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MAHĀMUDRĀ
AND RELATED
INSTRUCTIONS

CORE TEACHINGS OF
THE KAGYŪ SCHOOLS

Translated by Peter Alan Roberts

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MAHĀMUDRĀ AND RELATED INSTRUCTIONS
Core Teachings of the Kagyü Schools

The Library of Tibetan Classics is a special series being developed by the Institute of Tibetan Classics aimed at making key classical Tibetan texts part of the global literary and intellectual heritage. Eventually comprising thirty-two large volumes, the collection will contain over two hundred distinct texts by more than a hundred of the best-known authors. These texts have been selected in consultation with the preeminent lineage holders of all the schools and other senior Tibetan scholars to represent the Tibetan literary tradition as a whole. The works included in the series span more than a millennium and cover the vast expanse of classical Tibetan knowledge—from the core teachings of the specific schools to such diverse fields as ethics, philosophy, linguistics, medicine, astronomy and astrology, folklore, and historiography.

Mahāmudrā and Related Instructions: Core Teachings of the Kagyü Schools
Compiled by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

The Kagyü tradition began in Tibet in the eleventh century and developed into numerous lineages. Their characteristic teachings are the mahāmudrā tradition of stability and insight meditation and the six Dharmas of Nāropa. Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, the principal scholar of the Karma Kagyü school, chose the eleven texts for this volume. The selection consists of a twelfth-century compilation of lectures by Gampopa, the founder of the Kagyü monastic tradition; an eleventh-century mahāmudrā text by Lama Shang and a thirteenth-century text on the mahāmudrā and its preliminaries by Shönu Lha, both of the Tsalpa Kagyü; a collection of four thirteenth-century texts, principally by Sherap Jungné, representing the viewpoints of the founder of the Drigung Kagyü; two short fourteenth-century texts on mahāmudrā by the Third Karmapa of the Karma Kagyü; a sixteenth-century overview of the tantric tradition by Tashi Namgyal of the Dakpo Kagyü; a sixteenth-century text on mahāmudrā by Tashi Namgyal's pupil Pema Karpo, who as the Fourth Drukchen was head of the Drukpa Kagyü; a seventeenth-century text on the six Dharmas of Nāropa by Shamar Chökyi Wangchuk of the Karma Kagyü; a seventeenth-century mahāmudrā text by Tselé Natsok Rangdröl of the Karma Kagyü; and an eighteenth-century commentary on one of the Third Karmapa's mahāmudrā texts by Situ Tenpai Nyinjé of the Karma Kagyü.

THE LIBRARY OF TIBETAN CLASSICS ♦ VOLUME 5

Thupten Jinpa, General Editor

MAHĀMUDRĀ AND RELATED INSTRUCTIONS

Core Teachings of the Kagyü Schools

Translated by Peter Alan Roberts



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Message from the Dalai Lama

THE LAST TWO millennia witnessed a tremendous proliferation of cultural and literary development in Tibet, the “Land of Snows.” Moreover, due to the inestimable contributions made by Tibet’s early spiritual kings, numerous Tibetan translators, and many great Indian paṇḍitas over a period of so many centuries, the teachings of the Buddha and the scholastic tradition of ancient India’s Nālandā monastic university became firmly rooted in Tibet. As evidenced from the historical writings, this flowering of Buddhist tradition in the country brought about the fulfillment of the deep spiritual aspirations of countless sentient beings. In particular, it contributed to the inner peace and tranquility of the peoples of Tibet, Outer Mongolia—a country historically suffused with Tibetan Buddhism and its culture—the Tuva and Kalmuk regions in present-day Russia, the outer regions of mainland China, and the entire trans-Himalayan areas on the southern side, including Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, Kinnaur, and Spiti. Today this tradition of Buddhism has the potential to make significant contributions to the welfare of the entire human family. I have no doubt that, when combined with the methods and insights of modern science, the Tibetan Buddhist cultural heritage and knowledge will help foster a more enlightened and compassionate human society, a humanity that is at peace with itself, with fellow sentient beings, and with the natural world at large.

It is for this reason I am delighted that the Institute of Tibetan Classics in Montreal, Canada, is compiling a thirty-two-volume series containing the works of many great Tibetan teachers, philosophers, scholars, and practitioners representing all major Tibetan schools and traditions. These important writings will be critically edited and annotated and will then be published in modern book format in a reference collection called *The Library of Tibetan Classics*, with their translations into other major languages to follow later. While expressing my heartfelt commendation for this noble project, I pray and hope that *The Library of Tibetan Classics* will not only make these

important Tibetan treatises accessible to scholars of Tibetan studies, but will create a new opportunity for younger Tibetans to study and take interest in their own rich and profound culture. Through translations into other languages, it is my sincere hope that millions of fellow citizens of the wider human family will also be able to share in the joy of engaging with Tibet's classical literary heritage, textual riches that have been such a great source of joy and inspiration to me personally for so long.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tenzin Gyatso', written in a fluid, cursive style.

The Dalai Lama
The Buddhist monk Tenzin Gyatso



Special Acknowledgments

THE INSTITUTE OF TIBETAN CLASSICS expresses its deep gratitude to the Tsadra Foundation for most generously providing the entire funding for this translation project. This is first of the ten volumes being sponsored by Tsadra Foundation from *The Library of Tibetan Classics*.

We also acknowledge the Hershey Family Foundation for its generous support of the Institute of Tibetan Classics' projects of compiling, editing, translating, and disseminating key classical Tibetan texts through the creation of *The Library of Tibetan Classics*.



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WISDOM PUBLICATIONS and THE INSTITUTE OF TIBETAN CLASSICS would like to express their deep appreciation to the Ing Foundation and Ms. Nita Ing for their generous grant toward the publication costs of this volume, and to Drs. Mordehai and Hanna Wosk and family for underwriting the printing and distribution of significant copies of the volume to be offered to various Tibetan institutions and community associations across the world, as well as to selected university libraries in Canada and the United States.

The Publisher also wishes to extend a heartfelt thanks to the following people, who by subscribing to *The Library of Tibetan Classics* have become benefactors of this entire translation series: Tenzin Dorjee, Rick Meeker Hayman, Steven D. Hearst, Heidi Kaiter, Arnold Possick, the Randall-Gonzales Family Foundation, Jonathan and Diana Rose, the Tibetisches Zentrum e.V. Hamburg, Claudia Wellnitz, Robert White, and Eva and Jeff Wild.



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Foreword

by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

FOR THIS VOLUME, I have selected key classical Tibetan texts from the Kagyü tradition to present the tradition's core teachings. Today, I am happy to see this special anthology of Dakpo Kagyü texts published in English translation as part of *The Library of Tibetan Classics*, a series envisioned by Thupten Jinpa, the principal English translator to His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. These teachings are intended to create experiences and realizations in the mind. They contain two kinds of instructions: those that engage with the essential points of the body and those that engage with the essential points of the mind.

Engaging with the essential points of the body is accomplished through the stationary channels, the moving winds, and so on. These instructions for attaining buddhahood are the *path of methods*, which is comprised of the six Dharmas of Nāropa, such as caṅḍālī and the illusory body. The teachings of the six Dharmas are based upon the Guhyasamāja, Mahāmāyā, Hevajra, Cakrasaṃvara, and *Four Seats* tantras. These six Dharmas constitute the ultimate completion-stage practice for all highest yoga tantras, especially the nondual tantras.

The instructions for attaining buddhahood in one lifetime and in one body through engaging with the essential points of the mind are the *path of liberation*, which is comprised of the profound mahāmudrā instructions. The teachings on mahāmudrā explain that there is no stain whatsoever to be removed from the luminous nature of the mind and no additional quality that needs to be created in it. There are both sutra and tantra traditions of mahāmudrā. The former is meditation on luminosity free from conceptual elaboration, while the tantra tradition's mahāmudrā is the accomplishment of the unity of bliss and emptiness. The Dakpo Kagyü tradition is an uninterrupted lineage—sustained until the present—of the stainless realization of mahāmudrā.

The compilation in this volume of the instructions for both the path of

methods and the path of liberation will definitely be of great benefit to Buddhist practitioners and also to researchers, facilitating the accurate completion of their research. I both pray and am certain that this will be so.

This was written spontaneously in Rishipattana Deer Park by the one who was given the name Thrangu Tulku.

May goodness flourish!

Thrangu Rinpoche
Varanasi



General Editor's Preface

THE PUBLICATION of this volume marks an important milestone in making key classical Tibetan texts available in contemporary languages. This volume, *Mahāmudrā and Related Instructions: Core Teachings of the Kagyü Schools*, which is volume 5 of *The Library of Tibetan Classics*, brings into the world's literary heritage a collection of a very special genre of spiritual writings of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Compiled by the Most Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoché, a senior master of the Kagyü school, the texts featured in this anthology present the heart of the meditative tradition of the Kagyü school. Distilled in these translations are the insights and instructions of the Tibetan spiritual lineage of such great luminaries as Marpa Lotsāwa, Milarepa, and Gampopa, a school that is acclaimed for its profound and rich meditative practices. It is with both joy and honor that the Institute of Tibetan Classics offers the translation of these precious Tibetan texts to the contemporary reader, especially to those who seek to engage deeply with the Tibetan tradition and its wisdom.

Two primary objectives have driven the creation and development of *The Library of Tibetan Classics*. The first aim is to help revitalize the appreciation and the study of the Tibetan classical heritage within Tibetan-speaking communities worldwide. The younger generation in particular struggle with the tension between traditional Tibetan culture and the realities of modern consumerism. To this end, efforts have been made to develop a comprehensive yet manageable body of texts, one that features the works of Tibet's best-known authors and covers the gamut of classical Tibetan knowledge. The second objective of *The Library of Tibetan Classics* is to help make these texts part of global literary and intellectual heritage. In this regard, we have tried to make the English translation reader-friendly and, as much as possible, keep the body of the text free of unnecessary scholarly apparatus, which can intimidate general readers. For specialists who wish to compare the

translation with the Tibetan original, page references of the critical edition of the Tibetan text are provided in brackets.

The texts in this thirty-two-volume series span more than a millennium—from the development of the Tibetan script in the seventh century to the first part of the twentieth century, when Tibetan society and culture first encountered industrial modernity. The volumes are thematically organized and cover many of the categories of classical Tibetan knowledge—from the teachings specific to each Tibetan school to the classical works on philosophy, psychology, and phenomenology. The first category includes teachings of the Kadam, Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyü, Geluk, and Jonang schools, of miscellaneous Buddhist lineages, and of the Bön school. Texts in these volumes have been largely selected by senior lineage holders of the individual schools. Texts in the other categories have been selected primarily in recognition of the historical reality of the individual disciplines. For example, in the field of epistemology, works from the Sakya and Geluk schools have been selected, while the volume on buddha nature features the writings of Butön Rinchen Drup and various Kagyü masters. Where fields are of more common interest, such as the three codes or the bodhisattva ideal, efforts have been made to represent the perspectives of all four major Tibetan Buddhist schools. *The Library of Tibetan Classics* can function as a comprehensive library of the Tibetan literary heritage for libraries, educational and cultural institutions, and interested individuals.

It has been a profound honor for me to be part of this important translation project. I wish first of all to express my deep personal gratitude to H. H. the Dalai Lama for always being such a profound source of inspiration. I would also like to offer my sincere thanks to Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoché for his being such an exemplary representative of the Kagyü tradition, for his selection of the texts featured in this volume, and for providing a special foreword to this translation as well as contributing an introductory essay to the original Tibetan edition of the volume. I thank Peter Alan Roberts for his masterful translation of these precious Tibetan texts into English with such care, respect, and scholarly refinement. To the following individuals and organizations, I owe my sincere thanks: to David Kittelstrom at Wisdom for his incisive editing; to Gene Smith at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center for providing assistance with obtaining crucial Tibetan texts needed for the editing of the Tibetan texts; to the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, for proving full access to its library to the Tibetan editors working on the critical editing of these texts; and to my wife Sophie Boyer-

Langri for taking on the numerous administrative chores that are part of a collaborative project such as this.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Tsadra Foundation, who most generously provided the entire funding for this translation project. Without this support, no amount of dedication on the part of the Institute or the depth of talent and skill on the part of the translator would have resulted in such successful conclusion of the project. In particular, I would like to express my personal admiration of Eric Colombel for the profound vision and the deep dedication to the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition that underlie the mission of Tsadra Foundation. I would also like to thank the Hershey Family Foundation for its longstanding support of the Institute of Tibetan Classics, without which the task of creating *The Library of Tibetan Classics* simply would not have gotten off the ground. It is my sincere hope that the translations offered in this volume will be of benefit to many people. Through the efforts of all those who have been involved in this noble venture, may all beings enjoy peace and happiness.

Thupten Jinpa
Montreal, 2010



Translator's Introduction

THE KAGYÜ SCHOOL of Tibetan Buddhism has its origins in the eleventh century, a time when individuals went to India in search of teachings unavailable in Tibet. Buddhism had been introduced into Tibet four centuries earlier under royal auspices, and the schools that originated later were known as *Sarma*, “new,” to distinguish them from the *Nyingma*, or “old,” tradition. Among the numerous Tibetan translators and teachers of that time, the Kagyü meditator Milarepa is perhaps the most famous, and his biography and songs remain popular today. Three feature films have even been made about him recently—in India, Bhutan, and Tibet. His life of simplicity and austerity completely dedicated to meditation is a touchstone for a school that emphasizes meditation practice over scholarship. He is the peerless exemplar of reaching buddhahood in a single lifetime through only guru devotion and dedication to meditation, without any formal studies.

Nevertheless, although the Kagyü is based upon the teachings of a non-monastic meditator, it became a monastic tradition in the twelfth century through the efforts of Milarepa's pupil, Gampopa, the first author represented in this compilation. Since Gampopa's founding of the first Kagyü monastery, the Kagyü tradition has seen a proliferation of subschools, most of which now have a limited or minimal existence. The Karma Kagyü, now the most popular Kagyü tradition in both Eastern countries and in the West, originated with a pupil of Gampopa who became, retrospectively, the First Karmapa, and the Karmapa lineage was the first line of transmission in Tibet based on identifying the reincarnation of its principal lama. Various Kagyü factions competed for secular rule of Tibet via the Phakmodru and Rinpung dynasties beginning in the fourteenth century, and by the sixteenth century the Karma Kagyü school dominated Central Tibet.¹ It was eclipsed by the rise to power of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the middle of the seventeenth century, but it continued to have a strong following in the eastern regions of the Tibetan plateau. Another one of our authors,

the eighteenth-century Karma Kagyü hierarch Situ Tenpai Nyinje, built Palpung Monastery in the eastern kingdom of Dergé with royal patronage, and although Tsurphu Monastery in Central Tibet was the official center for the Karma Kagyü, Palpung became the most important of its monasteries as a result of the teaching and meditation practice that took place there.

Situ Tenpai Nyinje's successor, the Ninth Tai Situ, established the tradition of the three-year retreats, in which the deities Cakrasamvara and Vajravārāhī in particular are practiced and the six Dharmas of Nāropa may be mastered. These practices together with mahāmudrā meditation represent the ancient core of advanced Kagyü practice. In the last few decades hundreds of Westerners have accomplished the Kagyü three-year retreats in centers established in Europe and North America. Every Kagyü monastery of note has a *khenpo*, who is the head of scholastic studies, and a monastic college called a *shedra*, in which there is an intensive program of study for many years. But the heart of the Kagyü monastery is in its retreat centers, where one finds not only shedra graduates but also monks who become lamas without undergoing intensive scholastic training.

Palpung was also the seat of the polymath Jamgön Kongtrül (1813–99), the nonsectarian author and editor of numerous volumes that have had enormous impact in both the study and practice of the Karma Kagyü.² Because of the Kagyü emphasis on meditation over scholarship, the Kagyü lineage before Jamgön Kongtrül did not have an extensive literature. The literature that did exist is well represented by the works included in the present volume, teachings in which study is clearly unified with, and at the service of, meditation practice.

Kagyü Origins

The Kagyü tradition inherited the higher yoga tantric tradition that had become widespread in northern India in the closing centuries of the first millennium, particularly those tantras known as the *yoginī tantras* or, more commonly in Tibet, the *mother tantras*. This esoteric Buddhism was quite different from the Buddhism that was preserved in the Pali Canon. Transformed by the Mahayana ideal, Buddhist philosophical scholasticism, and tantra's antinomianism, the Indian Buddhism inherited by the Kagyü school had undergone an astonishing process of evolution and assimilation since the lifetime of Siddhartha Gautama in the fifth century B.C.E.

The Buddha himself did not found his religion in a vacuum; he had assimilated and transformed the religious traditions he was born into, including the very titles *buddha* and *muni*, the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*'s championing of the nontraditional practice of abandoning the lay life at a young age in order to overcome ignorance and attain liberation from *samsara* (itself a pre-Buddhist term), and the lifestyle of a shaven-headed renunciate with yellow robes known as a *bhikṣu*, already a venerable tradition.

Nevertheless, the Buddha's teachings were revolutionary in many aspects, and they proved also a fertile ground for later development of views and practices. Buddhist canonical literature enlarged to many times its original size as accomplished masters received, through meditation and vision, sutras and tantras that had not been previously divulged into the human world. This diverse and remarkable evolution and often bewilderingly rich array of teachings culminated in the Indian *siddhas*, practitioners of the mother tantras. Their views, practices, and conduct may seem far removed from those of the founder of their religion, yet they retained the essence of the original liberating message. This combination of both continuity and innovation within this ancient tradition—now almost a thousand years since the first beginnings of the Kagyü tradition in Tibet and two and a half millennia since the Buddha's lifetime—are clearly testified in the teachings compiled in this book.

The Kagyü school is one of seven religious traditions of Tibetan Buddhism that continue today as independent organizations; the other six are the Nyingma, Bön, Sakya, Geluk, Jonang, and Bodong.³ Of the antecedents to the Tibetan schools in India, there is no precedent in terms of exclusive institutions, for in India the transmissions of Buddhist practices were primarily between individual gurus and their personal pupils and not specifically identified with formal organizations such as the great monasteries.⁴ These large sectarian organizations encompassing a variety of transmission lineages became more solidified in Tibet once secular rule became the province of religious institutions headed by reincarnate lamas, and lineages vied with one another not just for adherents but for political influence and the resources of the state.

The term Kagyü as the name of a school is said to have originated as a shortened form of *kabap shiyi gyü*, which means the "lineage of four instruction transmissions."⁵ This refers to the teachings compiled by the tenth-century Bengali now generally known as Tilopa (these four transmissions are discussed in the next section). Tilopa's Indian pupil, Nāropa, became the teacher of the Tibetan translator and tantric master Marpa

Chökyi Lodrö, who in the eleventh century introduced many of Nāropa's teachings into Tibet. All Kagyü schools, extant and extinct, trace their origin to Marpa Chökyi Lodrö, and therefore Marpa Kagyü is sometimes used as a generic term for all Kagyü lineages. Marpa in turn became the teacher of Milarepa.

Of the more than fifteen Kagyü lineages that have appeared since the eleventh century, those that currently survive as major independent schools are the Karma Kagyü, Drukpa Kagyü, and Drigung Kagyü. The Barom Kagyü has over a dozen monasteries in Golok, a region in the northeast of the Tibetan plateau, and most of the other lineages have a small but continuing existence. There are also the Surmang Kagyü and Nedo Kagyü, though they in practice function as a subschool within the Karma Kagyü.⁶ The Shangpa Kagyü is technically a distinct, separate lineage from the Marpa Kagyü traditions. Nevertheless, while it can be classified as a school in its own right, it is currently primarily preserved as a lineage of practices within the Karma Kagyü tradition. Volume 8 in this series will feature teachings of the Shangpa school.

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, the principal scholar in the Karma Kagyü tradition, chose the eleven texts that comprise this volume. This volume therefore primarily represents a Karma Kagyü perspective and usage, with five texts from authors of importance within that lineage. The Dakpo Kagyü is a general term for all the lineages that derive from Gampopa, also known as Dakpo Lhajé, but also refers to his own specific lineage. This lineage is represented by a compilation of lectures by Gampopa himself and by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal, the abbot of Gampopa's monastery four centuries later. The works of both authors are studied in the Karma Kagyü as well. The Drukpa Kagyü is represented by a short mahāmudrā text by Pema Karpo that is nonetheless used for instruction by Karma Kagyü teachers. The Drigung Kagyü is represented by Sherap Jungné's *Single Viewpoint* and three associated texts, which codify the viewpoints of Jikten Sumgön, the founder of the Drigung lineage. Two texts from the Tsalpa Kagyü, a lineage that no longer exists, are also included. These Drigung and Tsalpa Kagyü texts are included within Jamgön Kongtrül's *Treasury of Instructions*. The other lineages, such as the Barom Kagyü and Taklung Kagyü, are not represented.

A Syncretic Tradition

The four transmissions that Tilopa received and passed on as a single transmission are said to be:

1. Cāryapa's instructions on *caṅḍālī* (see below)
2. Siddha Nāgārjuna's instructions on illusory body (*māyākāya*) and luminosity (*prabhāsvara*)⁷
3. Kambala's instructions on dreams (*svapna*)
4. Sukhasiddhi's instructions on the *bardo* (*antarābhava*)⁸ and transference of consciousness into another body (*purapraveśa*)⁹

Tilopa briefly described these six practices in a short verse text entitled *Instructions on the Six Dharmas*.¹⁰ In Tibet these practices became known as the *six Dharmas of Nāropa*. In English they became known as the six *yogas* of Nāropa through their being first translated in 1935 by Evans-Wentz in *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, even though Evans-Wentz only referred to them as “six doctrines,” which is the equivalent of six Dharmas.¹¹ The term *yoga* (*sbyor ba*) is never used for this set of practices in Tibetan, and they should not be confused with the Kālacakra tradition's group of six practices that *are* called *yogas*.

The six Dharmas of Nāropa are intended solely for advanced practitioners and are normally taught within a three-year retreat. In this volume they are the subject of Shamar Chökyi Wangchuk's text, the *Quintessence of Nectar*. They are also described in Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's overview of the tantras, *Light Rays from the Jewel of the Excellent Teaching*.¹²

Many teachings and practices of the Kagyü school, however, originally came from other Tibetan schools. The monastic Kagyü practitioner follows a tradition of ordination derived from the Kadam tradition, which formed in the eleventh century based on the teachings of the Indian paṇḍita Atiśa (982–1054), who spent his final years in Tibet. Kagyü scholastic studies have origins in both the Kadam and other traditions. For example, the distinctive *empty of other* (*gzhan stong*) philosophy¹³ that is particularly propounded within the Karma Kagyü is derived from the Jonang school. The Jonang also provided the Kālacakra practices. Mind training (*blo sbyong*) and White Tārā come from the Kadampas, and the *severance* (*gcod*) practices come from the lineage of that name. Practices of deities such as Green Tārā, Avalokiteśvara, Vajrakīlaya, and various guru yogas of Padmasambhava were introduced from the Nyingma school. Some Nyingma *tertöns* (who by various methods reveal or discover *terma*: teachings, ritual objects, and relics), such as Jatsön Nyingpo (1585–1656) and Yongé Mingyur Dorjé (1628/41–1708), were closely affiliated with the Kagyü. The *terma* of Namchö Mingyur Dorjé (1645–67), which form the basis of the Palyül Nyingma lineage,

also supplied the Kagyü with such deity practices as Amitābha and Bhaiṣajya Guru (Medicine Buddha).

There are also terma from within the Kagyü tradition itself. For example, the founder of the Drukpa Kagyü school, Tsangpa Gyaré (1161–1211), revealed a terma concealed by Rechungpa, one of the Kagyü's earliest masters, that became of central importance to the lineage. Of great importance in the Drigung Kagyü school are the termas of Rinchen Phüntsoḳ (1509–57) and Drigung Nüden Dorjé (1801–59).

Thus, although the Kagyü identity is that of a lineage of instructions descended from Marpa Chökyi Lodrö, the majority of common Kagyü practices are derived from other lineages. Much of Marpa's own transmission, such as Mahāmāyā and Buddhakapāla, have fallen into disuse and are only nominally maintained as a ritual transmission of their empowerments. Certain higher tantra practices introduced by Marpa, however, continue to be the central practices for advanced Kagyü practitioners and form the main part of the traditional three-year retreats.

The Quintessential Kagyü Practices

The advanced higher tantra practices that do derive from Marpa—and that could therefore be said to form the core of the Kagyü identity—appeared in India between the eighth and tenth centuries. They were among a small group of tantras that have been variously named *yoginī tantras*, *mother tantras*, *higher yoga (yogottara) tantras*, and *none-higher* or *unsurpassable yoga (yogānuttara) tantras*, which in English are usually referred to as the *highest yoga tantras*.¹⁴ For the Kagyü, the most important of these are the Cakrasaṃvara tantras. It is taught that the deity Cakrasaṃvara originates from a Heruka who defeated Śiva and assumed his form, retains, and sacred sites. He is a blue deity in sexual union with the red goddess Vajravārāhī. The original Indian tantric texts play only a small role in contemporary Kagyü study and practice, as advanced Kagyü practitioners of Cakrasaṃvara or Vajravārāhī focus primarily on meditation texts of Tibetan origin. For the Karma Kagyü, Vajravārāhī is the principal deity, holding Cakrasaṃvara in the form of a *khaṭvāṅga* scepter in the crook of her arm.¹⁵

According to the Tibetan view, the practices derived from the higher tantras are classified into two groups—the *stage of generation* and the *stage of completion*.¹⁶ The generation stage entails the visualization of oneself as the deity within a divine palace. The deity is called the *yi dam*, or “commitment

deity,” in Tibetan and *īstadevatā*, or “chosen deity,” in Sanskrit. The practice consists primarily of mantra repetition and a variety of chants, offerings, and visualizations. The practitioner’s habituation to the “pure perception” of the deity and the environs is intended to eliminate habituation to ordinary perception and reveal the intrinsic purity of all mental and physical phenomena.¹⁷

The Kagyü school divides the completion stage into two kinds of practice: the path of methods and the path of liberation. The *path of methods* consists especially of the six Dharmas of Nāropa mentioned above, and the *path of liberation* is primarily the practice of mahāmudrā, the main subject of the present volume.

The Six Dharmas of Nāropa

The principal practice among the six Dharmas of Nāropa is *caṇḍālī*. The primary, though not exclusive, Tibetan word for this practice is *tumo* (*gtum mo*), which literally means a “fierce or savage woman.” The Sanskrit *caṇḍālī* or *candalika* also conveys the meaning of “hot”—as in a hot, wild, passionate woman. In particular, it was the name for the female of the most impure of the untouchables: the caṇḍālas. The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, during his seventh-century visit to India, recorded how caṇḍālas were obliged to make noises to warn villages that they were passing through so that the inhabitants could hide indoors and avoid being polluted. It is indicative of the anti-nomian tendency of the highest yoga tantras that these and other female untouchables, deemed the lowest of human beings, were sought out as consorts in sexual yoga and were deified in such practices as Hevajra, where a caṇḍālī appears in that deity’s entourage. Heat was that goddess’s specialty: She could burn up the universe, incinerating all impurities that prevent the realization of innate buddhahood.

Caṇḍālī has become known in the West as “inner heat” because of the physical heat generation attributed to the practice. However, the goal of the practice is not heat but rather the experience of bliss and emptiness. Caṇḍālī is based upon an esoteric physiology, consisting of a network of channels (*nāḍī*) that pervade the body, through which move wind (*vāyu*) and in which are located “drops” (*bindu*). These drops can have various forms and may be solid or liquid, semen itself being an example. Though details of this morphology vary, generally the three most important channels are the central channel (*avadhūtī*), which runs parallel to the spine, and two secondary

channels that run parallel to its left and right: the *rasanā* and the *lalanā*. The breath enters the left and right channels through the two nostrils. As the mind and the winds are interdependent, the mind can be made to reach a nondual state through making the winds of the left and right channels enter the central channel at the abdomen. Therefore, breath-retention practices are employed to cause this to occur and thus give rise to the nondual state.

The caṅḍālī practice also involves the physiology of sexuality, generally described from a male perspective. It corresponds with far more ancient Taoist practices, which have a greater number of pressure points in breath control, called *jade locks*, and a specific female morphology that has the retention of menstruation as the parallel to the male retention of ejaculation. Caṅḍālī and the cakras system appeared in the Buddhist tradition subsequent to a period of Buddhist and Taoist coexistence in Central Asia. The *cakras*, literally “wheels,” are the points where subsidiary channels branch off into the body, but they were unknown in India before the latter centuries of the first millennium, when they first appeared in both Śaivism and Buddhism.

In all these traditions, semen, which in Buddhist tantra is euphemistically called *bodhicitta*, is located in the skull at the top of the central channel. In caṅḍālī, as during sexual arousal, a flame at the navel causes the bodhicitta to melt and descend as liquid, creating stages of bliss as it passes through four cakras at the throat, heart, navel, and genitals. In this practice, the bodhicitta is not ejaculated but drawn back up the central channel, creating four more stages of bliss during which the practitioner realizes the essential nature of the mind. Caṅḍālī is termed *liberation through the upper door* in contrast to sexual practice with an imagined or real consort (an “action seal,” or *karmamudrā*), which is called *bliss through the lower door*. A more advanced form of this consort practice involves the semen exiting, blending with the female fluid, and then being drawn back into the body and up through the cakras. This sexual practice was sometimes counted as one of the six Dharmas, and it is described in Dakpo Tashi Namgyal’s text within this volume.

Briefly, the other five practices are *illusory body*, which develops a perception of all phenomena as an illusion; *dream yoga* to gain an awareness and control of dreams; *luminosity*, or more literally from the Sanskrit “brightness,” which involves maintaining awareness on entering dreamless sleep; *transference*, in which one trains in firing one’s consciousness out through the crown of the head at the time of death in order to attain enlightenment, or at least a good rebirth; and the *bardo*, which is practiced in order to attain

enlightenment, or a good rebirth, in the state between death and rebirth. Although the number six has remained constant since the introduction of the six Dharmas into Tibet, there was considerable variation in the earlier centuries as to what practices made up that number. The practices enumerated were sometimes more than six, with two practices being classed as one.

The present-day list is similar to that given by Tilopa, although *purapraveśa*, the practice of transferring one's consciousness into a dead body and reanimating it, has been replaced by the less-dramatic companion practice of *transference* (*saṃkranti*), known in Tibetan and popularly in the West as *phowa*, in which the consciousness at death is sent into a *yidam* deity and thereby a pure realm. In Tilopa's instructions this was presented as only one form of *purapraveśa*. *Purapraveśa* literally means "entering a town" but is also called, less obscurely, "entering another's body" (*parakāyapraveśa*). In this practice the consciousness is transferred into a dead (yet healthy) young body, which is then reanimated. This enables the practitioner to avoid the process of rebirth and childhood disrupting the continuum of consciousness and memory. Though there is a popular legend that the transmission of this practice ended with the death of Marpa's son Darma Dodé, there are a number of instances in the biographies of medieval Kagyü masters, where they display their mastery of this practice by briefly reanimating a dead animal or bird while in meditation. In any period, however, accounts of permanently abandoning one's body and continuing one's life in another body are rare.

An ancillary to *caṇḍālī* practice briefly referred to in this volume is the set of distinctive and exacting exercises called *yantra* (*'khrul khor*), which include jumping and landing in the vajra posture, wherein the feet rest on the opposite thighs, so as to eliminate defects in the flow of wind through the channels.

Mahāmudrā in India

Mahāmudrā is a comparatively simple, direct approach to seeing the nature of the mind, though the teaching also includes many stages for an initial stabilization of the mind. Six of the eleven texts in the present volume are dedicated to explicating the practice of mahāmudrā.¹⁸

It is not easy to determine what historical kernel survives within Tibetan biographies of Indian masters. However, the Tibetan tradition has the mahāmudrā teachings commence with Saraha and his *doḥa* verses. Saraha is depicted to be the great-grandteacher of Maitripa, and therefore would be active in the early tenth century if taken in normal human terms, though

little in their biographies is normal. Saraha's teacher is said to be the bodhisattva Ratnamati, a tenth-level bodhisattva in Akaniṣṭha, the ultimate realm of the dharmakāya buddha Vajradhara. Therefore Saraha is the first human teacher in this lineage.¹⁹

The doha is the literary medium most closely associated with the mahāmudrā teachings and was used by successive generations of siddhas from the last centuries of the first millennium onward. However, the meaning of the word *doha* was lost in Tibetan translation. A *doha* is in fact a particular form of rhyming couplets. Famous examples of dohas are the Hindi poetry of Kabir (1440–1518), in which each doha could be an independent separate work. Indian poetry employed various kinds of verse and meters based on patterns of long and short syllables, unlike Tibetan, which counts only the number of syllables per line. As there is no Tibetan equivalent for the word *doha*, it has often simply been transcribed rather than translated. However, the general word for a spiritual song in Tibetan is *mgur*, and the dohas and a related type of verse called *caryāpādas* written in the earliest form of Bengali are generally referred to in Tibetan as *mgur*. This has led to an inaccurate back translation of all instances of *mgur* in Tibetan, including native Tibetan songs, as *doha*, glossed as “a song expressing realization.”

The language in which these dohas were written was not Sanskrit but usually a late middle-Indic language such as Apabhraṃśa. The very word *doha* is not Sanskrit; *do* means “two” and is related to the Sanskrit *dva*. Saraha's dohas were written in an eastern form of Apabhraṃśa and appear to actually be a collection of couplets by various authors. Their distinctive rhyming sound pattern is lost in both Tibetan and English translation. For example:

*Brāhmaṇ to nā jāne to bhed
Ebhāve pād ā boh e catur ved*

The brahmans do not know the truth
but simply recite the four Vedas.

Saraha is said to have transmitted his mahāmudrā lineage to the siddha Nāgārjuna, the tantric master that Tibetan tradition has conflated with the well-known Mādhyamika master of that name, who in the Tibetan version of his life is said to have lived for six hundred years. However, this would still not span the centuries between these two Nāgārjunas. Moreover, the earliest biographies of the Mādhyamika Nāgārjuna, which are preserved in

Chinese, have him living to only eighty, one hundred, or one hundred and twenty years.

Śavaripa, who is described to be a pupil of both Saraha and Nāgārjuna, is said to have been one of the tribal peoples in what is now Orissa. He is said to have lived as a hunter in the forests, and in one description of how Śavaripa first appeared to Maitripa, he is wearing a peacock-feather skirt and is attended by two tribal women, who are picking lice from his hair.

We enter surer historical footing with Maitripa (986–1063),²⁰ who became the principal master of mahāmudrā in India. He was a pupil of Nāropa for twenty years and is said to have started teaching in his fifties. His hermitage appears to have been in Mithilā (also known as Tirhut), an area that now corresponds to northern Bihar and neighboring parts of southern Nepal.

The Introduction of Mahāmudrā into Tibet

Atiśa received mahāmudrā instruction from Maitripa, which must have been before 1040, the year of both Nāropa's death and Atiśa's departure for Tibet via Nepal. He arrived in Tibet in 1042, where he stayed until his death twelve years later at age seventy-two. He taught mahāmudrā to his pupil Dromtön (1004–63), but Dromtön decided against making mahāmudrā a part of the Kadam tradition, fearing it would have a negative influence on conduct.²¹

The mahāmudrā lineage of Marpa Chökyi Lodrö, even though he was a pupil of Maitripa and the ostensible founder of the Kagyü tradition, is classed as the *subsidiary translation tradition* (*zur 'gyur*), because initially other mahāmudrā transmissions, many of which originated with Vajrapāṇi (b. 1017),²² were of greater importance.

Dampa Kor Nirūpa (1062–1102) was a Tibetan who held yet another mahāmudrā lineage. After a curious case of the practice of *purapraveśa*, Dampa Kor, as he was originally called, became known as Kor Nirūpa. A practitioner and traveler to Nepal from an early age, Dampa Kor is said to have died there when he was nineteen. Staying in the same house with him was seventy-three-year-old Nirūpa, a pupil of Maitripa's disciple Karopa. Nirūpa performed the practice of *purapraveśa* and entered Dampa Kor's body and revived it. After Nirūpa's old body was cremated, he went to Tibet in the young Tibetan body but wearing Indian clothing and with the conjoined name of Kor Nirūpa. He then changed to wearing Tibetan clothing and taught mahāmudrā there for twenty-one years, dying at age forty, this time in the more conventional manner.

Following these earliest transmissions of mahāmudrā there came what are called the *middle transmissions*, in which Vajrapāṇi plays a crucial role. Vajrapāṇi is known as one of “the four great pupils of Maitripa.” The other three were Natekara (also known as Sahajavajra), Devākaracandra (also known as Śūnyatāsamādhi), and Rāmapāla. Vajrapāṇi moved to Lalitpur (nowadays named Patan, in the Kathmandu Valley) in 1066. In 1074, when he would have been fifty-seven, he was known among Tibetans as one of the three great masters in Nepal,²³ the other two being Pamthingpa and Bhāro Chakdum.²⁴ One account describes him as a white-haired paṇḍita who liked to give sugarcane to Tibetans and enjoyed getting them drunk.²⁵

Vajrapāṇi went to Tibet with his Kashmiri pupil, Dharmasrī, and gave many teachings in the Tsang region of Central Tibet. He had numerous Tibetan pupils and assisted in the translation of nearly forty texts. He authored eleven texts that are preserved in the Tibetan canon. He is absent from a list of great masters in the 1080s, so it seems he had passed away by that time. The lineage of his teachings is called the *upper* or *western* mahāmudrā tradition to differentiate it from two other mahāmudrā traditions, the *lower* and *later* mahāmudrā.

The *lower* or *eastern* mahāmudrā began with Vajrapāṇi’s pupil, a Nepalese brahman generally known as Asu.²⁶ Asu is said to have been passing through Tibet on pilgrimage to China when he married a Tibetan woman and settled down in the Phenyül area of Central Tibet. Asu had many pupils and established a family line of mahāmudrā through two of his four sons.

Asu taught mahāmudrā to Milarepa’s pupil Rechungpa (1084–1161), who also studied with Rāmapāla, one of Maitripa’s four principal pupils, and with Tipupa, one of Maitripa’s seven “middle-ranking” pupils.²⁷ Rechungpa introduced various teachings into Tibet, even transmitting them to his own teacher, Milarepa. Rechungpa’s transmission is central to the Drukpa Kagyü school, which originated with Lingrepa, who was at one time a practitioner within Rechungpa’s nonmonastic lineage.

The *later* tradition of mahāmudrā comes from Nakpo Sherdé, a pupil of Vajrapāṇi in Nepal during the master’s last years. He focused in particular on the dohas of Saraha.

Mahāmudrā instructions were also introduced into Tibet in the twelfth century. Vairocanarakṣita, a paṇḍita originally from South India, studied in northern India under a number of masters, the most famous being Abhayākara Gupta (d. 1125), the greatest Indian Buddhist master of his time. Vairocanarakṣita’s principal teacher for mahāmudrā was the great scholar

and yogin Surapāla at Nālandā, who taught him the *Twenty-Six Teachings of Nonattention (amanasi)*.²⁸ Vairocanarakṣita became a master of mahāmudrā as well as other tantras and visited Tibet a number of times, eventually dying there. He translated many mahāmudrā dohas and teachings, including those of Maitripa. His pupils in Tibet are said to have included Lama Shang (1123–93), one of this volume's authors.²⁹ The *Blue Annals* also state that he taught the eleventh-century Dampa Kor as a child, but that appears to be a conflation with another teacher.³⁰

Tilopa

The traditional dates for Tilopa (also written in the Tibetan texts as Telopa, Tailopa, or Tillipa), whose formal name was Prajñābhadrā, are earth ox to earth bird, which would have to be 928–1009. In narratives of his life, Tilopa is described as a solitary dark-skinned wanderer with bulging eyes and long, matted hair. He is said to have been a monk who gave up the monastic life to live a tantric lifestyle, during which he chained himself into the meditation posture for twelve years. He subsequently became a sesame seed (*til*) grinder, which is said to be the origin of his name. He is also said to have worked as a procurer for a prostitute. All who knew him were astounded when he levitated “to the height of seven palm trees” and sang one of his spiritual songs.

Tilopa is depicted as having Vajradhara, the symbol of the dharmakāya, as his guru. A song attributed to Tilopa, though it is not included in the canonical works, even claims he had no human guru, contradicting the history of four transmissions mentioned above. This discrepancy is sometimes explained as Vajradhara having given only the blessing, while the instructions came from his human teachers. Another explanation is that Tilopa *was* Vajradhara, and his studying with gurus was an act performed merely to benefit others. The legends of Tilopa also have him receiving certain instructions from ḍākinīs in their realm, named Oḍḍiyāna.

Nāropa

The earliest known surviving biographies of Nāropa are those written by Gampopa and Lama Shang, two of the authors represented in this volume.³¹ They describe how Nāropa underwent a series of hardships under Tilopa, such as leaping off a temple roof, lying on a leech-infested mire, receiving savage beatings after stealing food, sexually assaulting a

bride during her procession, and attempting to kidnap a queen. Obeying Tilopa's commands brought him each time to the point of death, and he was only revived by Tilopa's miraculous powers. For the Kagyü tradition, with its emphasis on the liberating power of guru devotion itself, Nāropa's obedience and eventual enlightenment serve as an archetypal example, fortunately beyond literal emulation.

Subsequently Nāropa went to Nālandā, India's greatest Buddhist monastery, and became a great scholar there. Then, in the last years of his life, he established a hermitage, named Pullahari, where he eventually gave up all activity and entered silence, ceasing to teach. Later versions of Nāropa's life, perhaps out of an antipathy to scholasticism, reversed this sequence, first depicting Nāropa as a master of Nālandā and then showing him realizing the futility of mere study, abandoning his post, and going in search of Tilopa.

The dates of his lifetime are given as fire dragon to iron dragon, which would be 956–1040. Atiśa's departure for Tibet is reliably dated to 1040, and he brought relics from the cremation of Nāropa with him. The bronze stupa in which they are enshrined still survives near Lhasa next to the shrine in Nyethang Dölma Lhakhang temple, which Atiśa founded.

A once-common dating for Nāropa of 1016–1100 was the result of taking literally Tsangnyön Heruka's version of the life of Marpa, in which Marpa in his old age goes to India to meet Nāropa, who sings a verse of praise of Milarepa. However, this episode and its verse were derived from one of Tsangnyön Heruka's visions and are without historical basis.³²

Marpa

In contrast to the early years of the Nyingma traditions, when Tibet was united under a central monarchy, the Tibetan plateau of Marpa's time was divided among small kingdoms, oligarchies, and nomadic regions. Tibetans, on their own initiative, were going to Nepal and India to receive teachings not available in Tibet, sometimes bringing masters back with them. Marpa was one of these Tibetan translators of Dharma texts who during this time were given the honorific title of *lotsāwa* (from a middle Indic *locchāva*, said to mean "eyes of the world").

Also at this time, the far-western kingdom of Gugé, which saw itself as the successor to the ancient monarchy, brought Atiśa to Tibet. Atiśa's pupil, Dromtön, established the Kadam tradition, whose teachings would in turn become a key ingredient in the formation by Gampopa of the monastic

Kagyü. The Gugé monarchs did not approve of higher tantra practices, with their sex and sorcery, meat and alcohol. Nevertheless, Tibetan translators such as Marpa continued to introduce higher tantras, such as Cakrasaṃvara, into Tibet. In time, with the fusion of Marpa's lineage with Kadam teachings, the controversial aspects of the tantras were marginalized. Nevertheless, this higher tantra substratum continued to lie below the surface, reappearing in certain practices or biographical episodes of Kagyü masters. We also see these elements in some of our texts, in particular Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's overview of the tantras.

Marpa's dates are uncertain and vary from one source to another,³³ but he most likely was born around 1011 and passed away in the 1090s. Marpa's first teacher was Drokmi Lotsāwa (992/93–1043/72), whose teachings became the foundation for the Sakya school. Marpa collected gold in his midteens and went to Nepal and India for further teachings. He then met Nāropa and spent many years studying with him. The wealth he received for giving these instructions back in Tibet funded further expeditions.

Marpa in his biographies is portrayed as an aggressive, corpulent landowner with nine wives, engaging in disputes with his neighbors; he even has his pupil Tsurtön kill his cousin through sorcery as his fee for instructions.³⁴ As is clear from the earliest versions of his biography, Marpa did not receive the entirety of Nāropa's teachings. On his second visit, Nāropa had ceased teaching and maintained silence, but Nāropa did at that time give Marpa one of his last remaining possessions: a skull bowl.³⁵ Marpa subsequently studied with a number of other teachers, Maitripa in particular.³⁶

Among Marpa's pupils, Ngoktön (1036–1102) received practices and teachings that were not received by the more famous Milarepa. They were passed on through Ngoktön's lineage, and in the nineteenth century were introduced into the mainstream Kagyü by Jamgön Kongtrül.

Milarepa

Although Milarepa is particularly famous because of the 1488 biography and song compilation by Tsangnyön Heruka, Milarepa's biographies had been the subject of considerable narrative evolution since the earliest versions. His songs also had multiplied and were transformed through centuries of bardic tradition long before Tsangnyön Heruka's collection, which was the first to be printed, all earlier texts being handwritten manuscripts. From reading the succession of earlier versions, one can trace a song's evolution, the enlarging

of a narrative sequence, or the subsequent insertions of new songs into these new pieces of narrative. Milarepa's dates and lifespan vary considerably in the different versions of his life, but 1040–1123 appears the most likely, particularly in terms of the year of his death.³⁷

Mila was his family name, and *repa* signified a nonmonastic practitioner who wore a cotton robe as a sign of mastering the practice of *caṅdālī*. According to Gampopa and Lama Shang, Milarepa's family consisted of only himself and his father. He first became a sorcerer and then went to Marpa to receive teachings, in return for which he performed chores in the household, such as carrying water. When he eventually left Marpa to return home, he learned of his father's death, finding his home in ruins.

In later versions, Milarepa has a mother who plays a strong role in his life by insisting he take up sorcery. Marpa has Milarepa single-handedly build and demolish houses in order to purify him of the bad karma accrued through sorcery. This does not occur in the earliest versions because sorcery was not only intrinsic to the tantras, it was practiced by many well-known masters of the time, including Marpa and his other pupils. The Tibetan *las* or *phrin las*, for the Sanskrit *karman*, is commonly translated in the context of the *four karmas* as “activities,” though it more properly translates as “rites.” The first two of the four rites, from a Western perspective, would be classed as white magic—the *pacifying* rituals to remove illness and so on, and the *increasing* rituals to bring wealth, long life, and so on—while the latter two would be called black magic—the *controlling* rituals, which bring people, particularly women, under one's control, and the *wrathful* rituals, which cause illness, madness, conflict, or death. However, these practices, within the Buddhist context, are intended to be performed with the compassionate motivation of a bodhisattva. Moreover, the very sorcery practice that Milarepa mastered, a *terma* from his teacher Lharjé Nupchung, is currently a part of the Kagyü transmission included within Jamgön Kongtrül's *Treasury of Precious Termas*³⁸ and is also one of the main practices of the Dri-gung Kagyü.

Until the 1488 version of Milarepa's life, he was consistently described as an emanation, enlightened from birth. In one biography he is even an incarnation of the Buddha himself, where he states, “I am the emanated rebirth of master Nāgārjunagarbha, who was an emanation of the Buddha himself as prophesied by the Buddha,” and the author adds, “Therefore he truly was Nāgārjunagarbha, the emanation of the Buddha.”³⁹ However, Tsangnyön portrayed him as an ordinary being with extremely bad karma who has to

overcome many obstacles in order to achieve enlightenment. As the biography is also one of Tibet's greatest literary works, this has made Milarepa a figure of inspiration for practitioners in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.⁴⁰

Milarepa's pupils were predominantly peripatetic *repas* like himself. Milarepa literally adopted his first pupil, Rechungpa (1084–1161), on meeting him as a boy of about twelve years old. Some early texts present Rechungpa as Milarepa's principal pupil, with Gampopa relegated to the list of "pupils from the latter days." This is because Gampopa stayed with Milarepa for only thirteen months in 1122, just before Milarepa's death. Rechungpa established a nonmonastic tradition and even had a reputation for refusing to teach monks, especially since sexual practices were intrinsic to the *repa* lineage of that time.

Gampopa

Gampopa Sönam Rinchen (1079–1153), also known as Dakpo Lhajé, the first of our authors, was a monk from the Kadam tradition. Kadam monks at that time were forbidden to receive highest yoga tantra empowerments because of their sexual content. This would make Gampopa seem to be an unlikely pupil of Milarepa, let alone his successor. However, it is Gampopa's union of two apparently antithetical traditions to form the Dakpo Kagyü that would form the foundation for the immense development of the monastic Kagyü traditions.

By establishing a graded path, a majority of pupils could concentrate on monastic discipline, scholarship, and less-advanced meditations, while a minority could progress to the advanced teachings of Milarepa. Gampopa spent many years in solitary meditation before establishing a monastic community in the Dakpo region. His monastery was on the Daklha Gampo mountain range, which became the name of his monastery and the source of his sobriquet Gampopa.

The biographical literature on Gampopa evolved to portray him as predestined to transform the Kagyü lineage into a great monastic movement, while Rechungpa was increasingly portrayed as temperamental and unreliable. For example, in stark contrast with an earlier version of Milarepa interpreting a dream of Rechungpa's as auspicious, Tsangnyön Heruka has Milarepa interpret Rechungpa's dream to mean he will not achieve buddhahood for three lifetimes because of disobedience. It was Tsangnyön who introduced the concept of Gampopa as the "sun-like" disciple and Rechungpa as the secondary

“moon-like” disciple, a status often presented as Milarepa’s own viewpoint. Most egregiously, the earlier literature contains a passage where Milarepa, on parting with Rechungpa for the last time, states that he has given all the instructions to him alone and to no other, but that one instruction remains. He then shows Rechungpa his calloused bottom as an exhortation to constant sitting in meditation.⁴¹ The more popularly known Tsangnyön version repeats this episode but substitutes Gampopa for Rechungpa, even though as a monk, Gampopa could not have received Milarepa’s entire teachings, which would have included consort practices.⁴² Tsangnyön’s version omits all references to Milarepa’s partners in sexual practices (except for mountain goddesses when he was in his seventies), as this aspect of the Kagyü transmission, although described in this volume by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal, was marginalized by the mainstream monastic Kagyü tradition.

Gampopa, with his scholastic background, was the first in the Kagyü school to author a significant number of texts. His substantial text on the graduated path entitled the *Ornament of Precious Liberation* continues to be an essential foundation text for Kagyü study.⁴³ The text of his that opens this volume, *A String of Pearls*, is primarily focused on general teachings and is greatly informed by his Kadam studies. Yet it also contains seamless references to mahāmudrā and its Nyingma equivalent, *dzokchen*. A number of texts in Gampopa’s collected works are not technically composed by him but are transcriptions and notes of lectures that he gave, and the attributions of certain texts are contested. *A String of Pearls* collects together twenty short transcribed lectures that were intended to serve as guides for others to transmit the teachings they gave. The colophon attributes the teachings to Gampopa and states that they were compiled by by Gomtsül, Gampopa’s nephew and successor.⁴⁴

The Original Dakpo Kagyü Lineage

Gampopa’s successor was his nephew Gomtsül (1116–69),⁴⁵ short for Gompa Tsültrim Nyingpo, whom he had adopted as a ten-year-old boy and declared to be the rebirth of an Indian paṇḍita.⁴⁶ He succeeded Gampopa at age thirty-four, three years before Gampopa’s death, and became directly involved in resolving religio-political conflicts in Lhasa. He restored the ancient Lhasa temple, which a fire had turned into “ruins and smoke,” and established law and order in the Lhasa region.

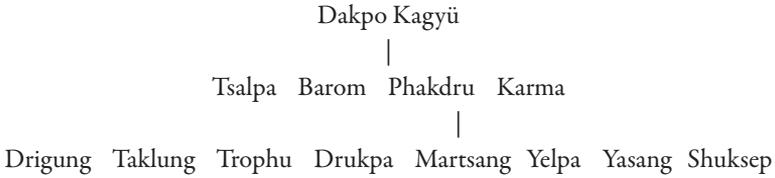
The original Dakpo Kagyü did not, like other Kagyü traditions, expand by establishing branch monasteries throughout the Tibetan plateau. Nevertheless, one of the most significant Kagyü authors, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal,

was a later successor of this lineage. Little biographical information on this master exists, but his works remain of great importance in the Karma Kagyü tradition, particularly his scholastic and practical manual, *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*.⁴⁷

The Four Senior and Eight Junior Lineages

During the first hundred years after the founding of the Dakpo Kagyü, there was an initial multiplication of lineages into what are traditionally known as the four senior and eight junior lineages (*che bzhi chung brgyad*). Subsequently, newer monasteries became branches of a central monastery; some lineages developed transregional significance while others, such as the Yelpa, Trophu, Yasang, and Taklung, presently consist of a few monasteries or important lamas. As with Gomtsül, some Kagyü lineages played central roles in Tibet's secular history.

The four senior lineages are those that branched off from the original Dakpo Kagyü, while the eight junior lineages branched off from one of these four, the Phakdru.



The senior lineages are the Tsalpa, Barom, Phakdru, and Karma, although this is a simplification, ignoring lineages such as that of Gampopa's pupil Chökyi Yungdrung.⁴⁸ The Barom Kagyü, founded by Darma Wangchuk (1127–99),⁴⁹ is not as historically significant, and its teachings are not represented in this volume.

Lama Shang and the Tsalpa Kagyü

Lama Shang (1122–93), also known as Tšöndrö Drakpa,⁵⁰ was already an advanced practitioner when in 1157—five years after Gampopa's death—he became a pupil of Gomtsül, who was only six years his senior. Lama Shang had already mastered *caṅḍālī* under Mal Yerwapa in the lineage of Milarepa's pupil Drigom Repa.⁵¹

Lama Shang founded a monastery at Tsal, near Lhasa, hence the name of his lineage. Continuing Gomtsül's secular responsibilities, he established a militia, which he used to impose his authority. Lama Shang's successors ruled the entire Lhasa region.

Lama Shang produced a significant body of literature. The third text in this volume is his *Ultimate Supreme Path of the Mahāmudrā*, which was written in verse. Jamgön Kongtrül included this in his *Treasury of Instructions*, a compilation of important texts from throughout Tibetan Buddhism. However the quality of his edition is poor, with numerous lines missing and two pages written out of order. Prior to the Tibetan companion volume to the present work, that edition was unfortunately the only one readily available to Tibetans.

The second text in this volume, the *Unrivaled Instructions of Shang Rinpoche*, is also an early text from the Tsalpa Kagyü lineage. The author is Shönu Lha of Pangshong Lhari Monastery. There is no biographical information on this author other than that he was a pupil of Lharipa Namkha Ö, presumably the founder of Lhari Monastery, whose teacher was Lama Shang. Therefore Shönu Lha would have been active in the first half of the thirteenth century.

This text is an early example of the mahāmudrā preliminary practices. Here they consist of the contemplation of the preciousness of a human life capable of practicing the Dharma, its impermanence, the suffering of samsara, and therefore the urgency to practice. This is followed by the meditation and mantra of Vajrasattva for purification, making a mandala offering for accumulation of merit, and prayers for blessing from the guru. The subsequent instructions for meditation are direct and simple advice on resting in the natural state of mind. The text does not mention the successive stages of meditation found in later mahāmudrā texts, such as that of Dakpo Tashi Namgyal.

Phakdru Kagyü and the Eight Junior Schools

Dorjé Gyaltzen, or Phakmo Drupa (1110–70), had studied and practiced in many traditions before he became a pupil of Gampopa at the age of forty-one, just two years before Gampopa died. Although he spent his later years in solitary hermitages, he attracted a great number of pupils and established the Densathil Monastery, where his relics were later enshrined. The Phakdru

lineage became historically important, its dynasty ruling Tibet in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Eight “junior” Kagyü lineages derived from eight of Phakmo Drupa’s pupils. The Taklung Kagyü, which had a period of secular power, had a major monastery and lineage in both central and eastern Tibet, though Nyingma and Rechung Kagyü teachings have become their principal practice. The Yelpa, Trophu, and Yasang continue to have a few monasteries and tulkus in Tibet. The Martsang⁵² monasteries were forcibly made Geluk in the 1600s, but its Mahāmudrā and incarnation lineage survives. The Shuksep became a Nyingma tradition, with a famous nunnery. The two “junior” lineages that are currently most active and who are represented in this volume are the Drigung and Drukpa, which will be described in more detail.

Drigung Kagyü

Jikten Sumgön, or Drigungpa (1143–1217), was a pupil of Phakmo Drupa during the last three years of the latter’s life⁵³ and founded Drigung Monastery, which gained secular power. The Drigung succession was initially hereditary but became an incarnate line beginning with two brothers, Könchok Rinchen (1590–1654) and Chökyi Drakpa (1595–1654). These were the first Chetsang and Chungtsang tulkus, the principal Drigung lamas—or Khyapgön Rinpoché—through to the present day.

A group of four Drigung Kagyü texts appears in this volume. In 1226, nine years after Drigungpa’s death, Sherap Jungné (1187–1241), who was Drigungpa’s nephew and successor, compiled two texts of aphorisms, the second a supplement to the first. To this are added two appendixes, which may be by Sherap Jungné or by a pupil of his, and together these four texts, collectively entitled the *Single Viewpoint*, represent Drigungpa’s view on an array of subjects. These are unusual and controversial texts, as each aphorism is basically a rejection of someone else’s view. Though the holders of these views are not mentioned by name, the views are often those of Sakya authors. Sakya Paṇḍita (1182–1251), who had met Sherap Jungné in the year before the writing of the *Single Viewpoint*, wrote his major work on the three levels of views specifically to refute the views propounded in this text.

However, Drigungpa also rejected one of Lama Shang’s views propounded in the text included in this volume. Lama Shang states that some people who receive a formal empowerment do not receive it, while others may receive it

without undergoing the ceremony. According to the twenty-sixth viewpoint in Sherap Jungné's supplementary text, Drigungpa took exception to this position. Drigungpa had little tolerance for moral ambivalence; for example, he rejected the possibility that sorcery could be classed as a good action. Drigungpa also held extraordinary views on the universal nature of the monastic vows and held a low opinion of termas. The practices of many present-day Drigung Kagyüpas are primarily derived from termas and also include wrathful rites of sorcery, but nevertheless, and in spite of the cryptic nature of certain passages, the texts are still regarded in the Drigung Kagyü as fundamentally important because of their numerous astute and striking observations. For example, one aphorism states that the most important results of our actions are experienced in this life rather than the next. To those familiar with the teaching on karma, this seems at first a strange remark. What it points to, however, is the commonsense observation that our practice should bring manifest results, such as less anger, increased patience, insight, and so on.

A number of commentaries in the tradition explain these pithy statements. The translation here has been guided in particular by Sherap Jungné's own commentary to his texts. The very title is problematic, as *dgongs* can have various meanings. Generally it is a polite term for "thought" but can mean view, realization, opinion, intention, meaning, or even intended meaning. This ambiguity is also a feature of its Sanskrit equivalent *abhiprāya*, which can mean intention, opinion, purpose, or meaning.⁵⁴ The basic meaning of the word is "approach," and in a Buddhist context it is related to the Pali term *adhippāya*, which can mean both intention and meaning. The title is often translated into English as the *One Intention*, and there are Drigung Kagyü lamas who explain that it refers to the Buddha's one intention of benefiting beings, and there are also those who believe it should be translated as "one mind." It has also been translated as "one import" and "one intent." I have followed Lamchen Gyalpo Rinpoche's view that, in this title, the meaning is closer to "view" than to "intention." It is Drigungpa's intention to demonstrate that not only were there no inconsistencies in the Buddha's teaching, but also there were no differing versions or viewpoints intended for different levels of individuals. I had long chosen "viewpoint," but was uncomfortable as it was too close to "opinion" in feel and tried to cover both sides with "intended meaning." However, "viewpoint" seems to concur with the use of *dgongs pa* in the texts themselves, which declare that "the viewpoint of the precious Dharma Lord Drigungpa is the single viewpoint of all conquerors."

Drukpa Kagyü

The Drukpa Kagyü originates with Lingré Pema Dorjé (1128–88), who started out as a Rechung Kagyüpa. Therefore, he initially had a tantric consort, but in 1165 he became a pupil of Phakmo Drupa, who told him to separate from her. He subsequently practiced peripatetically around Central Tibet. He performed rites to ensure victory for Lama Shang in his battles, and in his last years he was the abbot of Naphur Monastery.

His pupil Tsangpa Gyaré (1161–1211)⁵⁵ founded Namdruk Monastery, from which the Drukpa lineage derives its name. Though there have been various branches of the Drukpa Kagyü lineage, the hereditary lineage of Tsangpa Gyaré's monastery became the principal succession. After Künga Paljor (1428–76) declared himself the rebirth of Tsangpa Gyaré and became known as the Second Drukchen, there were both hereditary and incarnation successions.

The Fourth Drukchen, Pema Karpo (1527–92), proved to be one of the great authors of Tibetan Buddhism. One of Pema Karpo's short texts on mahāmudrā, still widely used for meditation instruction, is included in this volume.

A dispute over the recognition of the Fifth Drukchen split the Drukpa Kagyü. The two opposed candidates, even into adulthood, were Paksam Wangpo (1593–1641) and Shapdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594–1691). The latter was also the hereditary holder of the Drukpa lineage, but as a result of the opposition of the king of Tsang, Shapdrung retreated to the borderlands and created both the independent country of Bhutan and the “southern Drukpa school,” which is still the official religion of that country.⁵⁶ The successive incarnations of Paksam Wangpo are the Drukchen incarnations of the northern, or Tibetan, Drukpa Kagyü.

Karma Kagyü

Düsum Khyenpa (1110–93) was from a hereditary Nyingma family and had mastered Yamāntaka to the degree that, between the ages of ten and fifteen, he could cause death with its sorcery. He met Gampopa and Gomtsül in 1139⁵⁷ and subsequently received instructions from Rechungpa. He then practiced meditation with exceptional perseverance and disregard for personal comfort for many years in various locations.

In 1159, six years after Gampopa's death, he returned to his homeland in

east Tibet, and twenty-six years later he established there the foundation for a widespread school by founding Karma Monastery. In 1189, at the age of seventy-nine, he returned to Central Tibet and founded Tsurphu Monastery. He said that he had returned to fulfill a request by Gomtsül, who had died twenty years earlier, and to persuade the sixty-seven-year-old Lama Shang to terminate his martial exploits. Both lamas died four years later.

Düsum Khyenpa was the first in a succession of Karmapa rebirths, marking the beginning of the now ubiquitous *tulku* system of incarnate lamas. Gampopa, Lama Shang, and Düsum Khyenpa had recognized lamas and children as rebirths of great masters, but the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204–83), was the first to inherit the monasteries and authority of his predecessor. He was born eighteen years after Düsum Khyenpa's death and was not recognized as the rebirth of the First Karmapa until he became a pupil of the holder of the Karma Kagyü lineage.⁵⁸

The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé (1284–1339), established a Karma Kagyü canon of practice and study, introducing a number of teachings from other lineages. He performed the enthronement ceremony for the thirteen-year-old emperor Togan Temur (r. 1333–70), the last Mongol to rule China, who was ousted by the founder of the Ming dynasty.

Of all the Karmapas, Rangjung Dorjé has produced the most important body of literary works. This volume presents two of his short works. The first, his *Mahāmudrā Prayer*, is a popular text for teaching the meaning of mahāmudrā and has been translated elsewhere numerous times. The translation here has been made to accord with the commentary of the Eighth Situ that closes the present volume. The other text is less well known: *Instructions for the Mahāmudrā Innate Union*. This practical manual for meditating on mahāmudrā guides the practitioner through the stages of *śamatha* (stability) and *vipaśyanā* (insight). The Ninth Karmapa would later create a series of these manuals, including *Mahāmudrā: The Ocean of Definitive Meaning*.⁵⁹ That text and Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight* are the two most extensive mahāmudrā manuals used in the Karma Kagyü.

The Fourth Karmapa, Rölpai Dorjé (1340–83), recognized his principal pupil and successor, Khachö Wangpo (1350–1405), as the rebirth of Rangjung Dorjé's pupil Drakpa Sengé (1283–1349), thus instituting the succession of Shamarpa tulkus, who were often successors and teachers to successive Karmapas.

The Ming emperor Yong Le (1360–1425; r. 1403–25) presented the Fifth Karmapa, Deshin Shekpa (1384–1415), with a jeweled black hat, which has

since played an important role in blessing ceremonies by all the Karmapas. The Karmapa, however, turned down Yong Le's offer to use his armies to give the Karma Kagyü dominion over Tibet. Emperor Yong Le also bestowed the title Khenting Tai Situ on one of the Fifth Karmapa's pupils, Chökyi Gyaltzen (1377–1488), who became the first in the series of Situ incarnations.

During the period of Karma Kagyü engagement with the Ming dynasty, the Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorjé (1555–1603), identified the Sixth Shamarpa, Chökyi Wangchuk (1584–1630), who would succeed him as the head of the Kagyü lineage. Although his life was not long, Chökyi Wangchuk had a great reputation as a scholar and debater. He is the author of one of the works in this volume, the *Quintessence of Nectar*. That text on the six Dharmas of Nāropa includes recitations as well as instruction. It is the very text that Karma Kagyü practitioners use in the school's traditional three-year retreats.

Tselé Natsok Rangdröl (b. 1608) was a pupil of both the Sixth Shamarpa and the Tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorjé (1604–74). He composed the eighth text in this volume, *The Bright Torch*. He was recognized as the rebirth of a lama as a child, and he had both Kagyü and Nyingma teachers.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the Karma Kagyü had lost its political hegemony in Central Tibet to the Fifth Dalai Lama, so that their strongholds in the eastern regions of the Tibetan plateau, such as in the kingdom of Dergé, became increasingly important for them. The Eighth Situ, Tenzin Nyinjé (1700–74)—also named Chökyi Jungné—revitalized the Karma Kagyü in many ways. At the age of twenty-seven, under the patronage of the Dergé monarchy, he established Palpung Monastery, which became, in practice, the most important Kagyü monastery in Tibet. Situ Chökyi Jungné had secular authority within the Dergé kingdom, was honored by the Chinese emperor Chi'en Lung (1735–96), and taught at his court. He introduced the transmission of many practices and promoted the philosophical viewpoint prevalent in the Jonang tradition, which the Fifth Dalai Lama had suppressed in Central Tibet.⁶⁰ Tai Situ Chökyi Jungné also oversaw the preparation of a new edition of the canon, the Dergé Kangyur and Tengyur. He was one of the most prolific authors in the Kagyü tradition and even made new translations from Sanskrit. The seventh text in our volume, his commentary upon the *Mahāmudrā Prayer* written four hundred years earlier by the Third Karmapa, is one of Tai Situ Chökyi Jungné's earlier works. He wrote it at the age of thirty-three, around the time he was establishing Palpung Monastery, commencing what was to become the modern era of the Kham-based Karma Kagyü.⁶¹

Acknowledgments

It has been a great privilege to take part in this visionary work of Thupten Jinpa, whose intelligence and motivation is only matched by his patience, which had to be vast to encompass my apparently never-ending twiddling, three computer deaths, prevarication, and delays. Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, who it has been an enlightening delight to translate for over two decades, chose these texts, providing me with a challenge on several levels to live up to Samuel Beckett's dictum: "Fail better." Without the beneficence of Eric Colombel's Tsadra Foundation, I would not have been able to even take my first step on this far longer than expected road. I am particularly indebted to Gene Smith and all the workers at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC), who have made the life of a translator many gigahertz easier. Many have helped me to be able to reach the stage where I could attempt this work, in particular Akong Rinpoche, the late Tenpa Gyaltzen Negi, and Professor Richard Gombrich. I am thankful for the help in understanding various passages that I have received from Alak Zenkar Rinpoche, Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, Lamchen Gyalpo Rinpoche, Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, Karl Brunnhölzl, Sarah Harding, Edward Henning, and Lodro Sangpo. I am also thankful I had the indispensable guide of two previous translations, the *Lamp of Mahamudra* by Erik Pema Kunsang and *Mahāmudrā Teachings of the Supreme Siddhas* by Lama Sherab Dorjé. And I have greatly benefited from the works of such scholars as Alexander Berzin, Karl Brunnhölzl, Hubert Decler, Elizabeth English, David Gray, Christopher Lindtner, Dan Martin, Kurtis Schaeffer, Jikido Takasaki, and Shiniichi Tsuda. In particular, thanks to David Kittelstrom, the editor, who with assistance from Lea Groth-Wilson and Laura Cunningham has been on the receiving end of this slow-in-coming and wayward work. And thanks to Emily Bower for support and encouragement in bringing it to its conclusion.



Technical Notes

THE TIBETAN TITLE of the volume translated here is *Mnyam med bka' brgyud lugs kyi phyag rgya chen po dang 'brel ba'i chos skor*, which means *Mahāmudrā and Related Teachings of the Peerless Kagyü Tradition*. It is a special anthology of key texts of the Kagyü school developed specifically for *The Library of Tibetan Classics* and its Tibetan equivalent, *Bod kyi gtsug lag gces btus*. Bracketed numbers embedded in the text refer to page numbers in the critical and annotated Tibetan edition published in New Delhi in modern book format by the Institute of Tibetan Classics (2008, ISBN 81-89165-05-4) as volume 5 of the *Bod kyi gtsug lag gces btus* series. In preparing our translation, the Institute of Tibetan Classics edition served as our primary source, with reference also to other editions of the individual texts.

The conventions for phonetic transcription of Tibetan words are those developed by the Institute of Tibetan Classics and Wisdom Publications. These reflect approximately the pronunciation of words by a modern Central Tibetan; Tibetan speakers from Ladakh, Kham, or Amdo, not to mention Mongolians, might pronounce the words quite differently. Transliterations of the phoneticized Tibetan terms and names used in the text can be found in the table that follows the text. Sanskrit diacritics are used throughout except for Sanskrit terms that have been naturalized into English, such as *samsara*, *nirvana*, *sutra*, *stupa*, *Mahayana*, and *mandala*.

Pronunciation of Tibetan phonetics

ph and *th* are aspirated *p* and *t*, as in *pet* and *tip*.

ö is similar to the *eu* in the French *seul*.

ü is similar to the *ü* in the German *füllen*.

ai is similar to the *e* in *bet*.

é is similar to the *e* in *prey*.