

THE CHARIOT FOR TRAVELLING THE PATH TO FREEDOM
the lama's life story which nurtures faith

With constant reverence, I bow and pay homage
At the lotus feet of my glorious lama.
He is Vajradhara*, the lord encompassing the hundred
aspects of enlightenment,
Who in a single form unites all sources of refuge without exception,
The victorious ones of the ten directions and their sons.

In general, one's lot in samsara (1) follows from previous virtuous and evil actions. In particular, the experience of the precious human form endowed with the eighteen kinds of freedom and good fortune (2) arises as the result of completely pure moral conduct—renunciation of the ten non-virtuous actions and cultivation of the ten virtuous ones (3). Even more, to be born the son of religious parents, to be guided by fully capable holy teachers, and to immerse oneself in the Buddha's teachings which are as vast and deep as the ocean—all come from being gloriously filled with oceans of the two accumulations of merit and pristine cognition (4) over the course of countless previous aeons. Such is my praiseworthy karmic heritage.

My practice in this life has been to apply the essential points of the techniques of development and completion (5) of the profound mystic path of mantra and the two kinds of precious bodhicitta (6) of the greater vehicle (7) which develops the seeds of spiritual understanding. The consistent power of coincidence and connections gradually brought about mastery of these practices. The result has been oceans of splendid benefits for both others and me, all of which I now enjoy.

The last line of the verse addresses the prayer to me, Rangjung Kunchab, which means Self-Arisen and All-Pervading.

My father was the noble Mantra-Holder (8) Lekshe Drayang. His history begins with Kagyu Tenzin*, the great master of Tsabtsa Monastery in Kham or Eastern Tibet. The spiritual heir of Kagyu Tenzin was Karma Lhatong*, and he attained natural control of mind and phenomena. His student was Karma Norbu* who was also known as Karma Shenpen Ozer. Through his practice of the orally transmitted instructions, he attained control of mind and phenomena and openly performed such physical miracles as flying and soaring in the sky like a bird. His student was Ratak Palzang Tulku, the twelfth incarnation of the incarnation lineage of Tsona Monastery in the Nyarong district of Kham. He also received the elixir of the key instructions of the glorious Shangpa Kagyu (9). For many years, he stayed sealed in caves and, enduring tremendous hardships, practiced the wonderful Shangpa Kagyu cycle of teachings. In short, he planted the royal banner of practice. With full control of dreams and illusion-like appearances, he could pass without hindrance through the walls of his house and could know clearly and directly past and future events, such was the level of mastery that he had achieved. In accordance with his prophecy that in his next birth he would come as a guardian of the remaining treasure teachings (10) of the great treasure-finder Yong-ge



Dusum Khyenpa

Mingyur Dorje*, he was born in Tre-sho Gangi Rawa*, which is one of the four great provinces of the lower part of Dokham, to the family of the first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa*. Jamgon Lodru Taye (11) identified him as the intentional rebirth of Palzang Tulku. As the thirteenth incarnation, he became a mantra-holder or lay-practitioner of vajrayana (12) and was known by the name Karma Lekshe Drayang.

In Rinpoche's home valley is the great Kubum stupa. This stupa marks the birthplace of the first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa.

As a child, Dusum Khyenpa wore a goatskin while he herded sheep and cattle in the hills. Later, when news of his great spiritual attainments filtered back to his homeland, the goatskin became an object of veneration. It was the only possession of Dusum Khyenpa which had been kept by his family. The stupa of Kubum was constructed in his memory and two smaller stupas containing the remains of his parents were built on either side. Subsequently, the family home became known as Rat-tsak Dzong (Goatskin Castle) and the family name became Rat-tsak which was later modified to Ratak, Rinpoche's family name. Rinpoche and his father are descendants of the family of the first Karmapa.

When Rinpoche was in his early twenties, he supervised the restoration of the Kubum stupa which had been severely damaged during border clashes with Chinese troops. At that time, the significance of the name Kubum (one hundred thousand images) had been forgotten, but during the restoration the stupa was found to contain, in fact, one hundred thousand small images.

With the tremendous intellectual capabilities from his training in former lives, Lekshe Drayang became famous even at an early age for his learning in the five traditional sciences (13) and particularly in the science of healing. He studied under the two Jamgon lamas, Jamgon Lodru Taye and Jamgon Khyentse Wangpo*, and also under Mipam Nampar Gyalwa*. From them he received oceans of profound and extensive instructions including *The Five Treasuries* (14). Through his exertion in the path of development and completion, he had visions of many deities. Simply the mention of his lamas' names would cause the hair on his body to rise and tears to come to his eyes, indications of his faith in and devotion to them. He engaged fully in union and destruction (15), profound practices of the secret path of mantra (16). With the promise and prophecy that in his next life he would be born in the country of Mi-nyak to the east where he would work impartially for the benefit of all beings, he left his body at the age of sixty-eight. This man was my father.

As for my mother, she was devoted to the Dharma from an early age. She had the good fortune to be worthy of participating in the Vajra Feast of Noble Dakinis and other ceremonies led by Jamgon Kongtrul. He gave her the name Little

White Tara. In addition to the five one hundred thousands of the preliminary practices (17), she completed one hundred million recitations of the Vajra Guru* mantra, two hundred million Mani's (18), one hundred million Amitabha* mantras, and one hundred million Vajrasattva* mantras. Ever engaged in extensive accumulations of virtue and purification, she left her body at the age of seventy-eight at Bumthang in Bhutan.

Portents and conditions favourable to the union of my parents steadily assembled even from the time that they were young. In due course, they were married according to their wishes. For some years they stayed at a retreat center in the Dzongsho district called the Gathering Place of the Sugatas where they did separate yidam retreats (19). One evening, when they met to celebrate a profound and elaborate tenth-day vajra feast (20), I approached my mother's womb.

On this occasion of celebrating the tenth-day feast of warriors and dakinis (21), my parents dreamt that their noble lama, Jamgon Kongtrul, appeared. He said to them, "I need a place to stay," and then merged with them. They also dreamt that Orgyen Rinpoche* and his consort actually came from the Copper-Colored Mountain* along with a throng of warriors and dakinis. Thus was I conceived amidst all these portents.

During her pregnancy, my mother glowed with joy and good health. Wonderful dreams of good portent came to her continually. She stayed at a hilltop retreat called the Precipice Hermitage. One day while she was out gathering roots, branches, flowers, and fruit from



different medicinal plants, she sensed that birth would soon take place and returned to her home. I was born upright, feet first, amidst wonderful events that were seen by everyone. Above and all around the house brilliant rainbows formed and snow fell gently like a rain of flowers.

My mother and relatives described how, as soon as I was born, I looked around and smiled radiantly, showing no fear or shyness, and how I spoke about the spread of the Kagyu (22) teachings and repeated the Six-Syllable Mantra (23). My parents and everyone in the region were full of joy, and my birth was heralded as the birth of a very wonderful incarnation.

Even as a child, noble virtuous tendencies stirred within me. Naturally and spontaneously, I wished only to dismiss the wealth and enjoyments of an ordinary life and to keep simply to religious practice in some rocky shelter in the solitude of a mountain valley.

I had noble innate propensities for compassion and devotion. My compassion for sentient beings would move me to tears, particularly for all those afflicted and oppressed by suffering. So, too, would I be moved by my faith in and devotion to the lamas with whom I formed a connection by receiving from them empowerments which mature one spiritually and teachings which enable one to attain liberation (24).



Dzokchen Rinpoche, Thubten Chokyi Dorje



Situ XI, Padma Wangchuk



Palping Khyentse, Shenpen Ozer



Zhechen Kongtrul, Pema Trime



Khyentse Choki Lodru

When Rinpoche was still a child, the fifth Dzokchen Rinpoche, Thubten Chokyi Dorje, sent an emissary with many gifts to Rinpoche's father, asking him to allow him to bring up his son. Rinpoche's father sent the emissary back with the gifts, saying that he didn't know if his son was an incarnation or not and that, if he was, he would naturally help sentient beings. Besides, he wished to bring up his son himself. Nevertheless, Dzokchen Rinpoche sent the emissary again with the gifts and the reply that these gifts were an offering and that, whatever happened, the child would still help countless sentient beings.

While I was still quite young, my father worked hard to teach and train me to read, to write, and to understand the Dharma. Because my father worked enthusiastically at his own practice of daily recitations, meditations, and retreats, I also had to rise early and retire late, filling

the day with meditation, practice, study, and training. I was endowed with a good intellect and naturally had some facility with speech. White Tara* and Avalokiteshvara* I took as my yidams.

At the age of thirteen, I formally entered the precious Doctrine of the Victorious One. The eleventh Tai-Situ, Padma Wangchuk, gave me ordination and the name Karma Rangjung Kunchab—Self-Arisen and All-Pervading. In later years, everyone said that it was an appropriate name.

My noble father taught me both the short and long treatises of Ngari Panchen* on the three ordinations (25) and instructed me thoroughly in *The Four Tantras* of the science of healing (26). The master scholar Tashi Chopel (student and secretary of Jamgon Kongtrul) gave me the empowerments, scriptural authorizations, and instructions (27) for *The Kagyu*

Treasury of Mantra (28) and detailed teachings on the three main authoritative texts of the Kagyu school: *The Profound Inner Meaning*, *The Two Chapters of the Hevajra Tantra*, and *The Changeless Nature* (29), and also on the two short authoritative texts (30) of the third Karmapa, the omniscient Rangjung Dorje. He praised me greatly for my keen intellect and my good command of language.

At the age of fifteen, I undertook the summer retreat (31) at Bengen Monastery* in Hor. Before an assembly of hundreds of monks, nuns, and lay people, I spoke on the three ordinations. Because I spoke with no fear at all and with the confidence of a sound understanding, this exposition captured the hearts of everyone. People commented on my clear intellect, good delivery, and accurate presentation.

At the age of sixteen, I entered the three-year, three-month course (32) of practice in the great retreat center at Tsa-dra Rinchen Drak*. This retreat had been the main seat of Jamgon Kongtrul whose coming had been foretold by the Victorious One in many sutras and tantras (33). In this lama, the learned and attained Khyungpo Nalgor* had really returned to the world. Jamgon Kongtrul established the collection of teachings now known as *The Five Great Treasuries*.

At this time, my faith in my lamas and the Dharma and my enthusiasm for practice knew no limit.

Some idea of Rinpoche's enthusiasm for Dharma may be gained from his determination to avoid any waste of time during the three-year retreat. To ensure that he would wake up in the morning, he would go to sleep leaning against the door to his room. When the



H.H. Karmapa XVI



H.H. Dalai Lama XIV



H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche



H.H. Sakya Trichen

monk kicked open the doors to the rooms to wake up the retreatants in the morning, Rinpoche was sent flying across his room. If he felt sleepy during the day, he sat on his window ledge. In this position he would fall onto the floor as soon as he dozed off.

As for his faith, Rinpoche felt such devotion for his teacher, Lama Norbu, that during his life, he offered everything he owned to him on three separate occasions.

During this time, my lama was the highly venerable Norbu Dun-kun Drubpa. He had reached the peaks of experience and realization. From him I received teaching and instruction in innumerable empowerments, scriptural authorizations, and instructions from the Old, New, and Treasure Traditions (34). In particular, he gave me *The Five Golden Doctrines* (35) and other teachings of the great master



Ling Rinpoche



Trijang Rinpoche

Khyungpo, together with instructions and procedures for their practice. All these teachings were given to me in the way that the contents of a full vessel are poured completely into another.

In addition, I studied with many learned and attained masters: Tashi Chopel (secretary to Jamgon Kongtrul), the eleventh



Dingo Khyentse Rinpoche



Pawo Tulku XI

Tai-Situ incarnation, Padma Wangchuk, Palpung Khyentse Shenpen Ozer (the speech emanation of Khyentse Wangpo), Tsabtsa Drubgyu (a senior incarnation at Tsabtsa Monastery in Kham), the fifth Dzokchen Rinpoche (abbot of the major Nyingma monastery in Eastern Tibet), Zhechen Gyaltzab (a senior incarnation at

Zhechen Monastery), Zhechen Kongtrul (the Kongtrul incarnation at Zhechen Monastery), Khyentse Chokyi Lodru (the activity emanation of Khyentse Wangpo), the great and excellent sovereign lord of refuge, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the two tutors of the Dalai Lama (Ling Rinpoche and Trijang Rinpoche), the great and excellent Karmapa in his sixteenth incarnation, the eleventh Pawo, Tsuklak Mawai Wangchuk, Dudjom Rinpoche (present head of the Nyingmapa school), Dingo Khyentse Rinpoche (the mind emanation of Khyentse Wangpo), Kangyur Rinpoche, Chatral Rinpoche Songjay Dorje, Sakya Trichen (head of one of the two principal families of the Sakya School), Dezhung Rinpoche (senior scholar of the Sakya School), and others. With these holy persons as lamas, I con-



Dzhung Rinpoche



Chatral Rinpoche



Kangyer Rinpoche

tinually worked diligently at studying, contemplating, meditating, and practicing innumerable collections of instructions from both the sutras and tantras of the Old and New Traditions. Through my endeavours I became like a spiritual son for more or less all of them.

Although I really have little to offer in the way of stories of the wonderful abilities which come with experience and realization, people who have faith and a pure view towards me have insisted that something be said. In order to avoid simply refusing these requests, I describe some of the good fantasies I have experienced.

In one dream, I went into the private chamber of the previous Jamgon Kongtrul and found Lama Jamgon sitting there. He conferred the full four empowerments (36) on me and then dissolved into me. On another occasion, I dreamt that I had changed into the form of Padmasambhava* and that I brought many of the gods and demons of the immediate region under control and charged them to protect the Doctrine and not to cause problems. On yet another occasion, the twelve mountain goddesses (37) gathered in front of me and introduced themselves one by

one—Men-tsun, Dorje Zeluma, and so on. Clothed in flowing silk raiment and wearing beautiful jewelry, they sang and danced as an offering to me.

On occasions when I had a lot of physical and mental trouble, my identification with yidams such as Hayagriva* gave rise to dream experiences of my subduing many ghosts and demons (38).



Padmasambhava

When I awoke there was some relief from the actual problems as well. Once when I was seriously ill I dreamt that Tara made a prophecy about me, and consequently I triumphed over the obstacles. Sometimes there were dreams of meeting vast assemblies of supreme beings—buddhas, bodhisattvas, the sixteen holy elders (39), and others. In these dreams, I would repeat over and over such prayers of aspiration as *The Aspiration to Noble Activity*, *Nigama's Prayer of Aspiration*, *The Sealed Dedication*, and *The Aspiration for the Pure Land of Bliss*. In other dreams I offered prayers of far-reaching wishes while flying in the sky in circles around numerous mile-high stupas (40) of all the eight different forms. In short, there were many good dreams.

Rinpoche had many other dreams and visions, some of which he has related to other people. One of these was a dream in which he heard a prophetic song about himself while watching a dance in a celestial realm.

First, your country of birth
Was the upper region of Hor.
Then, for your practice,
The holy Dharma of maha-ati,
The uncontrived eternal reservoir
Originally pure, the home of awareness.
Finally, the place of your death,
Samye, the sandy mound.
Afterwards, you will be born
Between Do and Kongbu
As a beggar's son,
And establish countless sentient beings
Beyond the scope of intellect
On the path to freedom.
After that, you will be born
In a lotus flower
In the pure domain, the Realm of Bliss.



Green Tara

At the age of twenty-five I gave up the affairs of ordinary life completely and spent twelve years in intensive retreat practice in caves and other places unfrequented by people. I was content with whatever I had, impartial, and free from temporal concerns. All the offerings which I received from people who had faith in me and all the offerings which people made on behalf of people who had died, I used for spiritual purposes. In view of my way of life, the prayer describes me as being like a king for the way I renounced all worldly activity.

Little is known of Rinpoche's life during these twelve years. He lived in isolated places with little food. Some of these places were completely inaccessible in winter. Gyaltsen, Rinpoche's secretary, visited Rinpoche once when he was young. He remembers Rin-

poche's cave as being little more than a depression in a rock wide open to the north wind which blew constantly. Gyaltzen felt it was a terrible place and was glad to leave after a short time. The idea of staying in such a place for several months was unthinkable.

During these years, Rinpoche would occasionally leave his retreat to visit and consult with his root lama, Norbu Dondrub.

For Rinpoche, this way of life was the most meaningful, and he would gladly have continued to live in the mountains and meditate for the rest of his life. In the end, however, requests from Tai-Situ Padma Wangchuk and Norbu Dondrub forced him to leave the mountains to become the retreat director of Jamgon Kongtrul's retreat center, Kunzang Dechen Osal Ling.

I was friendly with everyone yet had no attachment to anyone. With compassion I cared for all people equally, whether they were friendly, unfriendly, or indifferent to me. All pleasurable experiences I enjoyed without becoming attached to them, regarding them as a vajra feast. For these reasons, I was regarded as a king of contemplatives in this age of turmoil.

One's external discipline is based on the shravaka* vehicle or hinayana. I refrained from immoral behavior by avoiding any action which would harm other beings, directly or indirectly. Internal discipline is based on the bodhisattva vehicle or mahayana. I continuously strove at bodhicitta in order to help others. Mystic discipline is based on the vajrayana. I put into practice the integration of development and completion. Since my intention has always been to fulfill these three commitments, the prayer refers to me as being a vajra-holder (41) with the three ordinations.

Because many great and holy persons such as Khyentse Chokyi Lodru, Zhechen Kongtrul, the great Sixteenth Karmapa, Dzokchen Rinpoche, and others have confirmed that I am definitely a human incarnation of Lodru Taye, Jamgon Vajra Ratna, and other teachers, the prayer refers to me as a holy bodhisattva, a son of the Victorious One.

Although Dzokchen Rinpoche definitely felt that Kalu Rinpoche was an incarnation, he did not mention any particular incarnation lineage. Darjay Gon, a Gelugpa monastery near Rinpoche's home, regarded him as an incarnation of Vajra Ratna, a Shangpa Kagyu master who lived in the nineteenth century and transmitted the Shangpa teachings to Khyentse Wangpo. Other lamas including Zhechen Kongtrul, Dzongsar Khyentse Chokyi Lodru, and His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa, felt that Rinpoche was the activity emanation of Jamgon Lodru Taye.

My love and compassion for all lesser sentient beings have led me to recite the names of buddhas and profoundly sacred phrases (i.e. dharanis and mantras [42]) to all kinds of animals, from larger ones who live on their own down to body parasites such as lice and fleas. From the Spoken and Treasure Traditions have come consecrated medicines which bring about the liberation of any sentient being who tastes them. Also, consecrated sand will bring about the liberation of beings who come into contact with it. By these and other ingenious means, I have set countless millions of birds, fish, insects, and other animals on the path to freedom.

With the wonderful resolve to teach, spread, sustain, and preserve the precious Doctrine of the Victorious One and par-



The Jowo image in Lhasa

ticularly the precious teachings of the Karma Kagyu (43) and Shangpa Kagyu transmissions, I have worked hard in the purest way to make the Doctrine flourish again and to keep the instructions for practice alive in Tibet and its affiliated regions and in India, China, Bhutan, and Sikkim. So the prayer refers to me as an incomparable and excellent guide.

I entrusted the teachings of the Shangpa Kagyu transmission to Kardorje Rinpoche, Lha-tsun Rinpoche and Tok-me Rinpoche, and many other holy persons from Sera Monastery*, and to the noble Mochok Rinpoche of Drepung*, and to many excellent lamas with experience, realization, learning, and attainment from

all the traditions of the Old and New Schools, and to the excellent incarnation Bokar Rinpoche and many other notable people.

At Tak-ten Pun-tsoek Ling, the main seat of the Jonangpa School (44) which was graced with a glorious spiritual and cultural heritage, at the vajra seat of Zhang-Zhung*, the main monastery of Khyung-po Naljor, at Mochokpa's* seats in Lhapa and Nye-Thang, and at many other places, I restored the teachings of the Jonangpa and Shangpa transmissions and carried out great works for the Dharma. Before Jowo and Sakya*, the two great images of Buddha Sakyamuni in Lhasa, before the Great Deity at Tsurpu Monastery* who liberates anyone who sees him, before the Glorious Lord at Rigung*, the Great Maitreya at Tro-pu*, and at Tashi Lhunpo*, Narthang*, and many other great shrines in Central Tibet and Tsang, I expressed my faith and aspirations for the future to my heart's satisfaction. In these ways, I have made my free and well-favored birth meaningful.

When Rinpoche returned to Palpung Monastery, he first resolved a number of administrative problems at the request of Situ Padma Wangchuk. Then he became the retreat director of Kunzang Dechen Osal Ling, the retreat center which Jamgon Kongtrul had founded and where Rinpoche had studied earlier. At that time, the retreat center consisted simply of a number of small houses near a main temple, all in fairly poor condition. Rinpoche reconstructed the retreat center, built proper cells, and expanded the number of units to twenty-five. After several years as the retreat director, Rinpoche left to make a pilgrimage to holy sites in Central



Kalu Rinpoche with H.H. Karmapa

Tibet. During this journey, he visited and restored many sites holy to the Shangpa tradition. In Lhasa he met Situ Padma Wangchuk who asked him to return to direct Jamgon Kongtrul's retreat again and also to take charge of a second retreat facility at Palpung, one which concentrated on the practices of the Karma Kagyu tradition.

When I was fifty, the armies of an irreligious people invaded the frontier and conquered the snowy regions of Tibet. Because of the turmoil of these times and due to the force of my aspirations in previous lives, I travelled to the Holy Country of India. Throughout this land, I taught and spread the Dharma, so the prayer refers to me as a teacher of the noble path to freedom and total knowledge.

I followed closely the guidance of the Sixteenth Holder of the Black Crown, Rangjung Rikpai Dorje, of whom it is difficult to speak (45). His Holiness looked

after me with great love and affection. He gave me the elixir of instructions for maturation and liberation and entrusted me with the care of the precious teachings of the Practice Lineage (46).

In 1955, the political situation in Kham had deteriorated to the point that Rinpoche decided to leave for Central Tibet. In Lhasa, he was received by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and at Tsurpu Monastery by His Holiness the Karmapa. He stayed for approximately one year at Tsurpu where he taught and gave empowerments. Then Karmapa asked him to take charge of Jang-chub-ling, a monastery in eastern Bhutan supported by the Bhutanese royal family. At Jang-chub-ling, he first established two retreat centers and built a large stupa. People in the vicinity felt that these religious activities exerted a noticeable influence in that region, creating an atmosphere of peace and security in what had generally been regarded as a dangerous valley.



The senior lamas of the Karma Kagyu School: clockwise from Kalu Rinpoche—Bokar, Pawo, Gyaltsab, Shamar, H.H. Karmapa, Situ, Kongtrul, Bairo Khyentse

In the Kagyu tradition, there is the well-known and long-established tradition of the Father and Son Victors* who intentionally take form in the world to help beings. Of these great individuals, I looked after Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Rinpoche, and Gyaltsab Rinpoche. I gave them the essential instructions of the Karma Kagyu which come from the traditions of the four teachings (47), heat, illusory-body, dream, and clear light. I instructed them in the path of method, that is, *The Six Teachings of Naropa* and *The Six Teachings of Niguma*, and in the path of liberation, *Mahamudra* (48), as well as in *The Five Golden Teachings*

of the Shangpa tradition and others. In short, I gave them these complete cycles of teachings as one would pour the contents of one vessel into another.

The Excellent Great Guide, Lord of every aspect of the Victor's Doctrine in the snowy regions of Tibet, the Supreme Source of Refuge, His Holiness the Dalai Lama Ten-dzin Gyamtso also took care of me with great love and affection. In his care of me, he gave me the glorious Kalacakra* empowerment and teaching and many other profound and secret instructions. Whatever his wish, I followed it as a command. To many holy people including Dagyal Hortok Thurto Rinpoche, the

abbot of the College of Lower Tantra, Geshe Rabten, the Dalai Lama's chef, valet, and sacristan, the professors of both the College of Lower Tantra and the College of Higher Tantra, the monks of His Holiness' residence and others, I offered empowerments and instructions and taught the procedures for the ritual and practice of the five great tantras, Guhyasamaja, Cakrasamvara, Vajrabhairava, Hevajra, and Mahamaya, and for *The Five Golden Teachings* of the Shangpa tradition,



Dingo Khyentse Rinpoche and Kalu Rinpoche

the thirteen empowerments for the Six-Armed Mahakala, and the empowerments and commentaries for the New Treasure tradition of Vajrakalaya* and others.

In addition, I have offered complete spiritual instructions in maturation and liberation to many holy people, lamas, incarnations, and notable individuals: Jamgon Khyentse Ozer, Khyentse Chokyi Lodru, the sixteenth Karmapa Rangjung Rikpai Dorje, Zhechen Kongtrul Rinpoche, Pawo Rinpoche, Dingo Khyentse, Chatral Songjay Dorje, Dzongsar Khyentse's reincarnation, Sakya Dakchen Rinpoche, Sakya Dezhung Rinpoche, Nyenpa Choktrul, Drongsar Khyentse, Palpung Khyentse, Dsigar Choktrul, Trangu Khenpo, Vajra Master Tenga Rinpoche, Baiyul Rinpoche, Sonam Zangpo, Bokar Rinpoche, Orgyen Tulku's two sons who are both incarnations, and others. These people are all vajra masters, mantra-holders, or spiritual friends of the highest purity and erudition.

Because of these great activities in the teaching, practice, and work of the teachings of all traditions—Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu, and Nyingma—the prayer refers to me as one who carries the light of the Victorious One's Doctrine.



Sonada gate and stupa

In 1962, Rinpoche left Bhutan and came to live in Darjeeling, India. The following year, Trijang Rinpoche (junior tutor to the Dalai Lama) was asked to help with the Dalai Lama's work in Dharamsala in western India. Because he had great confidence in Kalu Rinpoche, Trijang Rinpoche gave him his monastery in Sonada, a small town near Darjeeling. There Rinpoche immediately



Sonada under construction



Trijang Rinpoche



Prayerflags and "billboards," Sonada

began to construct a retreat center. He frequently visited Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim to consult with His Holiness the Karmapa and to teach Shamar, Situ, Kongtrul, and Gyaltshab Rinpoche. During this period he also went to western India where he visited His Holiness the Dalai Lama, gave several series of empowerments including The Treasury of Key Instructions, and started two retreat centers.

With both my actions and material support, I have served and honored the precious Doctrine by studying and teaching its instructions for spiritual understanding and by seeking to experience this understanding myself. I have made offer-



Kagyü Ling, Plaige, France

ings and expressed my wishes in prayer to my heart's satisfaction at many great and holy sites in Sikkim, Bhutan, India, and Nepal, and have set about two hundred members of the Sangha to practice in retreat centers. Hence, the prayer refers to me as the torch of the Doctrine.

A throng of fortunate students speaking different languages and of different nationalities from large and small countries all over the world have gathered around me like swans coming to a lake with water lilies. So the prayer refers to me as one who matures and liberates these many worthy beings.

Travelling through the infinite expanse of the sky, I have journeyed all over the world five times to large and small countries separated by great oceans: Israel, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Britain, the United States of America, Canada, Hawaii, and countries in the Far East including Burma, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan. To all people, men and women of different nationalities and languages, I taught the greater and lesser vehicles, emphasizing the teaching of karma, the relationship



Salt Spring Island, Vancouver, Canada

between actions as causes and their consequences or results. In particular, I placed them in the domain of guidance (49) of the Great Compassionate One, Avalokiteshvara. I placed less fortunate sentient beings in domains of guidance by reciting to them the names of buddhas and other sacred phrases. Hence, the prayer refers to me as a teacher of the sure and noble way to complete and total knowledge.

Many of my students have received and maintain the three ordinations, are embodiments of love and compassion, and are keepers of the Doctrine. To help both the Doctrine and sentient beings, I have dispersed all of them in a hundred directions to countries all over the world. The great banner of the moral code of the ten virtuous actions has been raised to far-reaching heights. A hundred doors have been opened to the practice of gathering the accumulations and clearing away obscurations (50), and the accumulations of merit and pristine cognition have been made to grow. The Dharma has spread over the whole world. Hence, the prayer describes me as one who carries the light of the Victorious One's Doctrine to the darkness of foreign countries.



Pope Paul and Kalu Rinpoche, Rome 1971

Rinpoche left India for his first trip to the West in 1971. He visited several countries in Europe including the Vatican where he had an audience with Pope Paul. After visits to Paris and Samyeeling in Scotland, he came to North America where he spent about nine months teaching at various centers. In the spring of 1972, he established his first center in the West, Kagyu Kunchab Chuling, in Vancouver, Canada. During his second trip in 1974-5, he founded several centers in France and Scandinavia and later in Canada and the United States. During this trip, Rinpoche journeyed to New York expressly to receive

Opening ceremonies for the first three-year retreat for Westerners, France, 1976



Kalachakra Empowerment, San Francisco, 1982

His Holiness Karmapa on his first trip to the West. In 1976 he made his third trip to build and begin the first three-year retreat for his Western students. This retreat was built at one of Rinpoche's centers in France. Afterwards, he revisited Canada and the United States and later made his first trip to Japan and the Far East. In 1980 he returned to France to end the retreat and to start a second one. He also gave the Kalachakra empowerment in Paris. This was the first time this empowerment had been given in Europe. On his next trip in 1982, he visited several countries in Southeast Asia. He then came to North America and started retreat centers in British Columbia and New Hampshire. On the same journey, he gave the Kalachakra empowerment in San Francisco and New York. He then visited centers in Europe and gave the Kalachakra empowerment in Sweden before returning to India.

When I was seventy-nine, I conferred the empowerments and teachings of *The Great Treasury of Precious Treasure Teachings* (51) which brings together in one collection the essential practices of the three classes of inner tantras (52) of the Old

School. This series of empowerments was given to many thousands of faithful students from India, Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, and several Western countries, lamas, incarnations, monks and nuns, and, above all, the crown jewels of the Kagyu Doctrine, the Father and Son Victors: the supreme Lord of Refuge Sharmar Rinpoche, Tai-Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, Gyalsab Rinpoche, and Bairo Khyentse Rinpoche. Consequently, I was described as the torch of the Doctrine of the Great Mystery and as one who unbolts and opens wide the doors to maturation and liberation.

I have come to understand that all phenomena, appearances, sounds, thoughts, and consciousness lack any true existence and are like dreams or enchantments. Everything that I have done in secular or spiritual affairs was done with the sole intention of helping others, and I have sealed my actions with profound prayers of dedication and aspiration to this end. Without exception, the possessions and wealth I have received over the years have been directed to religious purposes. Any relationship I have with someone, whether it be a good, bad, or neutral one, becomes significant since it will be the seed of his or her attainment of higher births and freedom.

In summary, my wish is for my mind to merge with the minds of all my excellent lamas whose kindness is beyond comparison. In my actions I work to fulfill their vision. In my mind, I never waver from the practice of precious bodhicitta and development and completion. Hence, the prayer describes me as a holy son of the Victorious One.



Amitabha's Pure Land of Bliss

We repeat this prayer with the wish that we be one with the holy root and transmission lamas. In the future, through our own wishes and through the blessings of all lamas, may we realize dharmakaya (53) for our own benefit and enjoy the glory of the two form kayas for the benefit of others. At the end of this life, may we immediately be miraculously born in Amitabha's pure land, the Pure Land of Bliss (54), and become great leaders and guides for all sentient beings.



Stupa, Kagyu Ling, France

In summary, with respect to the wheel of reading, listening, and reflecting, I started at an early age and have had more than just an ordinary training in reading, writing, and the comprehension of Dharma. As well, I have completed some two hundred million recitations of various mantras and have participated in and sponsored the practice of the three bases (55) for some sixteen summer retreats in different locations. With respect to the wheel of renunciation and meditation, I planted the banner of practice for some fifteen years. With respect to the wheel of works and activity, I have constructed and restored some fifteen stupas and thirteen

temples. In many different temples, I have offered gifts of brocade and cloth and sponsored the continuous burning of butter lamps. I have offered seven hundred thousand butter lamps in connection with the recitation of *The Aspiration for Noble Conduct*. I have established and led or taught some twenty-one three-year retreat programs and have been the source of encouragement for over three hundred people to do the five hundred thousand preliminary practices. I have organized the construction of two prayer wheels (56), one containing fourteen hundred million Mani's and the other over a hundred million of the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. I have made many hundreds of thousands of images of buddhas and bodhisattvas and miniature stupas. During my life, I have given one sixth of whatever possessions I had to sponsor the carving of the Six Syllables and other mantras on stones. I have provided the means of livelihood for hundreds of ordained monks and nuns and led the practice of fasting and prayer (57) many hundreds of times. In Western countries, I have established some seventy Dharma centers. These are the activities which have engaged me during my life.



AFTERWORD

Since the vajrayana is the path of inspiration and blessing, this account will be useful if it leads to an increase in the faith and devotion of those who have formed a spiritual bond with me by taking empowerment, scriptural authorization, and instruction from me. With this hope I have written this simple collection of a few of the better parts of the little there is to say. In writing this, I have not introduced any fictions and have kept the holy ones before me. That it is in a small way fitting for something like this to be written is due to the kindness of many holy individuals and many holy lamas who have each followed a life to freedom without others knowing. In particular, it is due to my own root lama, the holy Norbu Don-kun Drubpa.

This holy person dismissed all concerns with secular affairs and took ordination at an early age. He served the Doctrine immersed simultaneously in spiritual practice and studies. From the age of forty until he passed away, he stayed continuously in restricted seclusion in a mountain retreat called Nyima Kargo. By the age of seventy, he had eradicated all clinging to the characteristics of ordinary appearances. His experience in meditation had combined completely with his experience of the world. His mind melted into the realm of totality when he was seventy-four and his corpse turned into the body of an eight-year-old boy. When the mandala ceremonies of the four great tantras (58) were performed while his body was cremated, rainbows spread in intricate patterns in the sky for the whole day and innumerable bones and relics of different colors were recovered from the fire. Indeed, it



Receiving the Dalai Lama at Sonada, 1972

was clear from these signs that he had realized the great stage of no-meditation of the Mahamudra tradition or, in the Maha-ati tradition, the great stage of the end of the experience of pure being, the transcendence of mind.

I respected my holy teachers, and, hoping and wishing to follow their lives to freedom, I never wanted to take charge of a monastic complex. Rather, I wished to be free of the biases and priorities that come with involvement in temporal matters. Nevertheless, I often pondered the idea of there being a place for practice for the sangha in this period when the Doctrine of the Victorious One is encounter-



H.H. Karmapa and H.H. Dalai Lama

ing so many difficulties. The Lord of the Universe, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's advice to me for the future came at an opportune time. With an incomparable concern to help the teachings of all schools, the lord of refuge, tutor to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Trijang Rinpoche most graciously gave me the monastery and attached properties at Sonada in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. His Holiness Karmapa gave his consent with great pleasure, and when I was actually taking charge of this property, the lord of refuge, Dudjom Rinpoche, gave it the name the Kagyu Monastery where Merit Flourishes (59), along with a scarf of fine white silk and a sum of money as portents of good fortune. Dingo Khyentse Rinpoche gave encouragement, saying that since the location came in fact from the dance and play of the enlightened activity of Mahakala, the Lord of Pristine Cognition, the Victorious One's Doctrine would flourish there. Out of his warm love, Chatral Rinpoche Sangjay Dorje performed the rituals for taking over and subduing the land. Before I had even arrived in this area,

Khyentse Chokyi Lodru had given a name to this place in a prophecy, calling it Samdrup Tarjeuling (the Monastery of Growth and Fulfillment). Relying on the occurrence of these and other excellent portents of good fortune, I took charge of this monastic complex some sixteen years ago.

During this time, a monastery has been developed in which anyone who wishes to enter as a young or new monk, and any member of the sangha of the Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu, or Nyingma schools who wishes to stay here may do so. The full retreat program has been held four times for monks and one time for nuns, and the summer retreat has taken place regularly for sixteen years. In addition, there have come to be many lamas who are able to help beings by teaching, spreading, maintaining, and preserving the Dharma in many countries in the world. I feel that there will still be many more who will train and study in the Dharma and work and meditate on it here.

Throughout India and Tibet there have appeared innumerable masters of great

learning and attainment, bodhisattvas who have attained high levels of spiritual realization. Thousands of millions of emanations have come through their powers and miracles and have worked in enlightened ways for the benefit of beings, guiding each being in a way suited to him or her. This infinite enlightened activity is beyond the scope of the intellect. How can it be measured?

As a teacher, an ordinary person with a good education and ordination, I travelled to many countries lying in the great oceans which cover the world. Some were countries to which the sun's rays of the Holy Dharma had already spread. Others were countries unenlightened owing to the absence of Dharma there. The Wheel of Dharma was turned and places for study and practice were established in many large countries which, separated in-

to different areas of activity by the great oceans, have their own languages and alphabets: India, China, Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, and other countries in the Eastern Hemisphere, and in the Western Hemisphere from Germany in the east to America in the west and from Greece in the south to Norway and Sweden in the north.

This infinite expansion of enlightening activity has made the sutra and tantra traditions of the Victorious One's Doctrine shine like the sun. This is something extraordinarily magnificent: nothing like it has happened before on the face of the earth. However, all these things have taken place only through the inspiration and blessing of my lamas and the Three Jewels—never has there been the slightest feeling of pride or self-importance on my part.



Supervising construction at Sonada, 1981

ADVICE TO MY STUDENTS

For all those people who, in knowing about me and my life, wish to follow the life to freedom of their lama, I say these few words.

Because all of us are followers of the benevolent Buddha, we should, in our actions, words, and thoughts, refrain from all non-virtuous and unwholesome actions to the best of our ability, and we should work at virtuous activities as much as we can. All beings of the six kinds (60) are our kind parents and have for ages experienced the whole range of suffering and frustration in samsara. For these beings we should cultivate love and compassion and precious bodhicitta. We should constantly meditate on taking and sending (61) and recite enthusiastically prayers of far-reaching aspirations to complete the realization of all facets of buddhahood, to create and refine domains of enlightenment, and to ripen beings spiritually. With the understanding that our kind and holy lama is the actuality of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots, we should pray intensely to him, imagining that he rests on our head or in our heart, and, when we have finished praying, practice merging our mind with his.

We should take Avalokiteshvara (Chenrazi) as our yidam. This practice was taught by the Buddha in many sutras and tantras. It has been the practice of many learned and attained masters in India and Tibet. It is easy yet very beneficial. We should recite the Six-Syllable Mantra constantly, reciting it with the mind clear, empty, unceasingly aware, free from reference, free from clinging, and free from distraction.



The Six-Syllable Mantra

All phenomena, the appearances of confusion which arise around us, are, in terms of their essential nature, without independent reality. In terms of the way they are perceived, they comprise the different experiences of happiness and suffering. They are, by nature, impermanent. These varied, confused appearances constitute the basis from which the whole range of suffering in samsara develops. From our understanding that all these phenomena are, in the end, like the appearances which arise in a dream or under an enchantment, our clinging and attachment to fixed notions of reality will diminish.

In general, the aim of all spiritual traditions, Buddhist or other, is twofold: immediately, to provide refuge from the lower realms and to set beings on the path to the higher realms (62); and, ultimately, to provide refuge from all the sufferings of samsara and to set beings on the path to freedom. Since all these traditions come from the enlightened activity of buddha



Jetsun Milarepa

manifesting in ways which are suited to the nature of the individuals to be guided, we should have faith in them all.

In particular, all Dharma which came to the snowy land of Tibet—the teachings of the Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu, and Nyingma schools—was taught by the Lord Buddha in the sutras and tantras. It is complete and free of errors. In these traditions, the lineage of attained masters is unbroken. Their power and blessings have not diminished and continue to be transmitted. Their instructions on ultimate truth do not miss the essential points. Their philosophical views on the nature of reality pro-

vide a sound basis for practice. Their methods of meditation for liberating one from confusion form a sure path. The elixir of their spiritual instructions has not lost its potency. Emanations of many masters with learning and attainment, great bodhisattvas who have reached various levels of spiritual realization, have appeared in each of these traditions. There have also been countless persons like the great Jetsun Milarepa* who have realized the capabilities which mark the progression of attainment. Each collection of their spiritual instructions consists only of profound teachings which are able to

carry the individual to buddhahood.

Therefore, we should avoid being fanatical, hostile, or cynical about any of these traditions and train ourselves to have respect, reverence, and a sacred regard for them all. We should practice the tradition we feel most drawn to because of the relationships we have formed in former lives. Whichever tradition we follow, the most important point is to bring our practice to completion.

In summary, to follow the lama's life to freedom, we should always foster these qualities: renunciation born from an



Vajradhara

understanding that samsara is suffering; lucid, intentional, and confident faith in the Three Jewels; devotion and respect for our lama as being fully enlightened, a buddha; compassion for all sentient beings from the knowledge that they are all our parents; a way of living in which the two accumulations increase together; the development phase in which appearances and sounds are experienced as deities and mantras; the completion phase in which natural awareness is maintained without manipulation; virtuous action which puts an end to rampant desires and self-importance; comportment which avoids unwholesomeness like poison; faith which avoids sectarian attachment and hostility; and help to beings which places anyone with whom we have some contact on the path to freedom. If we adhere to all these points and follow the lama's life to freedom, the free and well-favored precious human existence which we have obtained becomes meaningful, the intentions of our lamas are fulfilled, the kindness of our parents is repaid, and the benefits for both others and ourselves will be fully realized.





COLOPHON

Because of his sacred appreciation of all traditions, the holy Kadorje Rinpoche of Sera asked me to give him many teachings. He received from me a large number of empowerments, scriptural authorizations, and instructions including the complete cycle of teachings of the Shangpa Kagyu, the complete collection of instructions of the Jonangpa and Shangpa traditions, and many cycles of teachings of the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions. On this occasion he said that he needed a prayer based on my life and earnestly requested me to write one. In response, I composed the first section of this prayer with the feeling of being undifferentiated from the great pristine cognition of the minds of the lamas of former times.

The second part was requested by the excellent incarnation Bokar Rinpoche in the priceless palace which contains *The Five Treasuries*, Shedrup Gatsal Ling, the great meditation center of Samdup Tarjeyling Monastery also called Sonamdar Kagyu Monastery. In the second year of the second of the two three-year retreats which he completed here, he repeatedly requested such an addition, saying: Since the spiritual offspring of you, my lama, have now spread to large and small countries throughout the world, there is need for a prayer with a more complete account of your life so that these students may have a basis for the birth of faith and conviction in their lama and the Dharma. For this reason, I, Karma Rangjung Kunchab, composed this account in prayer form in my eightieth year with the intention of helping the Doctrine.