

A MARVELOUS GARLAND OF RARE GEMS

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Biographies of Masters of Awareness
in the Dzogchen Lineage

*A Spiritual History of the Teachings
of Natural Great Perfection*

NYOSHUL KHENPO JAMYANG DORJÉ
Translated by Richard Barron (Chökyi Nyima)



PADMA PUBLISHING
2005

Published by
Padma Publishing
P.O. Box 279
Junction City, CA 96048

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Introduction by Sogyal Rinpoche © 2005 Tertön Sogyal Trust
Frontispiece photo courtesy of Tertön Sogyal Trust
Endpaper illustrations by Mike Reagan

ISBN 1-881847-41-1

First Printing
Printed in the United States of America

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CIP DATA

'Jam-dbyaṅs-rdo-rje, Smyo-sul Mkhan-po.
(Rang-bzhin rdzogs-pa chen-po'i chos-'byung rig-'dzin brgyud-pa'i rnam-thar
Ngo-mtshar nor-bu bai-du-rya'i phreng-ba. English.]
A marvelous garland of rare gems: biographies of masters of awareness
in the Dzogchen lineage: a spiritual history of the teachings of
natural great perfection / by Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorjé;
translated from the Tibetan by Richard Barron (Chökyi Nyima). — 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 1-881847-41-1 (9781881847410 : alk. paper)

1. Rñiñ-ma-pa lamas—China—Tibet—Biography.
2. Tibet (China)—Biography. 3. Rdzogs-chen—History.
I. Barron, Richard, 1952- II. Title.
BQ7662.9.A2J3613 2005
294.3'923'0922—dc22

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Introduction

by Sogyal Rinpoché

It is an honor, and a blessing, to introduce this extraordinary work, Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorjé's definitive history of the teachings of Dzogpachenpo, the "Natural Great Perfection." For me, this is a moving and yet a daunting task, because Nyoshul Khenpo was one of my most beloved teachers. Long before I ever received teachings from him, I had heard of his reputation; what I learned was that, after the very greatest Dzogchen masters of our time, such as Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoché and Kyabjé Dilgo Khyentsé Rinpoché, Nyoshul Khenpo was the most outstanding and knowledgeable exponent of Dzogpachenpo, the summit and heart of the teachings of the ancient Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism brought to Tibet in the eighth or ninth century by the great Guru Padmasambhava.

I came to discover that everything they had said about Nyoshul Khenpo was accurate. He was indeed someone who had about him the unmistakable air of the great masters of the past I had been fortunate to know closely: Jamyang Khyentsé Chökyi Lodrö, Dudjom Rinpoché, and Dilgo Khyentsé Rinpoché. Like them, he had actually made real within his experience the truth of the teaching of Dzogpachenpo. This must have been the reason for his amazing presence—that spaciousness and lightness that everyone remarked on, that fathomless depth that seemed to go on forever and to know no kind of end or limit. When you were with Nyoshul Khenpo, you felt yourself irresistibly gathered into the well of total relaxation and peace that existed at the core of his being. A great aura of warmth, tenderness, and humor surrounded him, and all of his students knew his intense kindness. I will always remember the meticulous care, the profound love that he showed us, each and every one.

As Nyoshul Khenpo revealed himself to me more and more over the years, I was astounded to find that there were simply no bounds to the depth of his understanding or the expanse of his knowledge of the teachings. On the one hand, he had an unparalleled grasp of the teachings of Dzogchen, their systematic structure and unique vocabulary, and on the other, he had all the experience and unshakable certainty of a great Dzogchen yogi. At the same time, he possessed such a complete command of all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and of both sutras and tantras, that I was tempted

to think of him alongside those towering figures who inspired the Rimé, “nonpartisan,” renaissance of Buddhadharma in nineteenth-century Tibet.

In paying homage to Nyoshul Khenpo, I will quote some brief excerpts from the oral teachings he gave to me or the Rigpa sangha over the years. But first, it seems fitting that in this book, which comprises a collection of biographies of the vidyadhara masters of the Dzogchen lineage, some glimpses should be included of Khenpo’s own remarkable life story. After all, he too was a vidyadhara—“a holder of pure awareness, or *rigpa*”—and a figure of vital importance in the transmission of this lineage to the masters of the present day.¹

I remember an evening in the French Alps in 1989, during one of the annual retreats that I hold with my students, when Khenpo told me the story of his life. The parts of it that I had come across before in his commentaries on his poetic songs of realization had not really prepared me for the impact of the entire story. After I left his house, I wandered home under the August moon, stunned by the sheer drama and range of his experiences, which outdid any movie screenplay you could ever imagine. He had been born into a poor family in the Nyarong district of eastern Tibet. According to the Tibetan calendar, it was on the tenth day of the Monkey month in the year of the Water Monkey, a day held particularly sacred and celebrated as the anniversary of the birth of Guru Padmasambhava. This was in July 1932. His was a large family. The father and two elder sons made their living as herders, and as a child, Khenpo was sent out into the hills to look after the animals. Yet he had an instinctive yearning to practice dharma, which was encouraged by his mother and his grandmother. In fact, his grandmother had been a disciple of Nyoshul Lungtok Tenpai Nyima, the great holder of Paltrul Rinpoché’s transmission of the oral lineage of Dzogchen pith instructions, and it was from her that Khenpo first heard Nyoshul Lungtok’s name. When she was young, she had also been a disciple of the famous Dzogchen masters Adzom Drukpa and Nyala Pema Duddul. She used to sit her little grandson in her lap and pull her warm fur wrap around him while she prayed and practiced and talked to him about taking refuge or about the great Nyoshul Lungtok. Khenpo said that meeting the dharma like this so early in life was as if the famous prayer of aspiration by the peerless Dzogchen master Longchen Rabjam were coming true:

In all my lives, wherever I am born,
May I obtain the seven qualities of birth in higher realms.
As soon as I am born, may I come across the dharma
And have the freedom to practice it correctly.

¹ I am grateful to Tulku Pema Wangyal Rinpoché for clarifying a number of historical details, and also to Drupwang Tsoknyi Rinpoché and Mingyur Rinpoché for contributing some of their own memories about Nyoshul Khenpo.

Then, may I please the sacred lama
And put the dharma into action day and night.
May I realize the dharma, actualize its innermost meaning,
And so cross the ocean of existence in this very life.
May I teach the sacred dharma to beings wandering in samsara
And never tire or grow weary of working to help others.
Through my vast and impartial service to others,
May all beings attain buddhahood together, as one!

When Khenpo was small, he actually saw Khenpo Ngakchung (Khenpo Ngawang Palzang, 1879–1941), who was Nyoshul Lungtok’s principal disciple and an emanation of Vimalamitra, when he came to the area to give the empowerments of *Nyingtik Yabzhi* (*The Four Higher Collections of the Heart Drop*). As a young boy, Khenpo loved to dress up in the robes of a dharma practitioner, no matter how much people made fun of him. At the age of five, he took refuge with the incarnation of Katok Getsé Mahapandita, and three years later enrolled in the local Sakya monastery. He began to learn to read with the head lama, Jamyang Tapké, a distant relative who had been a disciple of the legendary teachers Jamgön Loter Wangpo and Khenpo Zhenga. Once more, he took care of the livestock and tended the sheep out in the open on the slopes, beneath the vast sky of Kham. He used to go out begging for alms, fending off the ferocious guard dogs with a stout staff he carried with him.

Khenpo then went to study with an outstanding master of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, Rigdzin Jampal Dorjé. He practiced *ngöndro*, and *shamatha* and *vipashyana* meditation, with a special emphasis on bodhichitta. So poor was he at this time that when he came to the practice of mandala offering, he had to make do with a flat piece of stone from the riverbed, and as he could not afford a single grain of rice, he used river sand. He then began to study texts and to follow the twelve-year training of a khenpo. He committed to memory the thirteen great scriptures, studied hundreds of required texts by Indian and Tibetan scholars, and was appointed a khenpo at the age of twenty-four. He became very learned in both sutras and tantras. By this time, he was receiving empowerments, transmissions, and instructions from many renowned lamas, especially at Katok Monastery. They included Katok Getsé Tulku, Katok Chaktsa Tulku, Choktrul Pema Gyaltzen, Adzom Gyalsé Rinpoché, Gemang Drungpa Tulku, Tromgé Kundun Tulku, Dza Ling Ru Khachö Tulku, Tromgé Khachö Tulku, Tromgé Arik Tulku, and Jamyang Khyentsé Chökyi Lodrö.

Nyoshul Khenpo counted twenty-five great masters as his principal teachers, among whom the most central to his life was Lungtok Shedrup Tenpai Nyima (1920–?), the reincarnation of Nyoshul Lungtok and dharma heir of Khenpo Ngakchung. Khenpo served as his attendant for three years, and at the age of seventeen or eighteen, he began to receive from him the teachings of *Longchen Nyingtik* (*The*

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The Combined Lineages from Longchenpa to Jigmé Gyalwai Nyugu

Khenchen Chabdal Lhundrup (14th Century)



Chabdal Lhundrup was born in Dangtro, in the southern border region of Lhodrak. His father was Paldren, [1.122b] and his mother was Samdrupkyi. At an early age, he clearly experienced the forceful awakening of his spiritual heritage as someone holy. He learned how to read and write at the age of five, mastering these skills without difficulty. At thirteen he was ordained as a novice monk at the center of Densa¹ Tenchikpa in Lha Valley.² At twenty he took full

monastic ordination from Khenchen Sönam Drakpa,³ the abbot of Chölung Monastery, where he received training, practical instruction, and scriptural transmissions related to monastic discipline.

He trained with numerous spiritual mentors, becoming learned in Prajñāparamita, valid cognition, Vinaya, and Abhidharma. He then taught at many shedras specializing in the teachings of the dialectical approach and thus became widely renowned. [1.123a] He was an elder who was like a mountain of gold⁴—the very embodiment of erudition, venerability, and nobility.

He studied the systems of Lojong⁵ and arousing bodhichitta with Gyalsé Tokmé.⁶ From Jamyang Lekdenpa, he received the Lamdré cycle and other instructions of the Sakya school; from Lama Kunrin, *The One Hundred Transmissions of Mitra* and other transmissions; from the great tertöns Dorjé Lingpa and Rinchen Lingpa, their respective terma cycles; and from Yeshé Gyalpo, the transmission for the form of Mañjushri known as Ayushpati. In short, from numerous spiritual mentors, he received many teachings on the sutras and on the tantras of the Nyingma and Sarma schools, and mastered all of them. By order of Khenchen Jangsem Sönam Drakpa of Chölung, Chabdal Lhundrup was appointed the head abbot of Jodendé Monastery in Lha Valley, where he cared for his monastic community both spiritually and materially; thus this monastery became an excellent center.

During this period, the great Omniscient One was traveling to Bhutan in the south.

Chabdal Lhundrup invited him to Mentang, where he remained for an entire summer. Chabdal Lhundrup became convinced that Longchenpa had been his guru in previous lifetimes and served him devotedly, demonstrating the three kinds of faith. He was brought to spiritual maturity by numerous empowerments and teachings concerning the unsurpassable secret.

After the Omniscient One continued on to Bhutan, [1.123b] Chabdal Lhundrup built a retreat hut at Zekhar, the hermitage in Lha Valley, where he spent five years without interruption practicing the yoga of the Dzogchen approach of utter lucidity, cutting off all distracting complications. He reached a consummate realization of the great perfection, perceiving awareness's naturally manifest appearances without bias. He had visions of numerous meditation deities; and many oath-bound protective deities, such as Vaishravana and those of the five classes, listened to his commands and carried out their enlightened activities. With his untrammelled powers of higher perception, he was able to foresee things hidden from ordinary perception, things that turned out just as he foretold.

He was foremost among those who invited the Omniscient One Longchenpa to return from Bhutan. All of the people of Lhodrak honored the Omniscient Guru with devotion and requested that he turn the wheel of the dharma on a vast scale. In particular, Chabdal Lhundrup received instructions on *The Heart Drop of the Dakini* and wrote commentaries based on his questions about the transmissions he had previously received. The lord of the dharma Longchenpa was extremely pleased and accepted him as his heart son, entrusting him with the lineage. He instructed him, "Pass this on to Drakpa Özer."

Though he gained mastery over the entire array of teachings of the Nyingma and Sarma schools in general, Chabdal Lhundrup focused specifically on the theory and practice of the lord of the dharma's Dzogchen tradition of the supreme secret. He brought countless fortunate students to spiritual maturity and liberation, among them such excellent holders of the teachings as Tulku Drakpa Özer, Terchen Dorjé Lingpa, [1.124a] Guru Donyöpa, Jatang Gyaltzendrak, Tokden Yepalwa, and Tsultrim Tsen.

He lived to the age of ninety-seven, when, on the twenty-second day of the fourth month, Saga, his emanated form resolved back into the basic space of phenomena. His remains were kept in state for one month. Upon their cremation, numerous relics were found, just one of the many amazing miracles that took place, moving everyone to faith.

Gyalsé Tulku Drakpa Özer (1356–1409)

Chabdal Lhundrup's principal student was Gyalsé Tulku Drakpa Özer. [1.124b] A portion of *The Golden Garland of Questions and Answers* from the cycle *The Heart Drop of the Dakini* reads:

The next incarnation of Ledrel Tsal will remain for a short time in a sambhogakaya pure realm and then take birth at Tarpa Ling in Bumthang. From the age of fifteen, he will benefit beings. Then the son, Dawa Drakpa, an emanation of Hayagriva, will appear; he, too, will benefit beings.



In fulfillment of this and other prophecies, the great Omniscient King of the Dharma, Longchenpa, attained a sambhogakaya pure realm, for he experienced the full expression of awareness as a vision of the spontaneous presence of utter lucidity. From that state, he manifested as his own son,⁷ a tulku to guide beings; the child's mother was named Kyipala.⁸

At an early age, Drakpa Özer felt the attributes of someone holy awaken within. He would sing songs of advice to his mother and explain the meaning of the dharma to anyone who came near him. During that period, many people saw the guardian goddess of mantra Ekajati holding him in her lap and the Seer⁹ guarding him.

When the child was five, Khedrup Chabdal Lhundrup invited him to Zekhar in Lha Valley, in keeping with the prophecy uttered by the lord of the dharma Longchenpa. There he was well looked after, being accorded both spiritual honors and material support.

At the age of eight, he took the vows of a novice monk and was given the name Drakpa Özer. [1.125a] He studied and contemplated many avenues of the dharma. Like one vase being filled from another, he received from Chabdal Lhundrup the full range of empowerments, teachings, and oral transmissions concerning the unsurpassable secret that this great khenpo had himself received from the great Omniscient One. Drakpa Özer mastered all of them.

When he was nine, he was invited to central Tibet by students of his former incarnation. He was honored by many of the faithful at such centers as Jamding in Dra Valley, Riwo in the Drak region, Shuksep in the Nyepu Uplands, and Drigung in Gyama. He bestowed the nectar of the dharma on them according to their individual fortunes. The great scholar Yakdé Panchen respectfully sought an audience with him, during which he praised Drakpa Özer with the following words of admiration:

You have achieved this rebirth, and with the sublime knowing of someone
spiritually advanced,
you have mastered the meaning of the essence of being.
Bodhisattva, mahasattva,
Drakpa Özer, may you be victorious!

On his way back to southern Tibet, Drakpa Özer was welcomed at Yardrok with honors by the glorious Sakya Dakchen Lodrö Gyaltsen and the throne holder Dorjé Gyaltsen, both of whom received his kind teachings. Passing through Lhodrak, Lhalung, and other areas, he traveled to Bhutan, where he founded a retreat center at Langmatil. In such border regions as Bumthang, Ngenlong, and Menlok, [1.125b] he illuminated the path to liberation for many fortunate people with the torch of the dharma, including the teachings of the vajra heart essence of utter lucidity.

He returned to Tibet, where he carried out activities at the principal spiritual centers in order to create benefit and happiness on a vast scale. He especially worked to spread the traditions of the vajra heart essence of utter lucidity. He gathered many learned and accomplished students, among them Trulzhik Sang-gyé Önpö; his own son, Dawa Drakpa; Jatang Drakpa Gyatso; Sherab Palden of lower Ling; and Zhönnu Lodrö of Kyang Valley. He received whatever he could of the nectar of the dharma from all those who had been students of the great Omniscient One Longchenpa. In this way, he held the extensive lineage of the teachings and spread it everywhere.

At the age of fifty-four, on the twenty-fourth day of the fourth month in an Ox year,¹⁰ he passed into a state of peace at Kalden Jampading. When his remains were cremated, all those present were moved to faith by amazing signs, such as the many relics and images of deities that were found in the ashes and the canopies of rainbows that arched over the site. This great master blessed all of the places in which he stayed, his positive influence pacifying illness, famine, warfare, social unrest, and other problems. He ensured that the teachings of the heart essence would endure. [1.126a] From this master came Kunchen Dawa Drakpa and many other great teachers whose activities filled all of space, spreading the teachings and bringing beings to spiritual maturity. Today descendants of Drakpa Özer can still be found in the Bumthang region of Bhutan.

Trulzhik Sang-gyé Önpö Sherab Gyatso (14th–15th Centuries)



Drakpa Özer's main student was Sherab Gyatso, also known as Trulzhik Sang-gyé Önpö. He was born in the vicinity of Samyé Semkyé Ling, son of the Buddhist layman Pema-kyap and his wife, Önpö Kyipa. From an early age, the boy experienced an awakening of his noble predisposition. Upon hearing groups of monks chanting, he felt certain of the need to seek release from samsara [1.126b] and longed to enter the religious life. But because he was their only son, his parents prevented him from doing so until, at the age of seven, he was bitten by a rabid dog. Only then was he allowed to take monastic ordination from the abbot Sherinpa and the preceptor Shegyalwa and to enroll in the monastic community of Samyé.¹¹

At first, while he was learning the daily liturgies and other texts, he did not do well, having been exposed to leprosy while attending to someone afflicted with the disease.¹² From Lama Shakrinpa in the Chimpu Uplands, he requested the transmission for White Mañjushri. Having engaged in this practice intensely, he dreamed one night that a person, completely white, gave him a crystal mala and that he picked white flowers the size of plates. With this, his intelligence increased greatly.

At various stages of his life, he received a vast range of teachings on the sutras and on the tantras of the Nyingma and Sarma schools, studying with more than fifty holy mentors, including four successive abbots of Chölung Monastery. Among his teachers were the lord of the dharma Karmapa Rangjung Dorjé, Butön, Gyalsepa, Lama Sönam Gyaltzen, Jonang Chokgyalwa, and Khenchen Sönam Drakpa.¹³ Later, at the age of eighteen, he was given full monastic ordination by Lama Sönam Gyaltzen and the master Mandzuwa as abbot and preceptor, respectively. [1.127a] In a Bird year,¹⁴ Lama Sönam Gyaltzen led the gathered leaders of many chapters of the sangha in the consecration ceremonies for the restored monastery of Samyé. To all those assembled, Sherab Gyatso gave an original explanation of Prajñāparamita, for which he was highly honored.

He later attended the shedra of Tsetang,¹⁵ where he studied with Goshri Shakya Gyaltzen, the master Palgyalwa, and other scholars. He trained in Prajñāparamita, valid cognition, Vinaya, and Abhidharma, gaining stature as a scholar. When the lord of the dharma, the great Omniscient One Longchenpa, was returning from Bhutan in the south and staying at Zhung Mountain, Sherab Gyatso met with him. He offered him gifts and distributed alms to the three hundred people in Longchenpa's retinue. He received many empowerments, teachings, and pith instructions of the secret Dzogchen cycles, as well as kama and terma transmissions, including the tantra *The All-Creating Monarch*.

Longchenpa's attendants encouraged him, saying, "You surely are the lineage successor. You should stay and be the guru's personal secretary." But with real affection, the lord of the dharma advised him, "When one is young, it may be profitable to study; but this dialectical approach is for those of little faith, so do not waste your time on it." [1.127b] He gave Sherab Gyatso symbols of enlightened form, speech, and mind, as well as his hat, robes, and sitting mat, and authorized him to pass on the lineage of ultimate meaning.

Although Trulzhik continued to undertake appropriate study and contemplation, he came to feel that no external events or pursuits had any ultimate point, so he went into solitary retreat at the hermitage of Gyalnang. Thus a dynamic and sublime knowing born of meditation blossomed in him.

Once, when the great Omniscient One was staying in Drigung, Trulzhik invited him to the Chimpu Uplands, where Longchenpa bestowed the empowerments and gave teachings from the Nyingtik cycles. After he had finished teaching the path of

trekchö, Longchenpa passed away into a state of peace. Trulzhik made offerings and honored his guru's remains, and erected outer and inner supports, each of which included a shrine.

His parents then died, one after the other, and he decided to spend the rest of his life meditating in solitude. So he went to the central region of Uru, where he sought a spiritual connection with the great scholar Panchenpa at Ewam.¹⁶ Most notably, he met with Lama Orgyenpa at the mountain hermitage of Lhundrup Ling, pleasing him greatly. He undertook an intensive retreat on the deity Vajravarahi and perceived signs of having received the deity's blessings. The same teacher conferred on him many transmissions of the dharma from the Nyingma and Sarma schools, foremost among them the tradition of the lord of the dharma Longchenpa, [1.128a] as embodied in the empowerments, teachings, oral transmissions, and background material for the Dzogchen approach of the secret Nyingtik cycles.¹⁷

He then decided to improve his meditation in places where he was unknown, but just as he was setting out for the area around Mount Kailash, his guru ordered him not to go; he therefore spent time meditating in the mountain hermitages of lower central Tibet, Penyul, and other regions. He also established connections with several other holy teachers before returning to Chimpu. There he received from Tsungmé Ösel Rangdrol, also known as Guru Wadrakpa, the entire range of empowerments, teachings, and pith instructions of the secret Nyingtik teachings. He alternated periods during which he received these teachings with periods of intensive practice, relying on this teacher for six years without interruption.

When Gyalsé Tulku was returning from the southern region of Lhodrak, Trulzhik and his students went to meet him and made extensive offerings. On several occasions, Trulzhik received the entire range of teaching cycles from the tradition of the great Omniscient One, such as the two Nyingtik cycles, and trained in the practices of these cycles. The guru was extremely delighted, and their minds merged, becoming one. Drawing from prophecy, Gyalsé confirmed that Trulzhik was the custodian of his teachings, and Trulzhik considered the transmissions he received from this teacher to be the primary source of his lineage.

When his precious teacher Guruwa passed away in the Chimpu Uplands, Trulzhik completed the memorial services following his guru's final wishes. [1.128b] He then devoted himself one-pointedly to practice at numerous isolated places in the mountains, making do with meager food and shabby clothing and cutting off all complicating entanglements in his life. Although he had mastered the avenues of the dharma without making sectarian distinctions, he taught only the tradition of the great Omniscient King of the Dharma. And he taught only to those with faith, commensurate with their individual fortunes. He had countless learned and accomplished students who gained meditative experience on the profound path of practice, among them Shakya Shri of Gyangchen and Sherab Palden of lower Ling. In particular, he en-

sacred dharma from Gyalsé Dawa Drakpa included many famous teachers, such as Panchen Sönam Namgyal of Jamling and the throne holder Sherab Palden of lower Ling. He also brought countless other students to spiritual maturity and liberation, among them those of vast learning, such as Drupchen Kunzang Dorjé (who passed on his personal style of exegesis), Tsungmé Sherab Zangpo, and Lama Tuchenpa. He thus spent forty years working for the welfare of beings, then passed into nirvana on the day of the new moon of the Pig month in a Rat year¹⁹ at Samten Ling. After his remains were cremated, many relics, as well as images of deities such as Vajrayogini, were found in the ashes. Throughout Bhutan and the central region of Tibet, memorial services were held to fulfill his last wishes, and outer and inner supports were erected.

Drupchen Kunzang Dorjé (14th–15th Centuries)



Drupchen Kunzang Dorjé was the main student of the sacred guru Gyalsé Dawa Drakpa. He was born in Menlok, Bhutan, south of Tibet. From an early age, he experienced an uncontrived sense of disenchantment, certain of the falsity of all happiness within conditioned existence. [1.131b] In his moral conduct, he instinctively considered the ineluctable cause and effect of karma when weighing his options. From several holy masters, he received all of the appropriate

transmissions of the dharma, including detailed discussions of the results of karma, the vow of refuge, empowerments and permission blessings for meditation deities, and oral transmissions of mantras for recitation. He diligently applied himself to the practice of these, inspiring faith and praise in all who met him.

Kunzang Dorjé first met Gyalsé Dawa Drakpa when the latter came to Bhutan. At that moment, Kunzang Dorjé felt an unshakable, irresistible respect and devotion awaken, and he relied on this teacher for seven years. [1.132a] Like one vase being filled from another, he received from Dawa Drakpa the empowerments, teachings, oral transmissions, and background material for the two Nyingtik cycles of the Dzogchen teachings concerning the unsurpassable secret. He also received the empowerments, teachings, oral transmissions, pith instructions, activity rituals, and practical methods for the tradition of the great Omniscient King of the Dharma, such as the three Yangtik cycles.²⁰ With great diligence, he gained mastery through contemplation, meditation, and training and became Dawa Drakpa's great regent in the ultimate sense.²¹ Encouraged by his guru's instructions, he also spread these teachings to others whenever appropriate.

When the lord of the dharma, the great Gyalsé, passed away, Kunzang Dorjé oversaw the memorial ceremonies and completed all of the activities necessary to fulfill his guru's last wishes. Then, cutting himself off from all distractions—material pos-

sessions and ordinary activities—he frequented solitary mountain sites, such as Tarpa Ling and Kujédrak in Bumthang, Taktsang in Paro, and the forest retreat of Khotang. Relying on meager food and simple clothing, he one-pointedly practiced the heart essence of the profound path. To those fortunate seekers of liberation who gathered around him, he bestowed empowerments, teachings, and pith instructions. He never lapsed in these pursuits and so reached the consummate level of meditative experience and realization of the profound way of abiding, thus ensuring his own welfare; by mastering the activity that brought benefit and happiness to his students, he ensured the welfare of others. [1.132b]

Once, Kunzang Dorjé went to central Tibet, visiting the principal holy sites—Lhasa, Samyé, and so forth—and making offerings and prayers of aspiration. In Lhasa he was honored by a large number of his students and patrons from the Yo area, among them the lord of the dharma Kunga Gyaltzen Palzang, Dzogchenpa Sönam Rinchen, and Zhönnu Lodrö of Chang Valley. According to their wishes, he bestowed on them the nectar of the sacred dharma. He ensured enormous benefit for beings, as illustrated by the fact that numerous great teachers such as the lord of the Drigung tradition, Rinchen Puntsok, bowed at his feet and listened to his teachings.

Eventually, he spent most of his time in strict solitary retreat in the wilderness of Bumthang, occasionally bestowing the appropriate empowerments and teachings of this profound path, so that he was continually bringing about the two kinds of benefit. He did this unfailingly for a long time, until he passed away into the peaceful basic space of dharmakaya amid amazing signs. Drupchen Kunzang Dorjé was a contemporary of Tsewang Drakpa, the son of Ratna Lingpa.

Chöjé Kunga Gyaltzen Palzang (1497–1568)



Kunzang Dorjé's main student was the lord of the dharma Kunga Gyaltzen Palzang. He was born in a Female Fire Snake year²² in Tenchar in the border country of Bhutan, [1.133a] into the clan of the eight brothers of Masang Arwa. At the time of his birth, a spring burst forth from the ground. He later said that his habitual tendencies from previous lifetimes were quite evident. He clearly exhibited the attributes of someone holy—for example, tracing the six-syllable *mani* mantra in rock faces as though they were soft clay.

At the age of fourteen, he went to central Tibet, encouraged by Zhönnu Tsewang of Sordrang, a guru of Lhundrup Chödé Monastery. He was ordained as a novice monk by Chen-nga Chödrak, who gave him the name Kunga Gyaltzen Palzang and cared for him well, both materially and spiritually. [1.133b]

Taking a nonsectarian approach, Kunga Gyaltzen Palzang studied and trained in the various avenues of the dharma, listening to and mastering the teachings of the

various avenues of the dharma—sadhana practices, empowerments, teachings, oral transmissions, and pith instructions—to people commensurate with their fortune, so that everyone who made contact with him found the connection meaningful. [1.136a] Among his students in the sacred dharma were many great masters, such as Zhamarpa Könchok Bang³⁰ and the Drigung Zurpa; holders of personal transmissions of profound termas, including Tulku Jangchub Lingpa, Gargyi Wangpo of Nangtsé,³¹ and Dechen Lingpa; many scholars, such as Palding Rabjampa and Palkhang Lotsawa; and many accomplished yogins, including the great master Longyangpa and Kunzang Palbar. In particular, he taught Tendzin Chökyi Gyalpo, his heart son Kunga Drakpa, Paljor Gyaltzen of Shami, and many others who maintained the very essence of his tradition, as well as many secular rulers such as the governors of Yardrok and Chongyé.³² As well, he benefited many men and women, including monastics, lay tantric practitioners, hermits, and householders. Many of his students, and their students in turn, came to maintain his lineage in the central, southwestern, western, and eastern areas of Tibet, in the southeastern region of Kongpo, and in Bhutan. In this and other ways, this single holder of the Nyingma lineage accomplished tangible results through his widespread activities.

Natsok Rangdrol lived for seventy-seven years in this world, passing away on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month in an Iron Horse year³³ [1.136b] near the temple of Tradruk³⁴ in Yoru, central Tibet. His remains were brought in state to his monastic seat to be venerated and committed to the flames of the funeral pyre. An inner monument containing his death mask and a casket of precious substances, as well as other memorials, were erected on a vast scale in fulfillment of his last wishes, and throughout this time amazing signs manifested.

Tulku Tendzin Drakpa (1536–1597)



Tulku Natsok Rangdrol's main student was Tulku Tendzin Drakpa.³⁵ He was born in a Fire Monkey year³⁶ in Ngenlung Genlar, Bhutan, the son of Tashi and his wife, Samten Zangmo. In keeping with prophecies concerning his birth, he was recognized as the tulku of Tertön Pema Lingpa. As soon as he could speak, he clearly described residual memories of his previous lifetimes. [1.137a] At the age of four, he was invited to Bumthang by Pema Lingpa's sons, who paid him great honors at their respective seats. He remained at Pema Ling as heir to one of the sons, Könchok Zangpo, and was ordained there as a novice monk. He spent his time receiving the empowerments, oral transmissions, sadhana practices, and activity rituals of the terma cycles of his former incarnation and training in these practices. Before long, however, the lord of the dharma Könchok Zangpo passed away, so Ten-

dzin Drakpa went to stay for a time at Dechen Ling, the center of Pema Lingpa's son Dawa. There he studied all transmissions of the dharma relevant to his needs.

At fourteen he was invited to Tibet by Tulku Natsok Rangdrol. He visited the principal centers of southern and central Tibet, where he was accorded great honors. He received the entire range of teachings of the dharma, both the sutras and tantras. In particular, Natsok Rangdrol gave him, in the manner of one vase filling another, all of the empowerments, teachings, oral transmissions, pith instructions, and practical methods in the teaching cycles of both the great Omniscient King of the Dharma and the tertön Pema Lingpa. While studying with his guru, Tendzin Drakpa practiced the profound yoga of the stages of development and completion. On the basis of the transmissions he received, he was able to cut through imprecise thinking concerning the meditation, practice, and training he had already carried out. Thus he became a true Dzogchen master, upholding the ultimate lineage. [1.137b]

At twenty Tendzin Drakpa traveled to the southern region of Lhodrak, where all of the students and patrons of his former incarnation bowed to and venerated him. In one case, Drakarwa of Tsoyul offered him his monastery. There he also received appropriate empowerments and oral transmissions from and studied sacred dance with Lama Umdzepa. In Bumthang he requested several empowerments and oral transmissions from Dawa, including an empowerment for a sadhana focusing on the Eight Commands. He was honored by everyone in that region, high and low, and made a meaningful connection with them by teaching the dharma according to their interests.

He then returned to Tibet, where he studied the entire range of Buddhist approaches with many tutors, among them the lord of his buddha family, the great tulku Natsok Rangdrol himself, as well as the great Sakya master Ngakchang Chenpo, Jetsün Drolchok, and Nangtsé Rigdzin. He diligently practiced the profound path in the Chimpu Uplands and other places, and so realized the ultimate meaning of the equally profound way of abiding. He had many visions of his personal meditation deities and received their prophecies.

Then the lord of the dharma Natsok Rangdrol empowered Tendzin Drakpa to succeed him, bequeathing to him his monastery and all of its representations of enlightened form, speech, and mind.³⁷ After the guru had passed away, [1.138a] Tendzin Drakpa dutifully carried out his guru's last wishes, which included building monuments. In later years, he continued his guru's activities, erecting a number of memorials (such as gold life-sized statues of Guru Rinpoché and his retinue), caring for his students and patrons, leading group retreats, bestowing empowerments, and teaching every summer and winter.

He traveled to the various regions where his students lived—the southern regions, Bhutan, Tsang, and Rong—where he was honored by such figures as Gyalsé Pema

APPENDIX
Lineage Diagrams

KEY TO THE DIAGRAMS

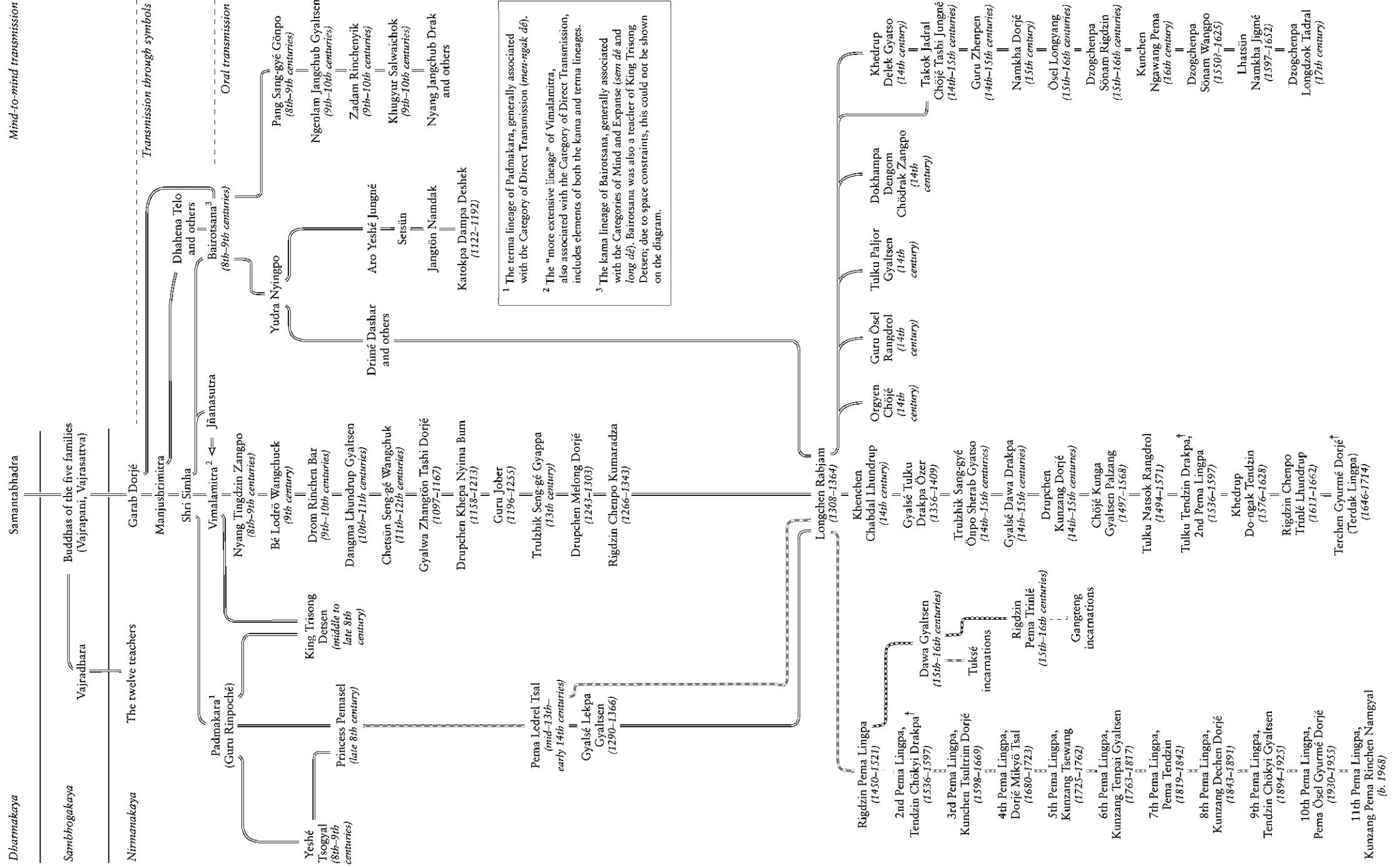
These lineage diagrams represent the mainstream transmissions of Dzogchen teachings as outlined in this book. The diagrams do not depict all possible connections between these masters.

===== Teacher-to-student lineage

----- Incarnation lineage

----- Familial relationship, although not necessarily consecutive generations; this is often a teacher-to-student lineage as well

Dudjom Yangsi[†]
(b. 1991) A dagger denotes that a given master appears in another location in the diagrams.



Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all dates refer to the Common Era.

The Precious Lamp: Author's Introduction

1. The lineages of: mind-to-mind transmission by victorious ones; transmission through symbols by masters of awareness; and oral transmission by human individuals.
2. The Indian abbot Shantarakshita, the master Padmakara (or Guru Rinpoché), and the Buddhist king Trisong Detsen of Tibet.
3. King Trisong Detsen sponsored the training of Tibetan translators, invited Buddhist scholars from India, and supported their collaboration in the translation of Buddhist scriptures from India into the Tibetan language.
4. “Early Translation school” refers to the Nyingma school, the most ancient of the four major schools in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, which was established in the eighth century by Guru Padmakara and others. More recent schools are collectively referred to as Sarma (New) or Later Translation schools.
5. The Tibetan term *kama* refers to teachings that have been passed on from generation to generation in an unbroken succession. *Terma* refers to teachings that were concealed by a great master such as Padmakara and later revealed under very specific conditions by a *tertön*, i.e., a recognized rebirth of the student who originally received the teaching when it was concealed and who is capable of revealing the teaching in an authentic way. Once a terma has been revealed, the lineage becomes one of transmission from generation to generation.
6. Minling Terchen is a name for Terchen Gyurmé Dorjé (1646–1714), also known as Terdak Lingpa. He produced the first standardized collection of the kama teachings, in thirteen volumes.
7. Longchen Rabjam. The title “Kunchen” (Omniscient One) is sometimes appended to the names of masters (e.g., Kunchen Jigmé Lingpa); used alone, however, it refers to Longchenpa.
8. Guru Rinpoché was active in Tibet during the eighth century; Sang-gyé Lama lived ca. 1000–1080.
9. The guru yoga has not been included in the present volume.
10. This section comprises three separate texts: the fulfillment ritual, in five folios; the concise ganachakra, in one folio; and the song for the ganachakra, in three folios. These have not been included in this volume.

11. These have not been included in this volume; selections can be found in Nyoshul Khen Rinpoché's *Natural Great Perfection*, trans. Lama Surya Das (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1995).
12. At this point in the original Tibetan text, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoché outlines the contents of the book; we have omitted the outline here, however, and incorporated it into a standard table of contents at the front of the book.
13. Longchen Rabjam, *The Precious Treasury of the Way of Abiding*, trans. Richard Barron (Junction City, CA: Padma Publishing, 1998), p. 267.
14. This is a reference to indications in the Buddhist teachings that we currently live in a cycle of degeneration and that, in the distant past, human beings' lives were much longer.
15. Approximately one hundred line drawings from the original Tibetan text have been reproduced in this volume.
16. A Tibetan title meaning "great scholar."
17. A Tibetan title meaning "lord of refuge."
18. A Tibetan title meaning "lord of siddhas" or "lord of accomplished masters."
19. This common Tibetan idiom refers to the point in a major empowerment when one casts a flower onto a depiction of the mandala of deities. Where the flower falls on the mandala signifies the karmic connection one has with that cycle.
20. The term "youthful vase (body)" is unique to the Dzogchen approach. It refers to the ultimate nature of being, "youthful" in that it is not subject to degeneration, comparable to a "vase" in that its integrity is inviolate, and a "body" in that it serves as the foundation for the qualities of enlightenment.

The Precious Mirror: Preliminary Remarks

1. Tib. Pema Jungné (Lotus Source). An epithet of Guru Rinpoché.
2. The Tibetan master Bairotsana was named after the sambhogakaya buddha Vairochana ("Bairotsana" being the Tibetan pronunciation). In this volume, we use the Tibetan rendering to distinguish between the master and the buddha.
3. The first Teacher in this instance was the primordial buddha, Samantabhadra.
4. Upper Tibet consists of the mountainous western region; middle Tibet, of the steppes, plateaus, and valleys of the central region; and lower Tibet, of the lowland valleys of the eastern region.
5. A Tibetan title meaning "learned and accomplished one."
6. The term "heart son (or daughter)" refers to a student who has received the most complete transmission (both scriptural and experiential) that a master has conferred in that lifetime.
7. "Tulku" (the Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit term *nirmanakaya*) indicates one who is recognized as the rebirth of a great master.
8. A Tibetan title meaning "master of awareness."
9. It is held that after a highly realized master passes away, the master's mind can manifest under certain circumstances in a form similar to that of the living master. This manifestation is perceptible to those who have great devotion for the master and a significant degree of realization.
10. Primarily *The Seven Treasuries* of Longchenpa.

11. *Kusulu* (or *kusali*) is a term of Sanskrit derivation for a spiritual practitioner whose way of life is very simple and whose approach to spiritual practice is direct and experience-based, with little emphasis on study of the scriptures.
12. Daknang, or pure visionary, transmissions are received by highly realized practitioners during visions of deities or past masters.
13. Nyak Jñanakumara (eighth century), Nup Sang-gyé Yeshé (ninth century), and Zurchen Shakya Jungné (1002–1062) were important figures in the early development of the Nyingma school.
14. Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo (eleventh century), also known as Rongzom Mahapandita or Rongzom Lotsawa, was one of the most important early writers in the kama tradition of the Nyingma school.
15. Ngari Panchen Pema Wangyal (1487–1542) was the author of *Ascertaining the Three Levels of Ordination*, an important Nyingma work on the relationship between the Hinayana vow of individual liberation, the bodhisattva vow of the Mahayana, and the samaya of the Vajrayana. An English translation of a commentary on this source text by Dudjom Rinpoché Jigdral Yeshé Dorjé has been published as Ngari Panchen, Pema Wangyi Namgyal, *Perfect Conduct: Ascertaining the Three Vows*, trans. Khenpo Gyurme Sandrub and Sangye Khandro (Boston: Wisdom, 1996).
16. Terchen Gyurmé Dorjé (Terdak Lingpa) and his younger brother, Lotsawa Chöpal Gyatso (Lochen Dharma Shri).
17. That is, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. When it stands alone, the name "Khyentsé" does not take the case ending "-i."
18. See Chapter 23.
19. Based on the teachings of the Buddha, as interpreted by the Indian master Nagarjuna, Madhyamaka (the Middle Way) is the highest expression of philosophy according to the Buddhist sutra tradition.
20. *The All-Creating Monarch* is the primary source tantra for the Category of Mind; *The Entire Array of Space* is an important source for the Category of Expanse teachings.
21. "The changing times" is a euphemism often used by Tibetan authors for the Chinese Communist military occupation of Tibet.
22. A way of indicating how perverse certain customs or behavior patterns can be.
23. The term "equal taste" or "one taste" refers to a level of realization where dualistic frameworks have been transcended and everything is experienced as having the same ultimate nature—the "same taste."
24. Although the term "naturally occurring lamp of sublime knowing" often signifies one of the four or six so-called lamps in the practice of tögal (see Chapter 5, note 38), it is also a more general idiom for a state of realization in which knowledge flows effortlessly, without the need for training or study.
25. Located at the crown of one's head.

The Precious Lattice: A Synopsis of the Oral Lineage of Dzogchen

1. The two approaches in the teachings and practice of Dzogchen. Trekchö (cutting through seeming solidity) is said to be for those with lesser diligence and places emphasis on allowing the mind to rest in the authentic view of reality; tögal (surpassing the pin-

12. Benefit that can be directly sensed or perceived by the recipient.
13. In Mahayana cosmology, our universe is one of many held in the hands of a cosmic buddha, a form of Vairochana known as Gangchentso (Glacial Ocean).

Colophon

1. The Male Iron Monkey year (early 1980 to early 1981).
2. The early summer of 1980.
3. The Male Water Monkey year (early 1992 to early 1993). The actual date was early in 1993.

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