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ENTRANCE TO THE GREAT PERFECTION  
A GUIDE TO THE  
**DZOGCHEN**  
PRELIMINARY PRACTICES

## INTRODUCTION



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

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

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

practical and poetic. Jigmé Lingpa's elegant aspiration prayers inspire us to look beyond the ordinary deluded habits that propel the mind into suffering, and to refocus instead on the mind's true nature and pure expressions. Its liturgical arrangements, or *sadhanas*, provide a framework for meditation and are capable of transforming confusion into wisdom, eliciting a radical shift in consciousness. Finally, its numerous instruction manuals provide pragmatic advice on virtually every aspect of the spiritual journey, leading the beginning meditator step-by-step along the path of contemplation.

This series of prayers, practices, and meditation manuals lays out a clearly structured path to enlightenment. In the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse, the spiritual journey begins with a set of preparatory practices, known in Tibet as *ngöndro*. These practices are designed to reorient the mind away from the mundane concerns of ordinary life toward the path to liberation, and then to build on that reorientation by creating an inner environment conducive to spiritual practice. Once the mind has been thoroughly trained and purified by these preliminary practices, the practitioner moves on to a series of advanced meditations that work to undo destructive habitual patterns and reveal the pure, luminous nature of mind that so often goes unnoticed.

As an introduction to the world of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse, and in particular to its teachings on the preliminary practices, this book explores the rich tradition that Jigmé Lingpa was a part of, examining the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism and the unique approach of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse. The second part of the book focuses exclusively on this tradition's preliminary practices. This section contains translations of Jigmé Lingpa's writings on the preliminary practices, instructions that formed the basis for one of Tibet's most beloved literary compositions: Patrül Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. In his short instruction manuals, Jigmé Lingpa provides pithy instructions on these meditative exercises. Following these two texts are a short commentary on the preliminary practices by the great Rimé master Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo and a contemporary commentary by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche. While Jigmé Lingpa and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo present a traditional perspective on the preliminaries, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche's lively instructions lend a modern sensibility to this ancient practice. Also included are two liturgies for the preliminary practices: the main Longchen Nyingtik ngöndro liturgy, compiled by Jigmé Trinlé Özer, and a short liturgy composed by Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo. In short, this book is meant to serve as an entrance to

the Great Perfection—to the innate purity and radiance of awareness, to the meditations and contemplative practices that reveal the mind's true nature, and to the lineage of enlightened masters that have passed these teachings down through the ages.

## THE ORIGINS OF BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Tibetan spirituality is as rich and varied as the Tibetan landscape, which soars from the lofty peaks of the high Himalaya to the remote and hidden jungles of the Indian borderlands. Tibet is home to a multitude of Buddhist traditions and lineages, each with its own unique instructions, texts, and approaches to Buddhist practice. The influx of these lineages from India occurred in two phases.

### *The First Wave of Buddhism in Tibet*

The first transmission of Buddhism to Tibet was initiated by a series of Tibetan monarchs that ruled the land at the height of its prestige and influence—in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries CE. King Songtsen Gampo was the first of these rulers. In addition to building numerous Buddhist temples, Songtsen Gampo formed links with the Buddhist cultures that bordered Tibet through his marriages to Chinese and Nepali princesses. Perhaps the most important development during his reign, however, was the creation of the Tibetan alphabet. In the middle of the seventh century, the king sent one of his ministers, Tönmi Sambhota, to India to study the Sanskrit language. The alphabet system created by Sambhota later allowed for the translation of the entire Buddhist canon into the Tibetan language and also served to bridge the geographic and cultural chasms that existed in Tibet at the time.

Though Songtsen Gampo is often credited with beginning the process of bringing Buddhism to Tibet, it was during the reign of his descendent, King Trisong Deutsen, that the Buddha's teachings truly took root in Tibetan soil. King Trisong Deutsen, who ruled the country in the eighth and ninth centuries and vastly expanded the Tibetan territory with fierce military campaigns, undertook the arduous tasks of building a major monastic center, translating the Buddhist canon, and inviting teachers from India to transmit the Buddha's teachings. The king also invited the abbot Shantarakshita and tantric adept Padmasambhava from India. Together, these two masters

worked under the king's patronage to establish Samyé, Tibet's first monastery. Trisong Deutsen's work was later continued by his grandson, King Ralpachen, the third of Tibet's three "Dharma Kings." Along with many other scholars and translators, these monarchs inaugurated a tradition of Buddhist study and practice that continues to this day.

After this flourishing of Buddhist activity during the seventh to ninth centuries, the spread of Buddhism suffered a major setback at the hands of Langdarma, the brother of King Ralpachen. Langdarma was bitterly opposed to the spread of Buddhism, which he saw as a threat to the indigenous Bön tradition. During his short reign, Langdarma worked to undo the efforts of his predecessors. His violent persecution dismantled the community of ordained monks and nuns—nearly destroying Tibet's fledgling Buddhist community—and plunged the country into a period of political and cultural fragmentation.

Buddhism was not entirely wiped out during this dark period, however. While Langdarma and his cohorts decimated most of the monastic community, a few monks escaped to Amdo in northeastern Tibet, where they preserved the lineage of monastic ordination. The community of lay practitioners survived as well, and many tantric lineages that were transmitted by Padmasambhava and other Buddhist masters continued to be taught and practiced in secret. Thus, despite the great upheavals that took place in the ninth century, the work of Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Deutsen, and Ralpachen made a lasting impact in Tibet. The lineages that stem from this first spreading of Buddhism to Tibet came to be known as the *Nyingma*, or Ancient School.

The Nyingma tradition holds unique teachings that are not found in other lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. Among its distinct teachings are the *Tantra of the Secret Essence* and the Great Perfection. In the Nyingma school, the *Tantra of the Secret Essence* is regarded as the most significant work on Buddhist tantra, a form of spiritual practice that stresses using all facets of life as avenues to awakening. The teachings of this text lay out the theoretical foundations of tantric philosophy, in addition to offering a thorough treatment of the main principles of tantric practice. This text has given rise to a rich commentarial tradition, with works being composed by the greatest luminaries of the Nyingma lineage, including Rongzom Mahapandita (1012–1088),<sup>1</sup> Longchenpa (1308–1362),<sup>2</sup> and, in more recent times, Ju Mipam Namgyal (1846–1912).<sup>3</sup>

Despite the renown of the *Tantra of the Secret Essence*, it is the Great

Perfection, or *Dzogchen*, that is the hallmark of the Nyingma lineage. Though the term “Great Perfection” can be used to refer to the fundamental nature of reality as well as the state of buddhahood, it most commonly refers to a continually evolving set of spiritual instructions and the lineage of enlightened beings who have mastered these teachings and passed them down through the ages. This radically direct approach points out the mind’s fundamental nature of luminous purity. According to its teachings, enlightenment is not a distant goal to strive toward, but an immanent reality that must be recognized in the present moment. Effort and agendas only serve to obscure the true nature of mind. Once this nature has been recognized, however, problems and negativity automatically dissolve, leaving the open space of pure awareness, in which the qualities of enlightenment spontaneously unfold.

We will return to the Nyingma school and its Great Perfection teachings later in this text. Now we turn our attention to the second spreading of the Buddha’s teachings and the lineages that were brought to Tibet after the ninth century.

### *The Second Wave of Buddhism in Tibet*

The Buddha’s teachings regained their foothold on the Tibetan plateau one hundred years after the persecutions of Langdarma. In the middle of the tenth century, Yeshé Ö, king of a region in western Tibet called Ngari, abdicated the throne to devote his life to Buddhist practice. Aware of the setbacks Buddhism had faced in the previous century, Yeshé Ö worked to revive the spread of the Buddha’s teachings by inviting Buddhist scholars from the Indian subcontinent to his kingdom and by sending a group of Tibetan scholars to learn Sanskrit and study the Buddha’s teachings. One of them, Rinchen Sangpo (958–1051), became a skilled translator. The work initiated by Yeshé Ö and Rinchen Sangpo marks the beginning of the second phase of the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet. The lineages that were founded during and after this period are collectively referred to as the *Sarma*, or New Schools.

One of Yeshé Ö’s initiatives was to invite the famed abbot of India’s Vikramashila Monastery, Atisha (982–1054), to Tibet. Atisha initially refused Yeshé Ö’s entreaties, but changed his mind once he learned that the former king had been imprisoned as a result of his efforts to spread the Buddha’s teachings in Tibet.<sup>4</sup> Inspired by the former king’s dedication, he left

India for Tibet and spent more than a decade in the land of snows, where he reinvigorated the monastic tradition and founded the Kadampa lineage.

The Kadampas stressed the importance of renunciation and monastic ordination. Above all, however, Atisha and his followers are remembered for their uncompromisingly simple lifestyle and the system of mind training, or *lojong*, that they espoused. The Kadampa mind-training teachings present the key ethical and philosophical principles of the Buddha's teachings in a pithy and accessible manner. Many of Tibet's most cherished literary works stem from this tradition, including Langri Tangpa's *Eight Verses on Training the Mind* and Geshé Chekawa's *Seven-Point Mind Training*. Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* is a model for the various mind-training systems practiced throughout Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, the Kadampa tradition was absorbed into other lineages and ceased to exist as an independent entity. The Kadampa teachings were not lost, however, as they became the cornerstone of the Geluk school, a lineage founded in the early fifteenth century by Tsong Khapa (1357–1419). Like Atisha before him, Tsong Khapa stressed the importance of monastic ordination, celibacy, and academic study, especially as a prerequisite for the advanced meditations of Buddhist tantra. While the Geluk school has produced innumerable meditation masters, it is particularly well known for its rigorous philosophical training and skilled logicians.

The Kadam teachings were also incorporated into the Kagyü lineage, which was brought to Tibet by the translator Marpa (1002/1012–1097). Marpa had traveled to India to study with the enlightened scholar Naropa (1012–1100) and a number of other spiritual masters. In Tibet, he passed the Kagyü teachings on to Milarepa (1052–1135), his main student and Tibet's most famous saint, who in turn transmitted them to Rechungpa (1085–1161) and Gampopa (1079–1153). The Kagyü lineage then divided into a number of subgroups founded by Gampopa's primary students and those who followed in their wake.

It was Gampopa who integrated the Kagyü teachings of Marpa with Atisha's mind-training lineage. Prior to Gampopa, the instructions of the Kagyü lineage focused primarily on the Buddhist tantras and Mahamudra—a profound system of contemplation similar to the Great Perfection teachings of the Nyingma school. Gampopa had been steeped in the mind-training instructions of the Kadam school before meeting Milarepa. Once he attained enlightenment and began to pass on the teachings to his own students, he

created a unique synthesis of the Kagyü and Kadampa teachings. To this day, the lojong instructions of Atisha are commonly taught alongside the Mahamudra transmissions of Marpa.

In the same century that Atisha reinvigorated the monastic traditions of Tibet and Marpa passed on the profound teachings of Buddhist tantra to Milarepa, the Sakya lineage was formed based on the instructions of the Indian siddha Virupa. Like Naropa of the Kagyü lineage, Virupa started as a monk and became a respected scholar at India's famed Nalanda University. After practicing Buddhist tantra for a number of years, he attained enlightenment and took on the role of a wandering yogi, adopting the "crazy wisdom" of living outside societal norms, with no fixed abode or established code of moral conduct to follow.

Virupa's teachings centered on the *Hevajra Tantra* and a related cycle of instructions known in Tibet as *Lam-dré*, or Path and Fruition. Eventually these instructions were passed down to the Tibetan translator Drogmi during the late ninth and tenth centuries. Drogmi followed the example of Virupa, beginning with the rigorous philosophical training of the sutra tradition and then moving on to the esoteric practices of Buddhist tantra, also known as *Vajrayana*. This became the established model for Buddhist practice in the Sakya lineage and was institutionalized at Sakya Gönpa in central Tibet, a monastery founded by Könchok Gyalpo (1034–1102) in the eleventh century. An unending stream of great scholars and saints has issued forth from this lineage, including unparalleled masters such as Sakya Pandita (1182–1251) and Gorampa Sonam Sengé (1429–1489).

The Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyü, and Geluk schools share many characteristics. Each, for example, synthesizes the relatively accessible teachings of the Sutra Vehicle with the more esoteric teachings of Buddhist tantra. In a Tibetan monastery today, you will find monks following both the Vinaya precepts (a set of guidelines for monks laid down by the Buddha roughly 2,500 years ago) and performing elaborate tantric rituals on a daily basis. Similarly, Tibet's monastic colleges traditionally focus on the teachings of the Sutra Vehicle, yet most include courses on the theoretical framework of tantra. Lamas give public tantric initiations as often as they explain fundamental Sutra Vehicle principles like impermanence and compassion.

All of these schools have thriving monastic traditions and long histories of philosophical and scholastic training. The Geluk monasteries of central Tibet are famed for their many learned scholars, yet the other three lineages

have equally impressive monastic colleges, or shedras, such as the Shri Simha Shedra of Dzogchen Monastery, one of the six “mother monasteries” of the Nyingma lineage. The curricula of the four schools are also remarkably similar. When it comes to the Abhidharma teachings, for example, Vasubhandu’s *Treasury of Abhidharma* is a mainstay in all four schools, just as the works of Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, and Maitreya are widely viewed as the pinnacle of Great Vehicle thought.

The practice of meditation has always been the hallmark of the Buddhist tradition, and Tibet’s many remote valleys and icy peaks are the perfect environment for those called to a life of contemplation. For these reasons, meditation and retreat play a vital role in all four schools. Each lineage nurtures communities of ascetic yogis dwelling in isolation and small bands of meditators living in strict retreat. In some schools, a regimented three-year, three-month retreat is a common form of intensive meditation practice, while in other lineages, meditators living together in small communities practice individually and at their own pace.

Despite these similarities, there are also differences between the four schools. One obvious example is lineage. As noted above, each of the four schools traces its ancestry back to ancient India and the teachings of the historical Buddha. Specific lines of transmission, however, vary greatly. The Great Perfection teachings of the Nyingma school, for example, are traced back through Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, and Berotsana to Garap Dorjé, the first human Great Perfection master, and then to the buddhas Vajrasattva and Samantabhadra. The Kagyü lineage, meanwhile, is said to have originated with the primordial buddha Vajradhara, who transmitted the teachings to the Indian siddha Tilopa. The teachings then descended to Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, and finally to Gampopa, before dividing into a number of sublineages. The Sakya and Geluk schools also possess their own lines of transmission.

Each school has a unique orientation. The Geluk and Sakya lineages stress the importance of philosophical training as a prerequisite for intensive meditation practice. For this reason, many lamas of these schools begin their training by studying in one of the lineage’s major monastic colleges. This training can often take decades to complete.

The Nyingma school, in contrast, is the least monastic of the four lineages and tends to emphasize the practice of Buddhist tantra and Great Perfection meditation alongside scholarly study and philosophical inquiry. In

the last century, Ju Mipam and Khenpo Shenga reinvigorated the model of the realized scholar-monk in the Nyingma school, but there have also been numerous lay masters. In fact, some of the greatest luminaries of this tradition were not monks, including great masters like Rongzom Mahapandita, Jigmé Lingpa, and, more recently, Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdral Yeshé Dorjé, the late head of the Nyingma school. The presence of a strong nonmonastic community of lamas and practitioners in the Nyingma school has also opened the door to a great number of female adepts.<sup>6</sup>

The Kagyü school emphasizes the practice of meditation. There is a rich scholastic tradition in this lineage as well, but the Kagyü school is known especially for its yogis and advanced meditators. In particular, this lineage is famous for its teachings on Mahamudra and the Six Dharmas of Naropa. Over the past thousand years, innumerable saints have based their practice on these teachings. Like the Geluk and Sakya lineages, this school places more emphasis on the importance of monastic ordination than the Nyingma lineage.

These four schools—the Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyü, and Geluk—are the most widely practiced lineages in Tibet. It is important to note, however, that there have been many other lineages and teachings on the Tibetan plateau. Some of these have died out, while others continue to flourish. The Chöd lineage of the great female master Machik Lapdrön (1031–1124), for example, continues to exert a powerful influence on the spirituality of Tibet, as do the Jonang and Shangpa Kagyü lineages, despite the fact that all three lack the institutional clout of Tibet's more prominent schools. Monks and nuns, householders and wandering ascetics, philosophers and simple yogis . . . there is enough variety in Tibetan Buddhism to accommodate them all.

## THE NYINGMA SCHOOL

The teachings of the Nyingma school are one of the world's great spiritual treasures. They range from accounts of the mystical exploits of saints to sublime philosophical treatises, some spanning thousands of pages, on the nature of the mind and reality itself. Over the centuries, these teachings have inspired countless hermits and sages, monks and nuns, kings and laypeople. In the following pages, we will explore this lineage and its profound teachings, beginning with the kama and terma transmissions and a few short biographies of key Nyingma figures.

### *Kama and Terma*

The instructions of the Nyingma school encompass the entirety of the Buddha's teachings. Like other Buddhist lineages in Tibet, Nyingma practitioners train in the three vehicles, or *yanas*, simultaneously. Pure monks and nuns practice tantra; eccentric yogis uphold the fundamental principle of nonviolence; and all practices are imbued with the altruistic attitude of bodhicitta. What sets the Nyingma school apart, however, is the unique way that these teachings have been passed down through the ages, and how the various facets of the Buddhist path are formulated. These two issues relate to the kama and terma transmissions, and to the nine vehicles, respectively.<sup>7</sup>

While all Buddhist teachings in Tibet can be traced back to ancient India, the Nyingma teachings came to the land of snows in the imperial period of Tibetan history, and especially with the transmissions that took place during the eighth- and ninth-century reign of King Trisong Deutsen. Since that time, the various lineages of the Nyingma school have been transmitted in two distinct forms, known as *kama* and *terma*. The word *kama* literally means "oral transmission," referring to teachings that have been handed down from teacher to student for over a thousand years. Terma, on the other hand, are teachings or sacred objects that are hidden by a spiritual teacher for the benefit of future generations. These "treasures" are later revealed by a reincarnation of the spiritual teacher or by a reincarnation of one of the teacher's primary disciples.

The kama lineage has been transmitted as an uninterrupted continuity of study and practice since the time of Padmasambhava, Shantarakshita, and Vimalamitra. Over time, various masters have compiled collections of important texts from this lineage. In the twentieth century, for example, Dudjom Rinpoche gathered together hundreds of texts from the kama lineage, filling over fifty volumes.<sup>8</sup> This collection contains many of the masterpieces of the Nyingma tradition and addresses all aspects of Buddhist thought and practice. The first twenty volumes or so contain the ritual root texts of the Nyingma school, including many tantric sadhanas, or practice liturgies. The latter half of the collection is filled with commentaries on a vast range of Buddhist topics. As evidence of the Nyingma school's tantric orientation, however, the vast majority of these texts relate to the theory and practice of Buddhist tantra, and the Great Perfection in particular. Included in this compilation are works by the greatest masters of the Nyingma lineage: Garap Dorjé, Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, Rongzom, Longchenpa,

Jigmé Lingpa, and many others. These writings are unique to the Nyingma school.

The Nyingma tradition also accepts the canonical status of the writings found in the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur*. These compilations are held in common with the New Schools. Respectively, these two collections contain the sutras and tantras of the Buddha, and canonical commentaries by Indian masters. Many of the works from these compilations, such as the Middle Way writings of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti, are studied in the monastic colleges of all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Because the lineage for each of these teachings includes the countless individuals that have practiced, mastered, and transmitted these teachings over time, the kama lineage is often referred to as “the long lineage of oral transmissions.” This continuity ensures that each teaching is grounded in the original teachings of the Buddha and the saints and scholars of times past.

This form of transmission is not without its disadvantages, however. With each successive generation, the chance of mistakes and corruptions slipping into the transmission increases, while broken samaya vows sap its vitality. Texts, for example, are especially prone to such degradations. Until recently, Tibetan texts were copied by hand or using woodblock prints. Each new version was susceptible to errors, omissions, and additions. For this reason, different versions of ancient texts often contain dramatic discrepancies in terms of both spelling and content. The oral commentary tradition that accompanies these texts is equally prone to corruption.

The terma lineage, by contrast, is less susceptible to such problems. Terma, or treasures, are typically revealed by reincarnations of those who initially received the teachings. When such a revelation takes place, there are very few intermediaries between the student that receives the teachings and the main gurus of the lineage, such as Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra. For this reason, terma transmissions are often called “the close lineage of revealed treasures.”

Treasures may be teachings, statues and other blessed objects, or any other item that is destined to have a positive impact in a particular time and place. In Tibet, most treasures were hidden by Padmasambhava and his spiritual partner, Yeshé Tsogyal.<sup>9</sup> Padmasambhava received a wealth of teachings. Though he was committed to passing them on to his Tibetan students, he saw that the time was not right for many of his transmissions and that they would have a much greater impact in the future. For this reason, he decided to transmit some teachings in private to a few close disciples and to have

these teachings hidden until the time was ripe for them to be studied and practiced. He then charged a particular student with safeguarding the teaching he or she had received and propagating it in a future life.

Treasures are hidden in various ways. Some teachings, for example, are written down in coded language, called *dakini script*, and concealed in rocks, earth, or even in water. Of those that are concealed in the physical environment, one common form is *sa ter*, meaning “earth treasure.” Other teachings, known as *gong ter*, or “mind treasure,” are hidden in the mind of the student. In both cases, the individual meant to reveal the teachings—the *tertön*, or treasure revealer—typically meets with an auspicious circumstance that triggers a recollection of the teachings or an impulse to travel to the place where the treasures are located.

One well-known example concerns the transmission of the Heart Essence of the Dakinis, an influential treasure cycle propagated by Longchenpa. The custodian of this particular teaching was Princess Pemasel, the daughter of King Trisong Deutsen. Shortly before the princess passed away at the young age of eight, she received all the teachings and empowerments associated with the Heart Essence of the Dakinis directly from Padmasambhava. Yeshé Tsogyal, who was also present, transcribed the teachings and placed them in a small casket for safekeeping. Princess Pemasel then held the casket at the crown of her head and prayed, “May I meet with these teachings in the future and benefit beings!” To this, Padmasambhava added his own prayers and aspirations. Shortly thereafter, the princess passed away.

Yeshé Tsogyal kept a record of everything that transpired and asked the master whether the teachings should be propagated or concealed.

“The time has not yet come to spread these teachings,” Padmasambhava responded. “They should be buried as treasure. Since the princess placed the casket of texts on the crown of her head and made aspirations for the future, these teachings are her heritage.”

The texts of the Heart Essence of the Dakinis, along with princess’s brocade cloak, were then hidden by Yeshé Tsogyal. At the end of the thirteenth century, Princess Pemasel was reborn as a man named Pema Ledrel Tsel. Once Pema Ledrel Tsel’s karmic connection with the Heart Essence of the Dakinis was reactivated, he revealed the teachings that had been concealed centuries before and began to propagate them. He did, however, make one fatal mistake. The instructions he revealed stipulated that the teachings should not be transmitted immediately, but should first be practiced in seclusion. They warned that the treasure revealer would incur the wrath of the dakinis, the

female protective spirits that safeguard the Great Perfection lineage, if this injunction were to go unheeded. Pema Ledrel Tsel ignored these warnings and soon began to transmit his revelations to a few close disciples. As the prophecy stated, this angered the dakinis, who soon created insurmountable obstacles to his life. He died shortly thereafter in his late twenties.

Because he died at such a young age, Pema Ledrel Tsel was unable to spread these precious teachings to more than a few close disciples. Princess Pemasel's next incarnation, however, was Longchenpa, who mastered the teachings through years of retreat practice before teaching them far and wide. Longchenpa's enduring reputation as an unparalleled master of the Great Perfection has ensured the place of the Heart Essence of the Dakinis as one of the most cherished treasure collections in the Nyingma lineage.

In addition to the Heart Essence of the Dakinis, innumerable treasure collections have been revealed over the centuries. Some fade into obscurity centuries after their revelation, while others continue to be taught and practiced for generations. One of the earliest treasure collections to be revealed, Rigdzin Gödem's (1337–1409) Unimpeded Wisdom Mind, or *Gongpa Sangtal*, has been held in high regard since its discovery in the fourteenth century. This collection is still widely practiced in certain regions, such as Sikkim, and at some Nyingma monasteries. Rigdzin Gödem is often mentioned alongside Guru Chöwang and Nyang Ral Nyima Özer as one of the three most important tertöns. Other collections, such as Namchö Mingyur Dorjé's (1645–1667) Space Dharma, or *Namchö*, and Longsel Nyingpo's (1625–1692) revelations, have also been integrated into the practice curriculum of some of the Nyingma tradition's main monastic centers and have made a lasting impact on the trajectory of Great Perfection thought and practice for this reason.<sup>10</sup> More recently, collections discovered by such masters of the Rimé movement<sup>11</sup> as Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo and Chokgyur Dechen Lingpa (1829–1870) have profoundly shaped the Great Perfection tradition, as have the collections revealed by Dudjom Rinpoche Jikdrel Yeshé Dorjé (1904–1988) and Dilgo Khyentsé Rinpoche (1910–1991) in the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup>

Though the vast majority of treasures derive from the teachings of Padmasambhava, there are some that relate to other Buddhist masters. Two collections that relate to the teachings of Vimalamitra, for example, are the Heart Essence of Vimalamitra,<sup>13</sup> revealed by Dangma Lhungyal, and the Heart Essence of the Karmapa, revealed by the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé, a patriarch of the Kagyü lineage. More recently, an important treasure was

rerevealed in the nineteenth century by Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo, a master of both the Sakya and Nyingma teachings, entitled the Heart Essence of Chetsün.<sup>14</sup> Other collections, such as Terdak Lingpa's Essence of the Profound Nature of Ati, are considered distillations of the Great Perfection teachings of both Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra. Another such example is Jigmé Lingpa's Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse, which we will explore in the following pages.

### PADMASAMBHAVA

The various lineages of the Nyingma school are united by their roots in the dynastic period outlined above and their shared reverence for Padmasambhava. While the life of Padmasambhava is shrouded in myth, it is clear that King Trisong Deutsen invited him to Tibet around the turn of the ninth century at the behest of the abbot Shantarakshita. At the king's request, Shantarakshita had come to the land of snows to transplant the monastic Buddhism of India on Tibetan soil and specifically to construct Samyé monastery. His initial efforts, however, met with failure. As legend has it, spirits and ghosts thwarted their every effort to build the monastery, mischievously undoing by night the work that was done each day. Frustrated by the lack of progress, Shantarakshita made a prediction that the building would only be finished if Padmasambhava were invited to Tibet to subdue the native spirits.

As predicted, Padmasambhava was found in India and invited to Tibet. Once there, he proceeded to subjugate the evil forces that were blocking the king's spiritual ambitions and to bind them under oath to serve the Dharma. With the spirits of Tibet working for the king and abbot rather than against them, the construction of Samyé continued without interruption. Eventually, it became hallowed ground where many teachings of the Nyingma lineage were transmitted, studied, and practiced.

Padmasambhava's reputation as a miracle worker did not begin in Tibet. The accounts of his birth, childhood, and upbringing are filled with inspiring tales of his unique and unconventional nature. One well-known story relates that Padmasambhava was born fully enlightened, appearing miraculously on a lotus flower in the middle of the ocean. He was found by Indrabhuti, the king of Oddiyana, who was searching for a wish-fulfilling jewel. In a rather humorous exchange, the king expressed his astonishment at finding a young boy in such strange circumstances. Responding to the king's inquiries, Padmasambhava exclaimed:

My father is Samantabhadra, self-awareness,  
 And my mother is Samantabhadri, the sphere of reality itself.  
 My caste is the indivisibility of this sphere and awareness,  
 And my name is Padmasambhava, the glorious Lotus-born.  
 My homeland is the unborn sphere of reality itself.  
 For sustenance, I consume dualistic appearances and thoughts  
 While engaging in the conduct of the buddhas of the three times!<sup>15</sup>

This delighted the king, who promptly adopted the boy and proclaimed him heir to the throne of his kingdom.

After a number of years, the young Padmasambhava saw that a life of royal luxury would limit his ability to help others. To escape his responsibilities as prince, he began to act in an unconventional manner. One day, he let a trident slip from his hand as he played. The trident ended up hitting and killing a child of one of the king's ministers. Since the laws of the land stipulated that anyone guilty of such a heinous crime could not go unpunished, even a prince, the king and his ministers banished the young boy. When the king, with a heavy heart, told his adopted son the news, Padmasambhava responded:

In this world, one's mother and father are precious indeed.  
 You, my parents, have given me an entire kingdom!  
 Yet I have no attachment to this land, nor any fear of being banished,  
 And since birth and death are no different, I do not fear being killed.  
 Since the law of the land is strict, it is good that I am being banished!  
 Mother and father, may you live long and happily.  
 Our karmic connection is sure to bring us together once more.<sup>16</sup>

Padmasambhava traveled to a number of charnel grounds—wild, uninhabited locales where Indian villagers disposed of the dead and which were reputedly filled with demons and ghosts. There, he continued to engage in the eccentric behavior of a carefree yogi. Using his meditative powers, he brought these spirits under his control and charged them with serving the Buddha's teachings. Due to his spiritual accomplishment and deft skill in dealing with these malevolent forces, he came to be known by various names, including "Pema Tötrengr Tsel" (Mighty One with a Garland of Skulls), "Dorjé Trakpo Tsel" (Mighty Vajra Wrath), and "Tsokyé Dorjé" (Lake-born Vajra).

Then Padmasambhava began a phase of study and practice. Despite being fully enlightened, he realized that he would be discredited if he did not have a lineage and spiritual mentors. For this reason, he sought out teachings from various masters. With Prabhahasti, for example, he took monastic ordination and received the name “Shakya Simha” (Lion of the Shakyas); from masters such as Ananda, Manjushrimitra, and Humkara he received vital tantric teachings.

In the course of his studies, Padmasambhava had visions of various deities and engaged in numerous miraculous feats. On one occasion, he defeated a group of Hindu philosophers in debate and proceeded to make a nearby jungle appear to burst into flames, thereby receiving the name “Sengé Dradrok” (the Roaring Lion). He was also given the names “Nyimé Ozer” (Light Rays of the Sun), as he was said to be able to ride the sun’s rays, and “Loden Choksé” (Wise One with Passion for the Supreme) due to his encyclopedic knowledge of the Dharma.

Another story concerns Padmasambhava’s relationship to a princess named Mandarava from the kingdom of Sahor. To further his meditation practice, he courted Mandarava and the two began to engage in various tantric practices secretly in a forest.<sup>17</sup> This scandalized the local population, who considered it a disgrace for a princess to be living in the jungle with an eccentric yogi. To avenge this affront, they set out to burn Padmasambhava and his spiritual consort at the stake. The villagers caught the two without fanfare. However, when they tried to burn them, they found that not only were Padmasambhava and Mandarava unharmed, but that the flames were actually spreading out and threatening to incinerate the immediate environs.<sup>18</sup> Seeing this, the people immediately stopped and begged the master’s forgiveness. Showering him with praise, they called him “Padmasambhava,” the Lotus-born. Mandarava became a teacher in her own right and is considered one of the first female masters of the Great Perfection.<sup>19</sup>

After leaving the kingdom of Sahor, Padmasambhava returned to Oddiyana and again faced persecution by the local population, which had not forgotten his expulsion from the country years before. True to form, he eventually impressed the king and his subjects with his miraculous powers and vast knowledge of the Dharma. He remained in the land for eight years, giving tantric initiations, teaching the Dharma, and eventually converting the entire land to Buddhism.

Padmasambhava traveled to the Wild Jungle Charnel Ground next, where he studied the Great Perfection with Shri Simha. According to the Heart

Essence of the Dakinis,<sup>20</sup> Shri Simha had been taught by Garap Dorjé, the first human master of the Great Perfection lineage. Padmasambhava stayed with Shri Simha for twenty-five years, studying and practicing the entire range of Great Perfection instructions. These teachings would become the basis for many influential collections in the Nyingma lineage, including the Longchen Nyingtik.

It was after this intense period of study and practice that King Trisong Deutsen invited Padmasambhava to Tibet. While there, Padmasambhava visited virtually every region in the land of snows and blessed thousands of places as sacred power spots. With his spiritual consort, the princess Yeshé Tsogyal, he traveled and worked tirelessly to help the Tibetan people establish the Buddha's teachings on the arid plains and isolated valleys of Tibet. Not only did he transmit the Buddhist teachings far and wide, he also gave secret teachings to his close disciples. Many of these teachings were written down and hidden for future generations. These terma teachings continue to be revealed to this day.

#### VIMALAMITRA

Along with Padmasambhava and the translator Berotsana, Vimalamitra was one of three key figures that transmitted the Great Perfection teachings to Tibet. Born in India, Vimalamitra eventually became a scholar and lived in the Buddhist center of Bodhgaya. One day, while on a walk with his friend, Jnanasutra, Vimalamitra had a vision of the buddha Vajrasattva, who told them that since their scholarly approach had not yet led them to enlightenment, they should travel to Siljin Charnel Ground in China to receive advanced teachings on the Great Perfection.

Vimalamitra set off immediately and soon met the great master Shri Simha. From Shri Simha, he received many teachings, including the Outer, Inner, and Secret Cycles of the Great Perfection's Key Instruction Section. He did not, however, receive all the instructions. After twenty years of study and practice, Vimalamitra returned to India. Some years later, his companion, Jnanasutra, decided to visit Shri Simha as well. In the end, it was Jnanasutra who received the full Great Perfection transmission from Shri Simha.

Once Vimalamitra heard that he had not received the teachings in their entirety, he became determined to find Jnanasutra and receive the Extremely Secret Unsurpassed Cycle of the Great Perfection. He eventually found Jnanasutra practicing in a charnel ground and was so impressed with his deep realization that he immediately became his old friend's devoted disciple.

Vimalamitra stayed with his teacher for over a decade and received all the teachings he had not previously received from Shri Simha.

When Jnanasutra passed away, Vimalamitra cried out and a jeweled casket fell from the sky into his hands. The box contained Jnanasutra's *Last Testament*, continuing a tradition that had started with Garap Dorjé, who had received similar teachings from Vajradhara himself. Jnanasutra's *Last Testament* presented a profound set of instructions called *The Four Ways to Rest*. In addition to the teachings he received from Shri Simha and Jnanasutra, Vimalamitra received visionary instructions from Garap Dorjé himself. After decades of practicing and transmitting the Great Perfection teachings in India, Vimalamitra was invited to Tibet by King Trisong Deutsen.

Vimalamitra's contribution to the spread of Buddhism in Tibet can hardly be overestimated. With many renowned translators, such as Yudra Nyingpo and Nyak Jnanakumara, he aided in the translation of tantric texts, such as the Mind Class teachings of the Great Perfection and the *Tantra of the Secret Essence*. Vimalamitra also transmitted the Heart Essence teachings, the most profound and secret instructions of the Great Perfection. He transmitted these teachings to only a few close students. These teachings, now known as the Vima Nyingtik, were eventually passed down to Longchenpa, the greatest exponent of the Great Perfection in Tibet.

It is said the Vimalamitra attained a rare level of spiritual accomplishment known as "the rainbow body of great transference," allowing him to remain in a body of light and reincarnate at will. He is said to have promised that he would return to Tibet every one hundred years to continue his work of spreading the Dharma. Some of the greatest luminaries of the Nyingma tradition are regarded as his incarnations, including Kumaradza, Jigmé Lingpa (1879–1941), Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (1820–1892), and the twentieth-century master Khenpo Ngakchung, also known as Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang.

### BEROTSANA

The translator Berotsana is credited, along with Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra, with bringing the Great Perfection teachings to Tibet. His spiritual career began when he was still a young man. Following the advice of Padmasambhava, King Trisong Deutsen summoned Berotsana to Samyé Monastery, where he was ordained as a monk and trained as a translator. Shortly thereafter, he was sent to India to seek out Dharma teachings and bring them to Tibet.

Berotsana's journey was filled with hardship, but he eventually reached India and set off to find an enlightened teacher. The Great Perfection master Shri Simha was still alive and transmitting his precious teachings in a region known as Danakosha. The ruler of the area, however, had placed a strict injunction on transmitting the teachings, so the only way for Berotsana to receive them was to study in secret. By day, Berotsana received teachings on the Sutra Vehicle, which were taught openly throughout India. By night, Shri Simha gave him teachings on the Vajra Vehicle, especially the Mind and Space Classes of the Great Perfection. Berotsana also received instructions on the Heart Essence from Garap Dorjé in a vision.

The next difficulty he faced was getting the teachings to Tibet. Since any written teachings were likely to be confiscated by border guards, Berotsana recorded the teachings he had received on white silk using goat's milk, rendering them invisible to the naked eye. To read them, he had to hold the cloth over a smoking fire, thus revealing what he had written.

Once he was safe in Tibet, Berotsana transmitted the teachings he had received to the king. Just as he had studied, Berotsana taught the Sutra Vehicle teachings openly during the day, while teaching the king secretly about the Great Perfection at night. When the Indians found out that he had taken the teachings to Tibet and was teaching them, they began to spread malicious rumors about Berotsana. Members of the royal court hostile to the Dharma seized on these rumors and used them as a pretense to have him exiled.

Berotsana was later brought back from exile when his student, Yudra Nyingpo, encountered Vimalamitra. Yudra Nyingpo convinced Vimalamitra that his master was an authentic Buddhist teacher. Vimalamitra then used his influence with the king to have Berotsana summoned back to central Tibet. On his way, Berotsana ran into an old man named Pang Mipam Gonpo. Despite the fact that the man was eighty-five-years-old and had never studied the Dharma, Berotsana sensed that he had great spiritual potential and proceeded to teach him about the nature of mind. Mipam Gonpo was too old to sit in the traditional meditation posture, so he used a stick to keep his chin propped up. He progressed by leaps and bounds, however, and soon attained a very advanced level of realization.

Berotsana is widely regarded as one of the most gifted and realized of Tibet's many translators. He was responsible for bringing many teachings into the Tibetan language, especially those that concern the Great Perfection. Berotsana is also said to have reincarnated many times in Tibet. Terdak

Lingpa, founder of the Mindroling lineage, is considered to be such an emanation, as is Jamgön Kongtrül. Berotsana passed away in a secluded forest in Nepal, attaining the rainbow body like many of his students.

### RONGZOM MAHAPANDITA

Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo, also known as Rongzom Mahapandita, is widely regarded as one of the two greatest exponents of the unique views and practices of the Nyingma school. Along with Longchenpa, he is known as an “Omniscient One.” This rare title connotes both breadth of knowledge and depth of realization. His innate intelligence was so great, in fact, that Rongzom himself once remarked, “Since there is no teaching that I did not study, my learning is not insignificant. Yet, as I never needed to review the teachings I received more than once, neither is it great.”

Rongzom was a contemporary of Atisha, Marpa Lotsawa, and many others who were instrumental in establishing new Buddhist lineages in the land of snows. He wrote extensively on a broad range of topics and demonstrated an unparalleled mastery of the Buddha’s teachings.<sup>21</sup> The Indian scholars he interpreted often commented on his universal knowledge, encouraging him to write his own treatises. He was also praised by some of the greatest masters of the Sarma traditions, such as Atisha and Marpa. Echoing their sentiments, the great Gö Lotsawa wrote: “In the snowy land of Tibet, Rongzom remains unequalled as a scholar.” The greatest testament to Rongzom’s accomplishments, however, is the lasting influence he has had on the great thinkers of the Nyingma school. Mipam, perhaps the greatest Nyingma thinker of recent times, modeled his views on those of Rongzom and Longchenpa, a debt that he acknowledges repeatedly in his writings. Rongzom’s thousand-year-old legacy continues to exert a powerful influence on spirituality in Tibet.

### LONGCHEN RABJAM

Longchenpa is often singled out as the single greatest master in the history of the Nyingma lineage. Born in central Tibet at the beginning of the fourteenth century, his life was extraordinary from the very beginning. It is said that a fierce protective female spirit named Remati appeared as soon as he was born and pledged to protect him. Throughout his life, he had visions of buddhas and saints, including Manjushri, Tara, and Padmasambhava.

Longchenpa’s spiritual training began when he was still a young child. His father offered him a series of tantric initiations when he was seven-years-old, and at nine, he was already memorizing lengthy sutras. He was ordained as a

monk at age twelve and soon mastered the Vinaya. His mastery of the subject was so thorough, in fact, that he was able to give teachings on the Vinaya when he was only fourteen.

Though he is known primarily for his writings on the *Tantra of the Secret Essence* and the Great Perfection, Longchenpa studied and wrote about virtually every Buddhist teaching and lineage that was present in Tibet at the time he lived. In his mid-teens, he studied many collections from the New Schools, such as the Path and Fruition (*Lam-dré*) teachings of the Sakya school, the *Kalachakra Tantra*, and the Chöd instructions of Machik Lapdrön. At nineteen, he entered Sangpu Monastery, an influential Kadam institution of the time. There he studied the works of Maitreya, the valid cognition writings of Dignaga and Dharmakirti, the Perfection of Knowledge literature, and the Middle Way. With the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé, he studied teachings from the Kagyü school, including the Six Dharmas of Naropa. His learning was so vast that he came to be known as “Samyé Lung Mangwa,” meaning “the One from Samyé with Many Transmissions.”

In his late twenties, Longchenpa met his root guru, Rigdzin Kumaradza. The night before Longchenpa arrived at his teacher’s camp, Kumaradza dreamt that a divine bird, accompanied by a thousand other birds, came and carried away his texts in all directions. He interpreted this to mean that someone would soon arrive that would be worthy of holding his precious lineage. Soon enough, Longchenpa arrived and was recognized as Kumaradza’s prophesied heir.

Kumaradza was considered an incarnation of Vimalamitra and was the main lineage holder of the Vima Nyingtik, Vimalamitra’s Heart Essence teachings. He transmitted all of these teachings to Longchenpa, who studied and practiced them in a state of such deprivation that he had only a single cloth sack to use as both blanket and bed. On five separate occasions, he offered his teacher all that he owned to rid himself of desire and attachment. Eventually, Longchenpa was appointed Kumaradza’s main successor, and he set off to practice the teachings he had received for six years in strict retreat.

Longchenpa was considered the reincarnation of Pema Ledrel Tsel, who was himself the reincarnation of Princess Pemasel, the daughter of King Trisong Deutsen. As noted earlier, Princess Pemasel received a rare Heart Essence transmission from Padmasambhava shortly before she passed away at the age of eight. In her subsequent births, she evolved spiritually and was eventually reborn as Pema Ledrel Tsel. She then revealed the Great

Perfection teachings she had received from Padmasambhava as a treasure. These teachings came to be known as the *Khandro Nyingtik*, the Heart Essence of the Dakinis.

Though Longchenpa was the direct reincarnation of the very same *tertön*, or treasure revealer, who discovered the Heart Essence of the Dakinis, he made a point of seeking out his predecessor's Dharma heir and receiving the transmissions in person. He also had visions of Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal, who transmitted the Heart Essence of the Dakinis to him directly. When he first taught this collection, numerous miraculous omens appeared. Everyone present entered a state of deep meditation that lasted for an entire month and all experienced visions of dakinis and protective spirits.

As one of the most renowned scholars and meditation masters of his time, Longchenpa could have easily built large monasteries and institutions, yet he chose to live the life of a simple yogi. He lived out his days wandering from place to place, staying in solitary hermitages, and guiding the fortunate students that had gathered around him. Longchenpa passed away in his fifties while dwelling in the simplicity of the mountain retreats he loved. Surrounded by dedicated meditators, he manifested all the signs of a completely enlightened being and used his own death as a way to teach his closest students about the truth of impermanence.

Longchenpa composed numerous commentaries on both the Heart Essence of Vimalamitra and the Heart Essence of the Dakinis and then gathered all of these teachings, along with the root texts, into one collection. This collection, known as the *Nyingtik Yabshi*, or Fourfold Heart Essence, spans thousands of pages and contains hundreds of individual titles. It is the single most comprehensive collection of writings on the practice of the Great Perfection. He also penned a series of treatises on the theoretical underpinnings of the Great Perfection, entitled the Seven Treasuries. This collection is widely regarded as one of the great masterpieces of Tibetan literature.<sup>22</sup> The same can be said of Longchenpa's Three Cycles of Rest.<sup>23</sup> While the Fourfold Heart Essence focuses on the secret and advanced meditations of the Great Perfection, and the Seven Treasuries stress its theoretical foundation, this series presents the entirety of the Buddhist teachings, and the Great Perfection in particular, in an accessible, easy-to-practice manner. Longchenpa also composed a commentary on the *Tantra of the Secret Essence*, entitled *Dispelling the Darkness of the Ten Directions*, that is widely studied to this day.

No Tibetan figure in the Nyingma lineage is as esteemed as Longchenpa. His writings on the Great Perfection are so extensive, profound, and clear

that it is hard to see how they will ever be matched. As a student, his diligence, renunciation, devotion, and thirst for the Dharma were unparalleled, while as a teacher, his lack of concern for wealth and power and his ability to guide others made him the ideal guru. As we will see, it was Longchenpa who inspired the revelation of the Longchen Nyingtik and prompted Jigmé Lingpa to compose many influential works.

## THE HEART ESSENCE OF THE VAST EXPANSE

The Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse is one of the most profound spiritual teachings ever revealed. Since the time it was discovered in the eighteenth century, it has given rise to innumerable enlightened lineage holders and masterpieces of spiritual literature. Many well-known masters of all lineages were practitioners of these teachings, including Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo, Patrül Rinpoche (1808–1887), and the successive incarnations of the Dodrupchen Rinpoches. In more recent times, Dilgo Khyentsé (1910–1991), one of the Dalai Lama's main teachers, and Chatral Sangyé Dorjé (b. 1913), a living buddha of the Dzogchen lineage, have been outstanding exemplars of this tradition. In the following pages, we will explore the origins and contents of these teachings, beginning with the man who revealed these profound treasures, Jigmé Lingpa.

### *Jigmé Lingpa and the Revelation of the Longchen Nyingtik*

Jigmé Lingpa was born in Southern Tibet in 1730, on the anniversary of Longchenpa's death. He was a spiritual prodigy from a young age, with an unusual degree of compassion and intelligence. He also experienced visions of his past lives, which are said to include King Trisong Deutsen and Longchenpa.

At the age of six, Jigmé Lingpa entered Palri Monastery as a novice monk. Though his parents were from a noble family, they were of simple means and unable to provide their son with anything more than the basic necessities of life. Because of this, his life at the monastery was extremely spartan. What he lacked in material comforts, however, he made up for with the richness of his inner life. Throughout this time, he possessed an insatiable thirst for the Dharma and was blessed with visions of saints and buddhas. Though Jigmé Lingpa took every opportunity to study and practice, he was never able to enter a formal education program. The amazing spiritual masterpieces that

he penned later in life were the flowering of deep realization, rather than the product of study.

A pivotal period in Jigmé Lingpa's spiritual development came in his late twenties, when he began a series of solitary meditation retreats that would last seven years. He followed an extremely strict code of conduct over the course of these retreats and vowed to limit his contacts with the outside world until he had perfected his own practice of the development and completion stage yogas. He had many visions throughout this period, including visions of Padmasambhava, Yeshé Tsogyal, and the Great Perfection master Manjushrimitra. He also experienced the opening of his throat chakra, the energetic center associated with enlightened speech, and from that point on was able to spontaneously compose beautiful songs of realization and learned treatises on a variety of Buddhist topics.

Jigmé Lingpa revealed the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse in the year 1757. One evening in the midst of his retreat, he was overcome with devotion for Padmasambhava. With tears streaming down his face, and unable to bear being separated from this great master, his consciousness soon shifted, and he became immersed in a state of luminous clarity.

After some time, he found himself in a visionary dream, bounding through the sky on the back of a white snow lion. He eventually arrived at Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu valley.<sup>24</sup> Soon enough, he arrived in the eastern courtyard of the monument, at which point he met a wisdom dakini face-to-face. Handing him a large wooden locket, she told him that within it he would find the symbolic script of Padmasambhava—the mind treasure of Samantabhadra and the secret treasure of the dakinis. The dakini then vanished.

Thrilled, Jigmé Lingpa opened the box and found five yellow scrolls and seven crystal beads. As he unrolled one of the scrolls, he noticed the smell of camphor and his entire body began to vibrate, which he took to mean that the guardian of the teachings was Rahula, an extremely wrathful Dharma protector—an enlightened manifestation that protects the Buddha's teachings. Unrolling the scroll further, he saw the symbolic script of the dakinis. The script was unintelligible to him, unfortunately, so he began to roll the scroll back up. Immediately the writing transformed into ordinary Tibetan script, revealing the sadhana of Mahakaruna, a form of Avalokiteshvara, one of the main yidam deities of the Longchen Nyingtik cycle.

The script aroused his curiosity about the teachings, prompting him to look for clues that would indicate who was meant to reveal the teachings.

When he found the line, “These instructions are a gift for the Dharma king and his son,” he saw that the teachings were meant for him, and a spontaneous understanding of all the words of the cycle and their underlying meaning arose in his mind. Shortly thereafter, he once again experienced a state of deep meditation.

Jigmé Lingpa then placed one of the crystals in his mouth and picked up the scrolls. Just as he set off to return home, the protector Rahula appeared in the form of a smiling monk and gave him words of encouragement. Next he ventured to the northern quadrant of the stupa and paused once again to look at the scrolls. The text he saw this time was the guide to the collection, with an inventory of its contents and information concerning its origins and destiny. Seeing this text, he felt a sudden inspiration to show it to his mother, believing that merely seeing the revelation would bring liberation.

In that instant, a woman appeared in the sky before him, and he presented her with the scroll. In response, she warned him of the danger of revealing the teachings to others prematurely. At her prompting, Jigmé Lingpa then swallowed the remaining crystals, and finally even the scrolls, triggering a surge of excitement. Feeling that the teachings of the treasure were etched in his mind, he woke from his vision and found himself immersed in a non-conceptual, blissful state.

As mentioned, Jigmé Lingpa was the reincarnation of King Trisong Deutsen. In that life, Jigmé Lingpa had received the teachings of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse directly from Padmasambhava. The teachings then lay dormant in his mind stream until the time was ripe for them to be revealed and propagated. He eventually transcribed all the teachings and practiced them in secret for seven years.

When he was thirty-one-years-old, Jigmé Lingpa began a second three-year retreat at Chimpu, near Samyé Monastery in central Tibet. During the course of this retreat, he experienced a series of three visions of Longchenpa, who empowered him as a master of the true lineage of realization and authorized him to compose texts. Despite these visionary experiences, however, he also took the time to seek out Great Perfection teachings from living masters. Among these transmissions were the key works of Longchenpa: the Fourfold Heart Essence, the Seven Treasuries, and the Three Cycles of Rest.

Eventually, a series of auspicious events indicated that it was time to propagate the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse. He began by codifying the outer guru yoga teachings, and then proceeded to the sadhanas of the Three

Roots, further guru yoga practices, and the sadhana of Mahakaruna mentioned earlier. In addition, he also composed some of his most well-known works, including *Treasury of Precious Qualities* and *Supreme Wisdom*. Then, in 1765, he gave the empowerments and teachings of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse to a group of fifteen disciples.

From that point on, Jigmé Lingpa continued to teach and write about the teachings he had revealed. He had students from the six “mother monasteries” of the Nyingma lineage, such as Rigdzin Chenpo, the main lama of Dorjé Trak Monastery, Shechen Rabjam of Shechen Monastery, Getsé Mahapandita of Katok Monastery, and the Third Dzogchen Rinpoche of Dzogchen Monastery. His students also included masters from the Sarma schools, including the heads of the Sakya and Drikung Kagyü schools, leaders from two of Ganden Monastery’s monastic colleges, and also political figures like the king and queen of Dergé, a powerful region of eastern Tibet.

Though he soon became one of the foremost spiritual teachers in all Tibet, Jigmé Lingpa steadfastly refused to surround himself with the pomp and splendor enjoyed by others. Instead, he lived in a simple hermitage, where he spent his days writing and teaching. The offerings he received were used solely for spiritual projects. He was particularly devoted to the traditional Buddhist practice of ransoming life, in which an animal scheduled for slaughter is purchased and either set free or kept as a pet.

The writings he composed in these years continue to exert a powerful influence on the Nyingma lineage. In all, his collected works fill fourteen volumes, each of which would equal numerous volumes in English. In addition to the three volumes of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse, Jigmé Lingpa also composed two lengthy autocommentaries on his *Treasury of Precious Qualities*. These profound texts cover the entire Buddhist path, from the foundational teachings all the way up to the Great Perfection. He compiled an entire volume of teachings on the yidam deity Vajrakilaya and also a collection of Nyingma tantras, entitled *The Hundred Thousand Tantras of the Nyingma School*, for which he wrote an extensive history.

Jigmé Lingpa’s highly regarded works on meditation practice are widely studied to this day. In all, he penned three works on the preliminary practices. The first two, included in this book, later became the basis for Patrül Rinpoche’s *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. His third work, *Staircase to Liberation*, presents a unique mind-training system from the Heart Essence of Vimalamitra.<sup>25</sup> On the development stage, he wrote a commentary entitled *Ladder to Akanishta*, which provides an overview of the main principles and

many key instructions on this style of tantric practice. Jigmé Lingpa also wrote what is perhaps the most widely taught Great Perfection instruction manual, *Supreme Wisdom*, which is more commonly known by its Tibetan title, *Yeshé Lama*.

Leaving behind a magnificent legacy, Jigmé Lingpa passed away in 1798. His students built upon the foundation he erected in the centuries that followed, emulating his lifestyle of simplicity and devotion, and spreading his teachings throughout Tibet.

### *The Expansion of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse*

Following the passing of Jigmé Lingpa, the Longchen Nyingtik lineage was carried forward by a number of outstanding Tibetan masters. Though listing all the sublineages that eventually arose is beyond the scope of this introduction, a few major lines of transmission warrant special attention. Jigmé Lingpa's two "heart sons" were Jigmé Trinlé Özer, the first Dodrupchen Rinpoche (1745–1821) and Jigmé Gyalway Nyugu (1765–1843). Both of these individuals were true masters in their own right, as well as completely devoted to Jigmé Lingpa and his Heart Essence teachings. These disciples initiated two enduring Longchen Nyingtik lineages.

Like Jigmé Lingpa before him, Jigmé Trinlé Özer counted some of the most renowned lamas of the Nyingma lineage as his students. His reincarnation, the second Dodrupchen, Jigmé Puntsok Jungney (1824–1863), established the famed Dodrupchen Monastery, which became central to the transmission of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse. The subsequent incarnations of the Dodrupchen lineage have all been outstanding masters as well, especially the third, Jigmé Tenpey Nyima, a renowned author and teacher. When the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1959, the fourth Dodrupchen, Jigmé Trinley Pelzang (b. 1927) escaped and built a monastery in Gangtok, Sikkim. This is now one of the primary Longchen Nyingtik centers outside of Tibet.

Jigmé Gyalway Nyugu, Jigmé Lingpa's second heart son, transmitted the teachings to Patrül Rinpoche, one of Jigmé Lingpa's three reincarnations.<sup>26</sup> The lineage then descended to Lungtok Tenpey Nyima (1829–1901/2), who passed on the teachings to Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang.<sup>27</sup> As noted above, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang—also known as Khenpo Ngaga and Khenpo Ngakchung—was reputed to be an emanation of Vimalamitra. He taught many outstanding masters of the twentieth century. Though the majority

have passed away, his heart son, Chatral Sangyé Dorjé, now in his mid-nineties, currently lives on the outskirts of Kathmandu valley in Nepal, where he maintains a hermit lifestyle and teaches only a few close disciples. Though not a direct student of Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, another notable figure in this lineage was Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorjé (1931–1999).<sup>28</sup> Nyoshul Khenpo passed on his lineage to a number of lamas who actively teach in the West, including Sogyal Rinpoche, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, and Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to Patrül Rinpoche, Jigmé Lingpa's two other reincarnations were Do Khyentsé Yeshé Dorjé (1800–1866) and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo. These masters are widely regarded as two of the greatest masters of the past few centuries. In particular, Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo helped initiate the Rimé movement, along with Jamgön Kongtrül (1813–1899) and Chokgyur Dechen Lingpa (1829–1870).<sup>30</sup> In the twentieth century, two notable incarnations from this lineage were Jamyang Khyentsé Chökyi Lodro (1893–1959) and Dilgo Khyentsé Rinpoche. Jamyang Khyentsé Chökyi Lodro's reincarnation, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche (b. 1961) teaches widely throughout the world, while the reincarnation of Dilgo Khyentsé Rinpoche, Urgyen Tenzin Jigmé Lhundrup (b. 1993), lives primarily in Bhutan and is still studying. In addition to these influential teachers, the Longchen Nyingtik is taught by scores of other teachers in Tibet, South Asia, and the West.

### *The Texts of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse*

Despite its great profundity, the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse is surprisingly accessible. Unlike many treasure cycles, which often contain hundreds of liturgies and other related materials, the *Longchen Nyingtik* spans only three volumes.<sup>31</sup> Contained in these three volumes are some of the Nyingma lineage's most well-known prayers, sadhanas, and instruction manuals.

The first volume opens with two autobiographies by Jigmé Lingpa, followed by a guide to the collection that lists its contents, as well as information concerning its revelation and propagation. The remainder of the volume consists primarily of sadhana texts, their associated instruction manuals, and prayers. This includes the *Outer Guru Yoga* (which was later incorporated into the preliminary practices), *The Gathering of the Masters of Awareness* (*Rigdzin Düpa*), and sadhanas related to Yumkha Dechen Gyalmo, Tara, Lion-faced Dakini, and various practices related to the Palchen Düpa

collection. Each of these sadhanas is accompanied by numerous subsidiary texts, some of which are supplementary liturgies, and others that are practical instructions on sadhana practice.

The second volume contains additional texts from the Palchen Düpa collection, followed by Jigmé Lingpa's explanation of development stage meditation, *Ladder to Akanishta*. Also included are sadhanas related to Mahakaruna and Hayagriva, an extremely secret guru yoga practice entitled *Tiklé Gyachen*, the wrathful guru yoga practice Takyung Barwa, and a series of prayers and aspirations. The volume concludes with a number of texts associated with the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities and the protectors of the lineage.

The third and final volume contains texts related to completion stage practice, including texts on transference, yogic heat, and trülkhör (yogic exercises), followed by a text on chöd. The remainder of the volume consists of Great Perfection tantras and commentaries, instruction manuals, and additional texts on practice, such as Jigmé Lingpa's three texts on the preliminary practices and the Great Perfection manual *Yeshé Lama*.

### *Practicing the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse*

The Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse presents a comprehensive path to enlightenment, beginning with essential contemplations that provide inspiration for spiritual practice, and continuing up to the most profound and secret practices of the Great Perfection. Each stage of the path builds upon earlier teachings, preparing the student for the steps that follow. Renouncing worldly concerns and recognizing the absence of self, for example, lay the foundation for cultivating compassion and understanding the principle of emptiness. These factors, in turn, eventually help the practitioner to recognize the pure, luminous nature of mind.

### THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES

The preliminary practices erect a solid foundation for dedicated spiritual practice. Indeed, they are often said to be even more profound than the various development and completion stage yogas, precisely because success in meditation depends largely on how effectively one has practiced the preliminaries. For this reason, the preliminaries are perhaps the most commonly practiced teachings in the Nyingma lineage.

The preliminary practices are divided into two groups: the common outer preliminaries and the unique inner preliminaries. The terms “common” and “unique” indicate that the outer preliminaries are held in common with the Sutra Vehicle, whereas the inner preliminaries are unique to the Vajra Vehicle. The outer preliminaries consist of a series of contemplations that elicit a feeling of disenchantment toward mundane activities, along with a sense of enthusiasm toward the state of liberation and the practices that lead to this state. This attitude of joyful renunciation ensures that one’s spiritual practice will not end up reinforcing ordinary states of desire and attachment. The inner preliminaries build on this foundation by clearing away obstacles and obscurations, while simultaneously creating circumstances that set the stage for awakening to take place.

The outer preliminaries consist of six contemplative exercises. In order, the six topics that are addressed in these contemplations are:

- ▶ The precious human existence
- ▶ Death and impermanence
- ▶ The shortcomings of samsara
- ▶ The principle of karma
- ▶ The benefits of liberation
- ▶ The guru principle

Each of these contemplations plays a different role on the spiritual path. The first two contemplations undermine the tendency to become obsessed with trivial matters and shortsighted goals, and instead help the practitioner to focus on what is more meaningful and of lasting benefit. Contemplating the shortcomings of samsara and karma, on the other hand, dislodges the notion that we can attain lasting happiness in future existences. All together, these four thoughts show us that no matter where we are born in samsara, there is no end to suffering. Building upon this recognition, the fifth contemplation offers an alternative—liberation—helping us to see the virtues of attaining freedom from confusion and suffering. The sixth and final contemplation takes this one step further by exploring the role of the spiritual teacher on the path to liberation.

The inner preliminaries are also broken down into six parts:

- ▶ Going for refuge
- ▶ Cultivating bodhichitta
- ▶ The meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva

- ▶ Mandala offering
- ▶ The offering of the simple beggar
- ▶ Guru yoga

All six practices contain a component that, according to tradition, should be repeated one hundred thousand times. As before, each practice serves a specific function. The act of taking refuge is the foundation for all Buddhist practice, insofar as it involves committing oneself to viewing the Buddha as one's source of guidance and inspiration, his teachings as the path to be followed, and the spiritual community as one's companions on the spiritual journey. In this practice, the meditator imagines him- or herself to be in the presence of the Three Jewels and Three Roots and recites a four-line refuge prayer, eventually accumulating one hundred thousand repetitions. Whereas the refuge prayer is often accompanied by full-body prostrations in the other lineages, in the Longchen Nyingtik prostrations are typically performed in the context of guru yoga.

Bodhichitta is the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others. In the context of the preliminary practices, the cultivation of bodhichitta is formalized by visualizing the Three Jewels and Three Roots, as before, and reciting a four-line stanza in their presence. This stanza is usually recited one hundred thousand times as well, though there are certain traditions where this is not the case.<sup>32</sup> In addition, there are also a number of contemplations that are practiced, including the cultivation of empathy and the willingness to consider the needs of others before one's own. This practice serves to dissolve self-centeredness and replace it with a more altruistic attitude, and eventually with the mind-set of bodhichitta.

The third inner preliminary practice is the meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva. Here, one visualizes Vajrasattva, the embodiment of purity, above the crown of one's head and imagines a stream of purifying nectar flowing out from his divine form. This nectar fills the entire body and purifies all forms of ignorance, negativity, and suffering. Along with this imaginative process, one also acknowledges the negative actions one has committed in the past, vows to refrain from doing them in the future, and recites the one-hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva to purify the latent habitual tendencies that lead to such negativity. Here, it is this mantra that is accumulated one hundred thousand times. This practice effectively eliminates the various factors that block realization from taking place.

Following Vajrasattva practice is the mandala offering, in which one

makes real and imagined offerings to a visualized assembly of enlightened beings. For this practice, the meditator holds a small mandala plate and repeatedly places offerings on top of it, while simultaneously reciting a short offering prayer and visualizing a host of enlightened beings. The physical act of offering and recitation of the prayer are repeated one hundred thousand times. This is taught to be a particularly effective way to gather the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. To this, the Longchen Nyingtik adds the offering of the simple beggar, which involves the imagined offering of one's own body. In addition to being a powerful way to gather merit and cultivate wisdom, this practice also functions to eliminate fixation related to the physical body.

The fifth and final practice of the inner preliminaries is guru yoga. In this practice, the animate and inanimate universe is viewed as a pure realm populated with buddhas. Within this divine atmosphere, the meditator supplicates the guru, makes offerings, and then merges his or her mind with the wisdom mind of the guru. When the devotion of the student is sincere and heartfelt, this merging of minds can bring about an immediate and profound shift in consciousness. Guru yoga serves to infuse the meditator's mind with the blessings of the lineage.

These outer and inner preliminaries prepare the mind of the student for advanced meditations like the Great Perfection. Once complete, the student receives guidance from his or her teacher concerning the appropriate course of meditation to follow. This may include development stage meditation (visualization and mantra recitation), completion stage with symbolic attributes practice (working with the body's subtle energies), and/or formless completion stage practices (recognizing and familiarizing oneself with the nature of mind).

As noted above, these practices are typically followed under the guidance of an experienced spiritual teacher. Once a student has requested permission to begin the preliminary practices and the teacher has consented, the first steps are to receive the appropriate empowerments, reading transmissions, and instructions. These three are known in Tibet as *wang*, *lung*, and *tri*. There are numerous empowerments that may be given to prepare the student for the preliminaries. Ideally, an empowerment for the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities would be received, or empowerments associated with Vajrasattva and Padmasambhava.<sup>33</sup> Along with these empowerments, the reading transmission for the preliminary practices liturgy would be given. In certain situations, empowerments may be dispensed with and

the reading transmission is given alone. Finally, the student must also receive practical instructions on the practices. This may involve receiving an explanation of the liturgy itself, or a commentary on the preliminary practices, such as those contained in this book or Patrül Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

In some sublineages, there are specific requirements for both the outer and inner preliminaries. In the lineage of Khenpo Ngakchung, for instance, the first stage of practice involves a one-hundred-day retreat, during which one spends approximately eight hours each day contemplating the outer preliminaries and the various bodhichitta meditations, and only four hours accumulating the required numbers to complete the inner preliminaries.<sup>34</sup> By the end of this retreat, the student will have completed one hundred thousand refuge prayer recitations and thirty thousand bodhichitta prayer recitations, in addition to having spent eight hundred hours contemplating the various topics outlined above. The student then proceeds to accumulate one hundred thousand recitations of the one-hundred-syllable mantra, one hundred thousand mandala offerings, one hundred thousand prostrations in conjunction with the seven-branch offering, and 12 million repetitions of the vajra guru mantra—*om ah hum vajra guru padma siddhi hum*. In other traditions, the requirements are much less demanding. There may be no specific requirement for the outer preliminaries, other than a strong recommendation that the student spend ample time contemplating them, and the guru yoga requirement may be 1.2 million recitations, rather than 12 million.

In terms of study, the Longchen Nyingtik lineage has one of the richest bodies of practice literature in Tibet, especially concerning the preliminary practices. The main preliminary practice liturgy itself, *The Sublime Path to Omniscience*, was compiled from the writings of Jigmé Lingpa and other authors by the first Dodrupchen Rinpoche. This lengthy liturgy, included at the end of this volume, is regarded as one of the most inspiring and lyrical compositions of the Tibetan tradition. A concise liturgy composed by Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo, entitled *The Sublime Path to Enlightenment*, is also included in this volume.

The two works by Jigmé Lingpa contained in this book are considered the primary instruction manuals on the preliminary practices and the basis for all others. In addition to Jigmé Lingpa's writings, there are two other works of primary importance concerning the preliminary practices: a short text by Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo entitled *Illuminating the Sublime Path to Omniscience* and Patrül Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. There

are numerous other commentaries in addition to these four texts. Of particular interest are Khenpo Ngakchung's *A Guide to "The Words of My Perfect Teacher"* (which contains the author's notes on Patrül Rinpoche's work) and Chökyi Drakpa's *A Torch for the Path to Omniscience* (a word-for-word commentary on the liturgy).

Traditionally, the preliminary practices are completed when the student has completed the required number of accumulations for each practice. Once again, however, there is no standard rule that applies in all cases. Some teachers may instruct their students to practice until certain signs manifest that indicate their success in practice. Such signs may be the occurrence of auspicious dreams, or a marked decrease in negative emotions and increase in virtues like wisdom and compassion. Another alternative, though less common, is to practice the preliminaries for a set length of time. Once complete, students typically proceed to a particular development stage *sadhana*.

#### DEVELOPMENT STAGE

Following the outer and inner preliminary practices, the student will ideally be ready to start the main practices of the Vajra Vehicle: the development stage and completion stage. In development stage practice, the meditator uses the visualization of pure realms and deities, mantra recitation, and meditative absorption to disrupt the ordinary processes of distorted perception and replace them with the pure appearances of a mandala—a divine palace and the deities that inhabit it. Such practices may have one deity or a pair of deities as their focal point and typically involve the recitation of lengthy liturgies and numerous repetitions of sacred mantras. By absorbing one's mind in these visualized appearances and mantric sounds, the habitual tendency to view the mundane world as impure and problematic is progressively refined away. Eventually, one's mind, and then even the body, merges with this divine identity.

Each development stage practice is centered on a particular yidam deity or group of yidam deities. Yidams are not gods, but rather archetypal projections that enable the practitioner to connect with certain aspects of his or her own buddha nature. Manjushri, for example, is the embodiment of wisdom. Thus, imagining oneself to be Manjushri is a skillful way to actualize one's indwelling wisdom. Likewise, one may focus on Avalokiteshvara to develop compassion, Vajrakīlaya to overcome obstacles, or Vajrasattva to purify negativity. By repeatedly envisioning oneself as an enlightened being, any lack of confidence in one's own enlightened potential is gradually worn away.

As with the preliminary practices, the development stage begins with an empowerment, reading transmission, and practical instructions. The empowerment one receives depends on the yidam deity one is going to practice. If one has been advised to practice *Gathering of the Masters of Awareness*, for instance, one would receive a specific empowerment for that practice. Likewise, one would also receive a reading transmission for the liturgy, or sadhana, that is used in daily meditation and then instructions on how to do the practice.

Each development stage practice has an associated sadhana—a structured liturgy that guides the meditator step-by-step through the practice.<sup>35</sup> Typically, sadhana practice begins with a series of preliminary steps that serve to remind the meditator of the basic principles of the Buddhist path. These preliminary steps consist of cultivating renunciation, taking refuge, and generating bodhichitta. There are also preliminary steps that are unique to the development stage, in which one expels malicious forces, establishes a protective boundary, and then consecrates oneself and the environment by invoking the compassion of the Three Roots—the guru, yidam deity, and Dharma protectors and dakinis.

The main practice opens with the three absorptions. In these three contemplations, the meditator becomes absorbed in emptiness, compassion, and the expression of these two, visualized as a seed syllable. Following this, one will visualize a mandala, with the practitioner imagined to be the deity that resides at its center. Depending on the style of practice, the visualization may be developed in an instant, or constructed in a step-by-step manner.<sup>36</sup> Once the visualization is complete, the meditator proceeds to invoke the blessings of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and to imbue the visualized images with this enlightened energy. One then visualizes the surrounding deities making offerings and praising the central deity (or deities, should there be a pair of deities in union).

When visualizing, there are three main elements that one should not lose sight of: clear appearance, stable pride, and the purity of the visualized imagery. Clear appearance refers to the visualized image of the deity, which should be clear and precise. It is also worth noting that the visualized forms are not solid, corporeal entities, but rather ethereal and made of light. Stable pride indicates that the practitioner should have the confidence that he or she truly *is* the deity. In recollecting the purity of the deity, one recalls that the imagined deity is actually an expression of the mind's enlightened nature.

Once the visualization is clear and stable, one may add the practice of mantra recitation. Each yidam deity has its own mantra, which is recited a certain number of times to complete the practice. Typically, the number of mantras that need to be recited is determined by the number of syllables in the mantra, with one hundred thousand repetitions for each. Thus, since the mantra of Padmasambhava—OM AH HUM VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HUM—has twelve syllables, it would be recited 1.2 million times. Depending on the number of deities in the mandala, the practitioner may have to recite numerous additional mantras, though for the surrounding deities the number of mantras that must be accumulated is substantially less.

The final step of development stage practice is the dissolution phase. Here, the visualized mandala is gradually dissolved from without: the external world melts into light and dissolves into the surrounding deities, the surrounding deities dissolve into the central deity, and finally the central deity dissolves into emptiness. The meditator then rests in an open, nonconceptual state. During the post-meditation period, the goal is to experience all forms, sounds, and thoughts as the display of deity, mantra, and wisdom.

When studying the development stage, one typically receives teachings on the sadhana one is going to practice. While most sadhanas have their own instruction manuals, it is also helpful to study works that discuss the general principles of development stage practice. In the Longchen Nyingtik lineage, Jigmé Lingpa's *Ladder to Akanishta* and two texts by Patrül Rinpoche—*Clarifying the Difficult Points in the Development Stage and Deity Yoga* and *Four Stakes That Bind the Life-Force*—are considered authoritative works on this subject.<sup>37</sup>

As with the preliminary practices, there are various ways to gauge whether or not one is ready to move on to more advanced forms of practice. Common requirements relate to duration, number of recitations, and experiential signs of success. For the first, one may be instructed to practice for a certain number of months. With the second, one commits to accumulate a set number of mantra recitations. The ideal, however, is to practice until one has experienced the signs of success that are spelled out in the relevant instruction manual. Such signs may manifest in dreams or waking life.

#### COMPLETION STAGE AND THE GREAT PERFECTION

Though development stage practice is an effective method for undoing the habitual patterns associated with impure perception, it can also lead to a fixation on the newly developed pure vision of reality. The completion stage

functions to counteract this tendency and also to help the practitioner identify and directly experience the subtle energetic body and the empty radiance of pure awareness. There are two main divisions of completion stage practice: completion stage with symbolic attributes and completion stage without symbolic attributes. In the former, emphasis is placed on working with the subtle energies, channels, and essences of the body and, in particular, on bringing the energies of the right and left channels into the central channel. In the completion stage without symbolic attributes, the nature of mind is emphasized. This includes effortless practices such as Mahamudra and the Great Perfection.

In the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse, there are texts and practices associated with both forms of completion stage meditation. The first completion stage practice contained in the root texts of the collection concerns the practice of transference, or *powa*, in which the practitioner projects his or her consciousness into a different plane of existence.<sup>38</sup> Following this are a number of practices that allow one to work directly with the body's subtle energies to elicit an experience of bliss-emptiness.

When it comes to the completion stage without symbolic attributes, the Longchen Nyینگtik focuses on the Heart Essence teachings of the Great Perfection. These profound instructions are contained in a meditation manual by Jigmé Lingpa, entitled *Supreme Wisdom*. This manual, often referred to by its Tibetan title, *Yeshé Lama*, fuses the Heart Essence teachings of Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava.

According to this system, once the student has completed the outer and inner preliminaries, the next step is to practice the unique preliminaries of the Heart Essence teachings: the outer and inner separations of samsara and nirvana, or *kordé rushen*; the physical, verbal, and mental preliminaries; and the practices of resting in the natural state and revitalization. These practices prepare the student for the advanced practices of breakthrough and direct leap—*trekchö* and *tögal*. Breakthrough is intended for those inclined to an effortless approach, where the focus is on emptiness and original purity. In this phase of practice, the meditator is introduced to awareness, or *rigpa*. Once awareness has been pointed out and recognized, one repeatedly familiarizes oneself with this pure awareness until it becomes a stable, living experience. The direct leap focuses on the radiance of pure awareness, rather than emptiness. This style of practice is geared toward those who are more industrious by nature.

The general progression of practice in the Heart Essence tradition

contains these four steps: the preliminary practices, development stage, completion stage with symbolic attributes, and Great Perfection. There is, however, no standard approach that each student must follow. The Buddha's teachings are noteworthy for their willingness to accommodate differences in aptitude, personality, and character. Not surprisingly, the approach of the Longchen Nyینگtik reflects this outlook. While most students do follow the progression outlined above to some degree, there is a great deal of flexibility when it comes to the specific practices one does, for how long, and how these practices are integrated with different life circumstances. Some practitioners, for instance, may be advised to do an abbreviated version of the preliminaries, while others may practice an intensive retreat-based version, which can involve nearly ten thousand hours of cumulative practice. Similarly, practitioners may practice sadhanas associated with one or more yidam deity, depending on their personal connection with a particular buddha family and the advice of their spiritual guide, or they may practice none at all and proceed directly to the Great Perfection.

## THE ORIGINS OF THIS WORK

The following translations of Jigmé Lingpa's writings on the preliminary practices were completed in two stages. I initially became interested in these texts shortly after meeting Chatral Rinpoche, a living master of the Great Perfection. At the time, I was beginning to learn Tibetan but was not yet able to read or speak fluently. Chatral Rinpoche kindly gave me the appropriate transmissions to begin the preliminary practices and then instructed me to visit one of his close students, Kyapchen Tulku Rinpoche, to receive detailed instructions on ngöndro practice. As I would soon find out, however, Kyapchen Tulku spoke no English, and since I was still unable to communicate in Tibetan, I had no way to receive the instructions I needed to begin practicing.

This turned out to be a great motivation to learn Tibetan. For the next year, I studied colloquial and literary Tibetan diligently, visiting Chatral Rinpoche when I could at his monastery on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal. During the course of my studies, I had the good fortune to meet an extremely learned lama named Khenpo Sherab Sangpo, who was teaching at the Centre for Buddhist Studies in Boudhanath at that time. Khenpo had already been teaching Western students for a number of years and was eager to learn English, so we made a deal: I agreed to teach him English every day

for an hour, and in exchange, he agreed to help me read Jigmé Lingpa's writings on the preliminary practices, which I had recently begun to translate with the permission of Chatral Rinpoche. For the next six months, we met a few times each week to work on his English and revise my translation. Eventually, my Tibetan improved to the degree that I was able to approach Kyapchen Tulku Rinpoche, who generously explained the entire ngöndro liturgy to me word-by-word. I then moved to a small retreat center near Chatral Rinpoche's monastery in Pharping to practice.

A few years later, I came across the draft translations I had prepared under the guidance of Khenpo Sherab Sangpo. I was struck by the beauty and profundity of Jigmé Lingpa's instructions and also the utter inadequacy of my initial efforts to render his words into English. I was, however, inspired to revisit the text and correct the many mistakes I had made. It also occurred to me that the translation might be of interest to other practitioners, so I visited Chatral Rinpoche to ask his advice. Rinpoche is known, not only for his mastery of the Great Perfection, but also for his strict approach to transmitting teachings. For this reason, I was not sure what he would say. I asked him whether or not it would be a good idea to revise the translations and have them published and was pleasantly surprised when he responded enthusiastically.

With Chatral Rinpoche's blessings, I then set to work correcting the translation. My first step was to check the entire text against the original Tibetan, which I did during a two-month retreat in Namo Buddha, Nepal. As luck would have it, shortly thereafter I found myself in close proximity to Khenpo Sherab Sangpo once again, who was teaching in Minneapolis. I consulted Khenpo about the many questions I had and clarified difficult sections in the text. Finally, I sent the translation to Heidi Nevin, a gifted translator and close student of Chatral Rinpoche's. Heidi generously checked the entire translation against the Tibetan and also offered insightful editorial advice, greatly improving both the quality of the translation and the readability of my prose.

When I was working on the translation, a friend told me about a wonderful commentary on the preliminary practices by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche. I eventually found a copy and read it eagerly, finding it incredibly beneficial for my practice. It occurred to me that an excerpt from his teachings would make a superb introduction to Jigmé Lingpa's translations. I asked Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche for permission to use an excerpt, and he generously agreed. Once I began to read through the text to find the right

passage, however, it was clear that I had a big problem: there was simply too much good material . . . I couldn't choose. I then made another request to Khyentse Rinpoche, this time asking if I could include the manuscript alongside my translations, and once again he agreed.

This, of course, left me without an introduction. After mulling it over, I decided to write this explanatory introduction and numerous appendices that would help the reader contextualize the teachings of Jigmé Lingpa and Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche. I wrote about the topics that I myself would have been interested in when I first set out to study and practice the preliminaries. I also thought it would be helpful to include Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo's commentary along with the long and concise ngöndro liturgies, as well as an extended reading list and glossary. Eventually, Snow Lion Publications agreed to publish the book. Under the auspices of the Rimé Foundation, I completed this project as a member of the Nitārtha Translation Network.