. She told them that, as she thought that they would return with food, she had given all that remained to a monk. It was too much for them. They became violently angry, reproached her for having no consideration and chased her out of the house.

After traveling for a long time, begging for food, she arrived at a large city in Kashmir where she was able to obtain a large quantity of rice. She used this rice to brew a kind of beer that she sold. She was then sixty years old. The *mahasiddha* Virupa<sup>60</sup> lived near this city. He shared his life with a woman companion who came every day to the market to buy beer because Virupa consumed a great quantity. One day, the old woman asked her, "You come every day to buy beer from me, who drinks so much?"

"In the forest lives a good guru who drinks it."

The old woman spontaneously felt devotion for this guru. She said, "If he is a good guru, I can no longer accept payment for the beer destined for him. I offer it to him with good heart."

She gave away the beer every day. Some time later, Virupa asked his woman companion, "Every day, you bring me excellent beer without paying for it. Where do you find it?"

"It is from an old woman who maintains a booth in the market. When she learned that the beer was for you, she no longer wanted me to pay."

"Tell her to come see me," Virupa said.

The woman companion went to the city, told the beermaker of Virupa's invitation, and asked her to come. The old merchant was full of happiness. She bought some meat, and with a large quantity of beer went to visit the *mahasiddha*.

---

<sup>60</sup>Virupa or Birwapa like many *mahasiddhas*, had a very peculiar lifestyle.



Seeing the immense faith of this woman, Virupa gave her his blessing and the cycle of empowerments of the Hevajra tantra, and explained the mahamudra to her. The effects of this practice were so powerful that, despite her sixty-three years, the beer brewer acquired the body of a sixteen-year-old woman and attained liberation. The body she acquired then was in fact a rainbow body, not an ordinary material body, but a physical appearance that only predestined individuals can see. From then on, she was known as Sukkhasiddhi.

Khyungpo Naljor, thanks to empowerments and instructions received from the two *dakinis* of wisdom, the thirteen *mahasiddhas*, and his one hundred and fifty masters, himself obtained the state of a *mahasiddha*. Returning to Tibet, he established his main monastery South of Lhasa, in a region called Shang, from which his lineage took the name of Shangpa Kagyu. The fame of his realization and erudition attracted so many disciples that he founded a total of 108 monasteries in central Tibet and Kham.

Vancouver, June 1982

### **Virupa does not pay for his beer**

Virupa, master of Sukkhasiddhi as we just saw, was famous for a peculiar episode in his life.

Because he lived with a woman companion and drank much beer, people considered him a bad lama and harshly criticized him. One day, he came to the city and stopped over to do some heavy drinking. He asked for as much beer as it would be possible to find and specified that no one should worry about the money because he would pay before sunset. Therefore, an enormous quantity of beer was put at his disposal and he drank it all. In fact, he had no money.

When the innkeeper asked him to pay, Virupa pointed his finger to the sun, and because of his powers, immobilized the sun course in the sky. Six days passed without the sun setting or even moving. Worried people went to the king for counsel.

The king personally came to see Virupa and asked him what he wanted. Virupa explained that he had promised to pay for his beer before sunset, but because he had no money, he had no choice other than stopping the sun in its tracks. The king told him, "In this case, I will pay for you. If you do not allow the sun to set, many people are going to die. I prefer to pay for the beer." Virupa accepted and allowed the sun continue on its course.

Virupa was a being of great realization. Although he drank excessively and lived with a woman, this did not tarnish his state of perfection at all. There are many *thangkas* in Tibet representing the mahasiddha Virupa stopping the course of the sun.

Madrid, Autumn 1987

## KHYUNGPO NALJOR'S MIRACLES

### **The vision of Rinchen Dorje**

Eight disciples of Khyungpo Naljor were considered particularly close to him. One of them, Rinchen Dorje, was his personal secretary. Although the disciple usually had great faith in his master, there was a time he began to doubt Khyungpo Naljor's realization and person. Khyungpo Naljor, for the purpose of purifying his disciple's mind, recommended a retreat devoted to the practice of Vajrasattva (Tibetan, Dorje Sempa) and *AH yi tongra*.<sup>61</sup> At the end of the retreat, Khyungpo Naljor had his disciple to come to his room and asked, "Well, how do you see your master now?"

"Under the same aspect as usual," replied Rinchen Dorje.

Khyungpo Naljor asked him to go out, and again a few moments later, he called him back. Rinchen Dorje then did not see an ordinary human being, but the deity Hevajra,

---

<sup>61</sup>Visualization and recitation of the mantra of Vajrasattva constitute the most frequent practice of purification in the Kagyupa school. *AH yi tongra* (the empty enclosure of AH) fulfills the same function in the Shangpa practices.

surrounded by his *mandala*. Sheltered in the *yidam's* body, were the *mandalas* of other deities, each one accompanied by a great entourage. In the head of Hevajra was the *mandala* of Guyasamaja, in his throat that of Mahamaya, in his heart that of Hevajra, on the level of his navel that of Chakrasamvara, and on the secret level that of Vajrabhairava.

From that time on, the devotion of Rinchen Dorje never failed.

### **One hundred and eight Khyungpo Naljors**

One day, Khyungpo Naljor was surrounded by an immense assembly of disciples and benefactors. The hustle and disorder made any activity difficult, and it was impossible to give a teaching or receive those who wanted to make an offering. Khyungpo Naljor's secretary, not knowing how to manage the situation, went to see his master and asked what he should do.

"Do not worry," replied the master, "Go to the great plain below the monastery, and with the assistance of the monks, using stones and earth that you will find there, prepare one hundred and eight thrones."

Thus it was done. When the thrones were ready, to the great amazement of the crowd, a Khyungpo Naljor appeared on each of them! Consequently, those who wished to receive teachings could do so with no difficulty, and those who wished to present offerings could do that without hustle.

### **Varied miracles**

On another occasion, Khyungpo Naljor arose in the sky to the height of a three-story house. He stayed there for a month devoted to teaching, not only human beings, but also celestial beings. During this month, he took no human food, tea, or water, but only nectar from the world of gods.

One of his disciples, a great *geshe*, once invited him to a place near a high cliff to accomplish a *vajra-feast* in his honor.

After presenting him with offerings, the disciple said, "You met one hundred and fifty masters in India and have reached a level of realization which I do not doubt. Nevertheless, I have heard many people talking of your miracles without seeing any of them by myself. Would you show them to me?"

Khyungpo Naljor acceded to the *geshe's* request. Rising in the sky, he appeared on a rainbow, multiplied his body in many appearances, disappeared, and reappeared. Finally, he went through the cliff, leaving an imprint that can be seen to this day.

### **A monastic plot**

The monastery of Khyungpo Naljor was approximately two-day's ride from a Kadampa monastery, which before the arrival of the Shangpa master, enjoyed great influence in the region. Unfortunately for this monastery, Khyungpo Naljor's fame attracted many disciples and benefactors who had previously supported the Kadampa monastery's needs.

The Kadampa monks, feeling their future threatened, gathered to decide what to do: should they become affiliate with the monastery of Khyungpo Naljor or fight against it? Most monks had felt more jealousy than attraction for their interfering neighbor. Rejecting the idea of becoming his disciples, they chose to destroy his monastery.

The news spread and reached the ears of the disciples of Khyungpo Naljor. The Kadampas were arming themselves and obviously planning an attack. There were only two possibilities, escape or fight, accordingly to the monks. Khyungpo Naljor said, "It is contrary to the principles of Buddhism to use violence, especially against ordained people. I do not see why I should leave my monastery. We are fine here. We will stay."

Monks and disciples wondered about what appeared to them to be a contradiction. At dawn, the unavoidable happened. The monastery of Khyungpo Naljor was

surrounded by the troop of armed Kadampas. Panic-stricken monks ran to their master, "We are surrounded! If we surrender, we are conquered! We cannot fight, we have no arms. We have no chance to be victorious!"

At this moment, Khyungpo Naljor, through his powers, created an illusory, numerous, and threatening army, which appeared at all the openings of the monastery. The Kadampas, stunned and frightened, abandoned their arms and retreated as quickly as they could.

### **A visit to the gods' realm and to hell**

The story was told of 108,000 faithful people gathering one day around Khyungpo Naljor. The crowd lacked discipline. People talked, laughed, amused themselves, and wasted a lot of time. Khyungpo Naljor asked them to go with him to a vast plain in the neighborhood. There, by the power of his mind, he created an environment like the gods' realm. Everything had vivid splendor and grace. The beauty of the gods and goddesses was much greater than that of human beings. Wonderful music charmed the ear, at the same time subtle perfumes spread in the air, and delicious dishes were offered to everyone. The crowd was delighted.

In the evening, back at the monastery, Khyungpo Naljor proposed another journey for the next day. Inspired by the day's spectacle, the crowd eagerly accepted.

Alas, the next day, the visit was something entirely different. The people, this time, had the feeling of being in hell. The environment was horrible and nauseating. Beings were tortured, burnt, cut, or scalded. The view was so unbearable that many fainted. Back at the monastery, everything was restored to normal.

"What we saw yesterday and today," asked the disciples, "was it real or only a magical creation?"

Khyungpo Naljor explained that, holding the view that all phenomena are illusory, one accomplishes an illusory practice

leading to illusory liberation. Phenomena are not ultimately real, but as a mad person who sees things as being other than they are, we take them for real.

Thanks to this experience and teaching, all the people present practiced with much ardor and benefit.

The extraordinary powers of Khyungpo Naljor manifested again during a famine in the region. People came see him and begged him to intervene. He made it known that everyone should take their seeds and plants, and immediately sow and plant them. During the night, Khyungpo Naljor produced a wonderful rainfall that brought forth crops in a single day.

### **Khyungpo Naljor's death**

When he was one hundred and fifty years old, Khyungpo Naljor felt death coming. He gathered together his disciples and benefactors. Sitting on a high throne, he instructed them at great length. He concluded by saying, "I have lived one hundred and fifty years, and I will leave this world to go to the Land of Bliss. If you know the practice of *powa*, consider its effects."

Everyone then saw a small sphere of white light, the size of an egg, exit from the summit of Khyungpo Naljor's head, swiftly rise up into the sky and dissolve. His mind had left.

## **KHYUNGPO NALJOR'S SUCCESSORS**

### **Mochokpa and Gampopa**

The main disciple of Khyungpo Naljor, looked upon as his successor, was Rinchen Samdrup, from the region of Mochok and therefore was also known as Mochokpa. For twelve years, he practiced in austere retreat, eating only roots and wild herbs. His meditation permitted him many powers, like flying in the air.

Mochokpa was a younger contemporary of Gampopa, the main disciple of Milarepa. Wanting to know Gampopa, Mochokpa went to meet him one day. Gampopa, because of

his powers of clairvoyance, knew that Mochokpa was approaching and despite his great age, he went to Mochokpa's encounter, welcoming him with great joy.

"You and I," he told his visitor, "have been master and disciple for numerous lives and we are linked by an intimate karmic connection."

They spent a few happy days together, giving each other empowerments. From then on, tight bonds were established between the Shangpa Kagyu and the Karma Kagyu lineages, with the result that they became inseparable.

### **Kyergangpa meets Avalokita**

Choky Senge succeeded Mochokpa. Choky Senge's uncle was the abbot of a monastery whose tradition decreed that following the death of the abbot, he was to be replaced by a nephew. When his uncle died, the monks wanted to install Choky Senge on the throne. He strongly refused. He did not want to administer a monastery but instead wanted to devote himself to a life in retreat. To avoid the complications created by his refusal, he left the region to live in a cave dug out of Kyergang cliff, surviving only on a mixture of *tsampa*,<sup>62</sup> ashes, and water. From then on he was generally called Kyergangpa.

Having spent three and half years in retreat, he went out one day, as he was accustomed, using the narrow path leading from the cave. Suddenly, he saw the sky filled with rainbows. First, he thought that it was a psychological problem due to his deficient diet. Fearing he would fall, he leaned against a boulder. Avalokita (Cherrezig) appeared to him in the sky, facing him, and conferred on him a special transmission. He then spent three and one half years meditating on Avalokita. He attained realization, and from then on was known as the *Mahasiddha* Kyergangpa.

---

<sup>62</sup>Flour of roasted barley.

## **The caravan of Sangye Nyentonpa**

Sangye Nyentonpa has remained famous for the immense devotion he had for his master Kyergangpa. Twice, he offered all his personal property and belongings, including gold and silver from the monastery he directed. He was ready to accomplish the same act for a third time when he met opposition from his own monks. "Your conduct is not reasonable," they told him. "You have a master who lives far away and we never see, and because of your devotion to him, you ruin the monastery. We cannot follow you on this path." The monks refused to prepare the loading envisioned by Sangye Nyentonpa, which required a caravan of several animals accompanied by many men.

Sangye Nyentonpa was momentarily stopped in his tracks. A short time later, in the middle of the night, four people arrived at the monastery and said, "We are caravan people. We are going to Kyergang and we have no load at the moment. If by chance you have goods to carry in this direction, we will gladly help you."

"Oh, yes, I have many things to carry!" replied Sangye Nyentonpa. "I would like to take a great quantity of offerings to my master who resides there. If you agree to help me, I will leave with you tomorrow."

Assisted by the four visitors, Sangye Nyentonpa loaded the animals with cereals, brocades, objects of gold and silver, and everything else he could carry. The journey took four days. They were almost at the cave of Kyergangpa, when the caravan people suddenly declared, "Excuse us, but we are obliged to leave you here. On one of the sides of Mount Meru,<sup>63</sup> a tantric master is in the process of accomplishing a ritual to which we must attend immediately."

---

<sup>63</sup>In other words, in a world other than Earth.



Saying this, they unloaded the baggage, and quickly left Sangye Nyentonpa standing there. Disconcerted by these mysterious words, Sangye Nyentonpa nevertheless was happy to be near his master and could make arrangements to carry his offerings for the last remaining hundred yards.

Kyergangpa asked him if he had received assistance for his journey. Sangye Nyentonpa told the story of the mysterious caravan, and the master said, "I have accomplished the ritual of Six-Arm Mahakala thinking that you needed assistance, and it seems that I had been heard. They were certainly Chetrapala, Zinamitra, Takiradza, and Dugon Trakche<sup>64</sup> who assisted you taking on the appearance of the four caravan people."

### **Sangye Nyentonpa caresses the thunderbolt**

Sangye Nyentonpa resided for awhile in a cave carved out of the side of a cliff above a great precipice. He had the habit of sitting in meditation at the edge of the cave. One day when he was in meditation, a violent storm broke out and thirteen lightning bolts simultaneously struck his knees. He was not scared or surprised, and the lightning did not wound him any more than raindrops falling on a flower. He took the thunderbolt in his hand, played with it for a moment, rolling it on the pleats of his robe, then he threw it onto the cliff. When it fell, it left an immense brown trail on the grey face of the rock. The place has become a place of pilgrimage.

---

<sup>64</sup>These four beings are four protector deities from the entourage of the Six-Arm Mahakala deity of wrathful aspect (Chadrupa). We have seen that Kalu Rinpoche had also received assistance from these mysterious beings for restoration of a retreat center (see Lama Gyaltzen's memories" in the volume *Excellent Buddhism*).

## **The sculptor and his work**

During this retreat, Sangye Nyentonpa each day performed the ritual of Six-Arm Mahakala, for whom he had great devotion. Wishing to make a statue of the deity, he gathered enough clay to model a statue the size of a man. However, he was not very skillful with his hands and decided to ask a sculptor to execute his project. A short while later, an Indian *yogi* sought his hospitality. Sangye Nyentonpa gladly welcomed him, and during the conversation, the *yogi* asked him what he wanted to do with all that clay in the corner of the cave.

"I would like to make a statue of Mahakala and I am looking for a good sculptor. Would you know how to work with clay, by any chance?"

"Yes, I have some ability in this domain. Give me the clay," replied the *yogi*. And, in a short time, with incredible dexterity, he modeled an very well-proportioned and perfect statue in all its details.

Sangye Nyentonpa was impressed. "It is now necessary to paint it," he said. "Would you know how to do that as well?"

"Yes, of course," replied the *yogi*. "Do you have the necessary colors?"

"I have everything necessary," answered Sangye Nyentonpa, as he presented some black, white, red, yellow, blue, and green pigments he had acquired. To his amazement, the *yogi* mixed all the pigments together in a bowl, drank them, and spit them on the statue! In an extraordinary way, each color took its appropriate place, exactly.

"Since you have such abilities," said Sangye Nyentonpa, "Would you please consecrate the statue?"

Without replying, the *yogi* melted into the statue.

This statue was extremely venerated. Each year, as long as he was in Tibet, the Dalai Lama had a goldsmith fabricate the different objects that Mahakala holds in his hands, a kapala, a knife, a damaru, and so on, to offer them to the statue.

During a pilgrimage, I myself have seen this statue. I and two companions stayed a week where it is installed. Nothing out of the ordinary happened, but I saw the body as golden, while my two companions saw it as dark blue. Each time we talked about it during the week, we disagreed. For them, it was dark blue; for me, nothing could change it, it was golden.

### **Sangye Tenpa**

The successor of Sangye Nyentonpa, Sangye Tenpa had realization and such a powerful mind that many people passing by his hermitage would experience the ultimate nature of their own mind. He was also famous for having the power to cure many illnesses by the touch of his hands, with the result that many ill people came to see him.

### **Decline and renaissance**

During several centuries, many masters integrated their own teachings with the teachings of the Shangpa lineage. The result was that this lineage had the tendency to lose vigor as an autonomous lineage and find itself diffused into other schools such as the Sakyapa, Gelukpa, and so on. We had to wait until the 19th century for its rebirth, thanks to Jamgon Kongtrul Yonten Gyamtso, known also as Lodro Thaye, whose arrival had been prophesied in various sutras and *termas*.<sup>65</sup>

### **Lodro Thaye met the enigmatic Karma Norbu**

Lodro Thaye was in retreat for a while in a cave near the monastery of Palpung, placed under the authority of Pema Nyingje Wangpo, the ninth Situpa, who was his main master, when he heard that a holder of the Shangpa lineage, Karma Norbu, was visiting the monastery. Wishing to receive the empowerments and instructions of this lineage, Lodro Thaye

---

<sup>65</sup>Transmission through hidden treasures.

went to Palpung to meet Karma Norbu and present his request. Karma Norbu agreed to receive him. Lodro Thaye expressed his interest in the Shangpa lineage, but Karma Norbu did not say a single word during the interview, and answered no questions.

Lodro Thaye was profoundly troubled by this. He wondered what could have motivated Karma Norbu to be so rough toward him. Had he committed any serious faults, such as breaking his Vajrayana commitments? During the night, he could not sleep. Suddenly, he had an idea "To repair any faults I have possibly committed," he thought, "I will propose to Karma Norbu that I will build a retreat center for the Shangpa practice."

The following day, he again asked for an interview to present his project. As soon as he entered the room where Karma Norbu was, contrary to the previous day's silence, Karma Norbu did not allow him to open his mouth. Taking the initiative, Karma Norbu said, "Your idea is very good. Building a Shangpa retreat center is exactly what needs to be done. I do not have much time now, therefore, I will give you only a short empowerment. Later, I will confer on you the totality of the Shangpa empowerments and instructions."

To keep his commitments, Lodro Thaye built the retreat center of Tsadra Rinchendra, where, later, I myself accomplished a three-year retreat.

### **The work of Lodro Thaye**

During his life, Lodro Thaye received the teachings and empowerments from the masters of the lineages of all Tibetan Buddhism that he gathered into a collection of more than two hundred volumes. He especially collected the main Shangpa teachings together in a work called the *Five Golden Teachings*, presented in the metaphor of a tree.

- the roots are the *six dharmas of Niguma*
- the trunk is the *mahamudra*

- the branches are *the three integrations of the practice*
- the flowers are *the two red and white dakinis*
- the fruit is the *nondeath, nonerror*

These Shangpa Kagyu instructions are today accepted by all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and no one doubts their authenticity.

*Question: Why are miracles no longer seen today?*

Kalu Rinpoche: Have you not seen that I have flown a lot recently?<sup>66</sup> For miracles to be accomplished, it is necessary to have the joint realization of the master and the faith of disciples. Outside of this context, it is not possible.

*Vancouver, June 1982*

---

<sup>66</sup>Kalu Rinpoche jokingly makes an allusion to his flights by plane.



Lodro Taye

## Index

Alayavijnana	50
Amitabha	48, 88, 101, 102, 104-108
Arhat	17, 57, 142
Atisha	41-44, 63, 186, 200, 201
Avalokita	22, 27, 88, 89, 102, 104, 113, 114, 116, 213
Bardo	7, 23, 26, 45, 51, 65, 66, 68, 69, 73-75, 77, 81, 83-91, 99, 100, 102, 105, 107, 136, 167, 170, 181
Bodhicitta	69, 91, 104, 125, 193
Bodhisattva	33, 36, 39, 42, 57, 58, 63, 70, 72, 74, 102, 108, 109, 112, 113, 125, 142, 161, 184, 185, 187, 193, 201, 205
Buddha	17, 21, 27-29, 31, 33-35, 37, 48, 53, 55-58, 61-63, 65-67, 73, 85, 90, 92, 101, 108, 113, 114, 116, 117, 120, 121, 126, 132, 137, 138, 141-143, 150, 155, 157, 161, 165, 166, 169, 175, 177-179, 181, 183, 184, 187, 194-201, 205
Buddhalocana	50
Chod	133, 141-144, 151-157, 159-164, 184, 194, 202
Dakini	161, 188, 203-205
Dharma	7, 27, 29, 34, 35, 40-42, 45, 46, 55, 61, 67-69, 73, 74, 77, 81, 83-85, 89, 92, 97-99, 106, 107, 115, 117, 119-122, 124, 135, 136, 141, 142, 148, 152, 157-160, 165, 177, 179, 182, 184-186, 194, 198-200
Dharmakaya	35, 37, 54, 83, 136, 137, 140, 155, 156, 181, 182, 203
Gampopa	31, 42, 43, 91, 182, 183, 187, 189, 193, 201, 212
Guru Yoga	69, 119, 134, 136, 139, 193
Hinayana	7, 17, 27, 33-37, 42, 57-59, 101, 181, 185, 195, 196
Jangchub-O	41
Kadampa	42, 43, 193, 194, 201, 202, 210
Kagyü	8, 153, 181-183, 187, 194, 197, 201, 202, 207, 213, 219
Karma	7, 8, 22, 33, 44, 67, 69, 73, 85, 91, 102, 108, 117, 121-128, 132, 142, 148, 152, 155, 156, 157-160, 164, 167-171, 179, 182, 183, 194, 197, 205, 213, 217, 218
Karmapa	43, 90, 135, 149, 153, 182-184, 187, 189-193, 202
Kyergangpa	213-215
Lama	7, 8, 21, 29-31, 35, 51, 53, 55, 60, 61, 67, 72, 77, 78, 80, 106, 107, 119, 121-123, 125, 128, 132, 134, 135, 137, 139, 140, 144, 158, 161, 163, 165, 192, 193, 197, 207, 215, 216
Land of Bliss	27, 78, 80, 85, 88, 89, 97-102, 104-109, 203, 212
Lawapa	184
Lhakthong	70
Machik	141, 143, 150-154, 157, 160, 162, 194, 202
Maha-ati	20, 40, 146
Mahamudra	20, 22, 29, 30, 52, 57, 70, 82-84, 95, 96, 136, 146, 181, 183-187, 189, 192-194, 196, 201, 204, 207, 218

Mahasiddha	40, 184, 186, 187, 202, 206-208, 213
Mahayana	7, 18, 27, 33-37, 42, 55, 57, 59, 101, 144, 147, 148, 181, 185, 195, 196
Maitripa	184-187
Mamaki	50
Mandala	52, 53, 69, 74, 105, 119, 124, 130, 133, 134, 155, 160, 194, 204, 209
Mantra	20, 24, 50, 54, 60, 63, 86, 89, 90, 112-117, 119, 128, 129, 179, 180, 208
Marpa	31, 42-44, 61, 95, 99, 123, 144, 182-185, 187-189, 193, 201
Milarepa	31, 42, 61, 73, 92, 93, 95, 98, 144-146, 161, 163, 183, 184, 187-189, 192-194, 201, 212
Naropa	7, 23, 42, 51, 61, 65, 73, 74, 77, 84, 88, 95, 123, 156, 181, 183-185, 188-190, 192, 193, 196, 201, 204, 205
Niguma	203-205, 218
Nirmanakaya	35, 54, 83, 139, 155
Nirvana	19, 86, 113, 135
Nyingma	37, 39, 40, 42, 44, 182
Padampa Sangye	143-148, 150, 151, 194, 201
Padmasambhava	31, 40, 44, 114, 116, 135, 157, 200
Pandaravasini	50
Phase of completion	19-21, 23, 193, 196
Phase of creation	19-21, 23, 84, 193, 196
Powa	77, 81, 99, 100, 156, 157, 164, 212
Prajnaparamita	36, 143, 150, 164
prana	50-52, 95, 112, 167
Ratnasambhava	48
Sakya	70, 72, 202
Sakyapandita	148, 149
Samaya	59, 61-63
Sambhogakaya	35, 50, 51, 54, 83, 139, 155
Samsara	19, 35, 44, 61, 86, 91, 92, 99, 109, 113, 117, 119, 199
Sangha	27, 29, 34, 35, 55, 120-122, 124
Sangye Nyentonpa	74, 75, 153, 214-217
Saraha	184, 187
Sarma	37, 39-41, 44
Shangpa	74, 96, 153, 182, 187, 197, 202, 207, 208, 210, 213, 217-219
Shantarakshita	40, 44, 200
Shawaripa	184, 186, 187
Shinay	70
Sukhasiddhi	161, 184, 204, 205, 207
Sutra	33, 36, 55, 170, 199, 200
Svabhavakaya	54, 84, 140
Tantra	39, 45, 53, 55, 58, 141, 180, 200, 207
Taranatha	91, 202
Tathagatagarbha	33, 86
Three Jewels	27, 29, 30, 34, 35, 42, 55, 67, 69, 119-122, 124-126, 130, 132, 134,



	137, 156, 157, 159, 160, 198
Three Roots .....	29, 30, 35, 120-122, 124-126, 130, 132, 134
Tigle .....	81
Tilopa .....	42, 61, 123, 183, 184, 189, 201
Trisong Detsen .....	40, 44
Tsongkhapa .....	31, 43, 201
Tumo .....	51, 81, 95, 96, 146, 190-193
Vairocana .....	48
Vajradhara . . .	8, 19, 28, 31, 122, 123, 134, 139, 140, 181-184, 187, 201, 203, 205
Vajrasattva .....	63, 69, 119, 126-130, 208
Vajrayana .	1, 3, 4, 7, 17, 19, 21-24, 27-30, 33, 35-37, 42, 45, 47, 51, 52, 55, 57-59, 61-63, 89, 119, 121, 122, 127, 128, 141, 161, 164, 180, 181, 185, 194-202, 218
Vinaya .....	92
Virupa .....	202, 206-208
Yidam .....	22, 24, 26, 30, 47, 51, 121, 164, 186, 189, 194, 209





**Kalu Rinpoche**, a lama of the Kagyu Shangpa lineage, was born in Eastern Tibet in 1904. He studied and practiced with many great beings of all traditions before living in solitary retreat for 12 years. One of the first Tibetan masters to teach in the West, he passed away in 1989.

Up to now, Kalu Rinpoche's teachings were only available in fragments. In the three volumes, *Excellent Buddhism*, *Profound Buddhism*, and *Secret Buddhism*, ClearPoint Press offers a complete and precise version of these precious teachings.

More than a theoretical treatise, these three books provide the reader with a living, diversified, and often surprising approach to Tibetan Buddhism.

**Secret Buddhism** reveals the essentials of Vajrayana, mantras, empowerments, the six yogas of Naropa, Chod, Pure Land, and the six bardos. A history of the Kagyupa and Shangpa lineages and some explanation of the principles of Tibetan medicine complete this survey of Tibetan Buddhism.

**Profound Buddhism** teaches how to deal with emotions from a Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana point of view. This volume also includes teachings on the nature of the mind, the relationship between mind and body, emptiness, compassion, the situation of the individual in the cycle of existence, and karma.

**Excellent Buddhism** contains biographical reminiscences on Kalu Rinpoche, teachings on daily life, inspiring stories on Buddhist practitioners of the past, and reflections on the relationship between Buddhism and the West.