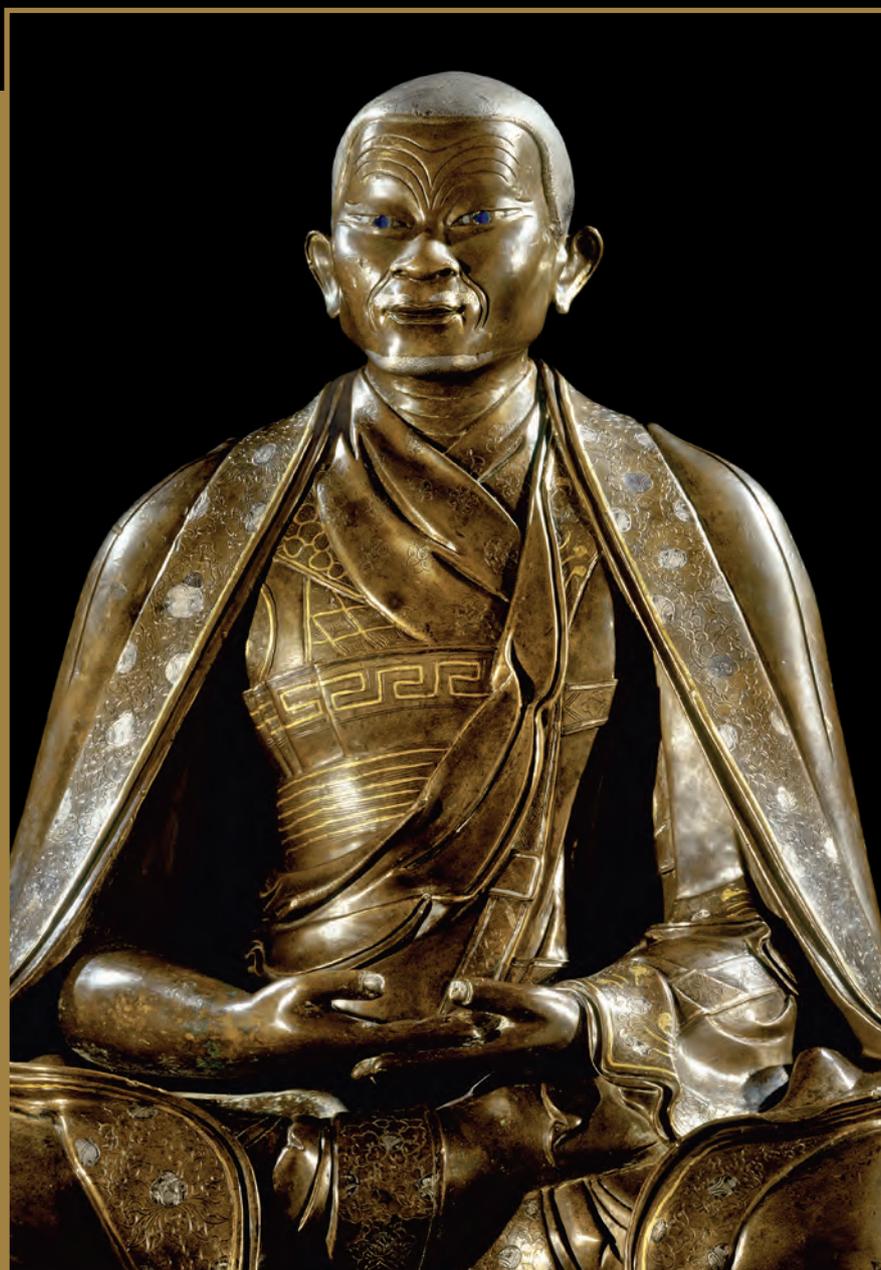




# KARMAPA

1110 - 2010 ཀམ་པ་ 900 YEARS







## Karmapa: 900 Years

Third edition, revised and expanded

Written and photo-edited by Lhundup Damchö (Diana Finnegan, PhD)

Design by Louise Light

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His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama with the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa during the early years of exile in India.  
*Photo courtesy of the Private Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama*



THE DALAI LAMA

MESSAGE

*(translated from original Tibetan)*

Of the eight great practice lineages within Tibetan Buddhism, the Karma Kamtsang school belongs to the bountiful Dagpo Kagyu tradition. The founder of this school, a dedicated practitioner of the Buddha's teachings, the glorious Dusum Khyenpa, was born to Dorje Gonpo and Gangcham Mingdren in the Tibetan year of the Iron Tiger of the 2nd Rabjung, which corresponds to the year 1110, in a place called Teshod Gangkyi Rawa in the Dokham province of Tibet.

Since then, there has been a longstanding annual custom of commemorating this celebrated master's spiritual accomplishments that were as pervasive as space. This year marks his 900th anniversary and on this fortunate occasion, under the auspices of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, various Kamtsang Kagyu monasteries, Dharma centers and other affiliated groups are assembling in Bodhgaya to celebrate the occasion. This event will also be celebrated by affiliated communities around the world. I am delighted to know that this is happening and extend my prayers and best wishes to all.

Recalling that the best way to please your spiritual teacher is to put his teachings into practice, it is my humble appeal that people who are interested listen to, think about and study all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and dedicate themselves to preserving and promoting the values that the Buddha taught in the hope that his wonderful message of compassion spreads throughout the world.

With my prayers and good wishes that the celebrations and their associated events may go very well.

November 10, 2010



Birthplace of the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa. Dreho, Kham. *Photo courtesy of Rokpa*





The Tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorje, among the most original artists in Tibetan history, painted this remarkable scene from the Buddha's life story. On the verge of his enlightenment, Prince Siddhārtha is seated beneath the Bodhi Tree. Though surrounded by the legions of obstacles and temptations he had to overcome in order to reach that point, depicted here in the form of demons and temptresses, the Buddha-to-be remains tranquil, his resolve to awaken utterly unshaken. *Photo by Karl Debreczeny*

# 1 ♦ The Life of Buddha

The path to liberation taught by the Karmapas reaches back through more than 25 centuries of history in India and Tibet. The trail begins in the 6th century BCE, in central India, when a young prince seated himself beneath the Bodhi Tree in Bodhgaya to meditate, and arose the following day as the Buddha. The trajectory of the Buddha's life—from privileged prince to wandering mendicant to spiritual teacher to the world—charts a course of radical self-transformation that continues to inspire people in India, Tibet and around the world. The Karmapas transmit the wisdom that the Buddha discovered in his own personal quest, in order to support those who similarly wish to create their own freedom and lasting happiness.

## Birth and Early Signs of Greatness

The Buddha-to-be took his final birth as the prince Siddhārtha Gautama, descending from the realm of Tuṣita to enter the womb of Mahāmāyā, queen of the Śākya kingdom in northern India. On the night of his conception, his mother dreamt of a white elephant with six tusks. While she was en route to her parents' home from her residence in Kapilavastu, Queen Mahāmāyā delivered him easily, holding the branch of a tree in a grove near a town called Lumbinī. As was the custom of the time, sages were called upon to interpret the marks on the child's body for signs of his future destiny. They predicted two possible courses for his life: if he remained in the palace, they said, he would become a great wheel-turning king, far surpassing his father in the scope and fame of his realm. Or, if he went forth from the palace as a wandering ascetic, he would become a buddha—one who had attained the highest possible state of complete and perfect enlightenment.

## Display of Prowess and Marriage

As a result of this prediction, the young prince's father took pains to ensure the future of his realm. To that end, he began shielding his son from unpleasant experiences that might spark a wish to renounce his princely duties. At



Mahāmāyā, the mother of Siddhārtha Gautama, has just given birth to the bodhisattva. The infant stands beside her, as devas above offer him a bath. *Huntington Archive at Ohio State University; Photo by John C. Huntington*

the same time, the king undertook to satiate the young prince with pleasures to bind him to the royal life. Prince Siddhārtha's early life was otherwise typical of that of a young heir to the throne. He trained in the areas of study appropriate to his princely caste, including literature, statecraft and military training. Whenever his skills were put to the test, his prowess astounded all present. For example, during an archery competition, his arrow passed straight through the targets of all the other competitors, and went on to pierce the earth so deeply that water gushed forth where it landed.



This mural from the Mūlagandhakuti Temple in Sarnath depicts Prince Siddhārtha on the eve of his great departure, in the final moments before he renounces the life of luxury he led as a prince. *Photo by Ajay Tallam*

In due course, Siddhārtha chose Yaśodharā as his first wife, and many other women later entered his harem. In short, the Buddha-to-be led a life of pleasure and privilege—yet found no contentment in either.

## Walking Away from Pleasures

Driven by curiosity about life outside the palace walls, Siddhārtha seized the opportunities he found to slip away to explore the city. Unguarded, he was immediately confronted with three successive signs of the deep suffering that is integral to human existence: illness, aging and death. Following this, he encountered a wandering ascetic,

whose presence demonstrated to the young Siddhārtha a newfound possibility: that there might exist a solution to suffering for those who sought it.

On a subsequent occasion, after a night of revelry in his harem, Siddhārtha's renunciation for the world of empty pleasures arose with even greater strength, and he resolved to go forth that very night. He enlisted his charioteer to help him escape under cover of darkness, and they managed to depart undetected, the devas lifting the hooves of his horse to muffle their sound. Turning for a final glimpse of the city of Kapilavastu, Siddhārtha vowed not to return until he had freed himself completely from the cycles of birth and death. Sending his charioteer back alone, Siddhārtha cut his hair at the site of the Stūpa of Purity, and embarked on the final stage of his multi-life quest for enlightenment.

## The Practice of Austerities

At this point in time, a tradition of meditative practice was already flourishing in northern India, and Siddhārtha proceeded to learn what he could from the foremost teachers of the day. He quickly mastered the meditative practices they taught, only to discover that although such techniques resulted in states of meditative bliss, they did not bring about liberation from suffering. Determined to persist until he discovered the means to completely eradicate all suffering,

Siddhārtha moved on, next experimenting with the numerous ascetic practices also found at that time in India. To that end, he engaged in the severest of physical austerities in the company of five like-minded companions near the Nairāñjanā River in central India. Later in life, the Buddha would describe his physical condition during this period of intense asceticism to his disciples as follows: When his hand passed over his body, the Buddha said, his body hairs fell out at the touch, having rotted to their roots. If he touched his stomach, he told them, he could feel his backbone, and if he stood up to stretch, he promptly fell flat on his face.

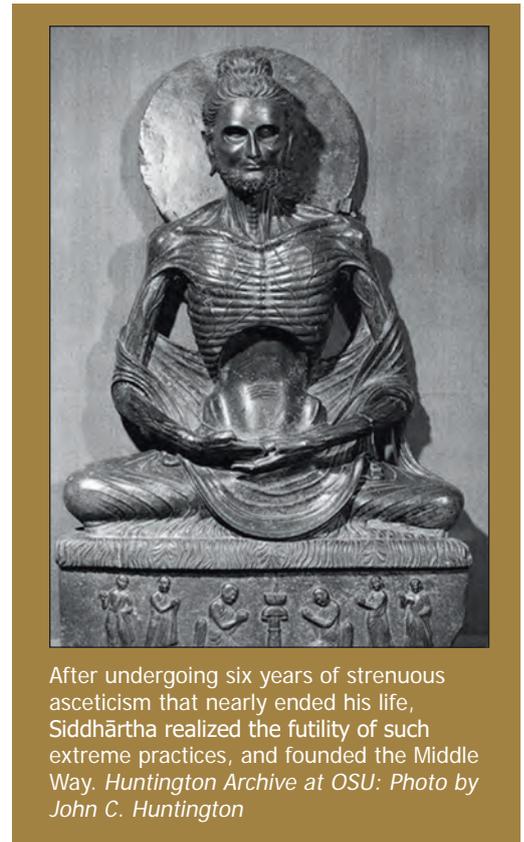
After six years of austerity, Siddhārtha realized that his physical weakness had become an impediment, and not a means, to spiritual progress. Recognizing that such practices could not bring him the lasting happiness of enlightenment, he decided to resume eating to nourish his body. Doing so, he soon began to regain strength, but lost the respect of his five companions, who scorned him as a weak-willed hedonist.

## Enlightenment

After accepting an offering of a golden bowl of yogurt with honey from a young woman named Sujātā, Siddhārtha cast the bowl into the river. Walking to the Bodhi Tree, he sat down at its base, vowing not to arise until he had found ultimate release from suffering. Easily defeating the armies of Māra, come to deter him from his ultimate goal, Siddhārtha remained steadfast in meditation throughout the long night. During the final watch of the night, before daybreak, Siddhārtha penetrated the ultimate truth and awakened, a complete and perfect buddha.

## Turning the Wheel of Dharma

Having discovered the path of liberation from cyclic existence, or “saṃsāra,” the Buddha now understood the path of liberation for all, and soon embarked on a lifetime of continuous activity dedicated to leading others from suffering. Seven weeks after the Buddha had attained enlightenment, Brahma approached him and requested him to teach. The Buddha thereupon set out on foot for Sarnath, near Vārāṇasī, where his five companions in asceticism remained practicing. In Sarnath the Buddha taught them the Four Noble Truths, setting in motion the wheel of Dharma that has continued turning without interruption to this day.



Buddha's five companions during his ascetic period became his first disciples. Here they flank a wheel that is symbolic of the Buddha and his teachings, which were first offered at Deer Park in Sarnath. *Photo by DhJ*

Upon hearing the Buddha's Dharma, the five friends became the first bhikṣus. The ranks of the Buddha's monastic community swiftly swelled as he wandered from place to place teaching the Dharma. Over the course of the next four decades the Buddha's counsel was frequently sought by nearly all the major kings of his day, who offered full and generous support to the early sangha.

The Buddha gained vast numbers of followers in the major cities of Rājagṛha, Vaiśālī, Vārāṇasī and Śrāvastī. In addition, he returned to his hometown of Kapilavastu to offer the nectar of Dharma as repayment for the kindness of those who had nourished him with ordinary food as a child. On one of these visits, his stepmother, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, requested the Buddha to estab-

lish an order of bhikṣuṇīs, or fully ordained nuns, which would later flourish across India and beyond. In fact, the Buddha managed to lead out of suffering the entire family he had left behind when he renounced his life in the palace. His son Rāhula and his wife Yaśodharā both took monastic vows, and each went on to attain the highest fruit of that path: arhatship, in which all afflictive emotions are permanently uprooted.

The Buddha likewise cared for his mother Mahāmāyā by offering her the Dharma. Mahāmāyā had been reborn in the deva realm of Tuṣita following her death shortly after delivering him in Lumbinī. The Buddha ascended to that realm, where he spent three months teaching her the Dharma as a way to repay her kindness in giving birth to him.

## Subduing Opponents and Display of Miracles

As he wended his way from town to village, from palace to roadside, sowing widely the seeds of Dharma, the Buddha overcame numerous challenges—from the obstacles put forth by his own jealous cousin Devadatta to provocation from eminent teachers of the brahminical systems who saw their royal patronage and prestige slipping as the Buddhadharmā gained

wider acceptance. In Vārāṇasī, a perennial center of Sanskrit learning, the Buddha defeated six important teachers of such rival views through his Dharma teachings. In Śrāvastī, aware that nothing short of a demonstration of his miraculous powers would cut through the strongly held views of the brahminical teachers there, the Buddha accepted a challenge to compete in a contest of miraculous displays. After turning down offers by Bhikṣu Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarṇā to perform such displays on his behalf, the Buddha himself manifested a vast display of miracles that silenced all his opponents.

Examining the history of the 45 years that the Buddha spent teaching following his enlightenment, it is clear that the Buddha not only offered the Dharma unstintingly to all, but that he also carefully attuned his presentation of the Dharma to accord with the aptitudes and attitudes of those present. His discourses included everything from simple homilies to highly sophisticated philosophical



Inside the main shrine of Bodhgaya, this image of Buddha Sākyamuni reminds visitors of their own potential for enlightenment. *Photo by Claire Pullinger*

exegesis, each offered according to the capacity of the students. The internal diversity of the Dharma that the Buddha taught assured that disciples could enter the teachings at the level most appropriate to them, and progress thereafter along the path leading to enlightenment.

## Final Days and Relics

Up until the very last moments of his life, the Buddha continued to teach and to care tenderly for all those around him. When he was well advanced in years, near Kuśinagarī in northern India, the Buddha accepted a meal from a

metalworker that prompted serious illness. As it became clear that this meal was to be his last, with great kindness the Buddha urged the metalworker to have no regret, explaining that the meal that brings on a buddha's parinirvāṇa is especially meritorious. As the Buddha drew his last breaths, an old mendicant named Subhadra arrived to question him on some points of doctrinal confusion. When the Buddha's attendant Ānanda refused to admit him, the Buddha told Ānanda to let Subhadra approach, proclaiming that as long as he had breath left in his body, he would continue to offer the Dharma. Deeply inspired by the Buddha's replies to his questions, Subhadra became the last bhikṣu ordained by the Buddha himself. The Buddha then imparted the ultimate teaching on impermanence to his disciples, by passing away into mahāparinirvāṇa. Buddha Śākyamuni left behind a glorious array of relics that were divided into eight parts and enshrined in eight great stūpas across India.

The Buddha left us not only his bodily relics, but also the legacy of his mind and heart—the Buddhadharma, a vital nectar that continues to pass from master to disciple today. From this pure spring discovered by the Buddha so many centuries ago, the Dharma flowed, first north from India to Tibet, and from that point forward for the past 900 years through the stream of Karmapa reincarnations. ●



With his hand displaying a gesture to dispel fear, the serene countenance of the Buddha gazes out upon the world he seeks to aid. *Photo by A. Gude*



The great stūpa of Sāñcī, located in today's Madhya Pradesh, was commissioned by Emperor Aśoka and is believed to contain one of the original relics of Śākyamuni Buddha. The stūpa further keeps the Buddha's presence vivid with sculptures depicting the events of his life. *Photo by Marc Shandro*



With the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism came the proliferation of bodhisattva imagery, such as this Gupta-era Padmapāñi Avalokiteśvara, here painted on a wall of the caves in Ajanta. *Huntington Archive at OSU: Photo by Eric R. Huntington*

## 2 ♦ Buddhism in India

Teaching the truths he realized under the Bodhi Tree, the Buddha introduced to India, and indeed to the world, nothing short of a new consciousness. His basic message—that enlightenment and other forms of spiritual attainment were accessible to people of all classes, races and genders—constituted a radically different understanding of human potential than that promoted by the dominant religious systems of Indian society of the day. Whereas at that time study of the Vedas was only permitted among certain castes, and then only to their male members, and whereas only certain men were thought capable of liberation, Buddha offered the Dharma fully to everyone he encountered, high or low, rich or poor, male or female. This universal access to his teachings was the logical outcome of the basic truths that the Buddha taught: that the causes of happiness and suffering lie within the mind of each person, and that everyone endowed with a mind has the same basic capacity to free themselves from suffering and attain lasting happiness.

With this radical vision of spiritual potential, a new social order emerged: the sangha, formed by Buddha according to the moral values taught in his Dharma. The sangha community was ordered along social and philosophical principles unheard of in the contemporary caste-based order. No longer was it how one was born that mattered most, but rather how one lived one's life. Indeed, the monk who served as custodian of Buddha's vinaya—the corpus of rules and texts governing monastic life—had himself been born a member of one of the lowest strata of Indian society, the barber sub-caste. Buddha chose to ordain this barber earlier in the day than a group of his own cousins, all Śākya princes, and then insisted that the princes prostrate to the newly ordained barber, as their elder in the vows.

Equally revolutionary was the Buddha's creation of a monastic order for women. Indian society of that era offered women no opportunity for spiritual activity outside of the domestic sphere. Against



At Bodhi Gaya, the Buddha achieved the insight that enlightenment was available to all people, regardless of class, race or gender. *Photo by Claire Pullinger*

such a backdrop, and many centuries before comparable opportunities would be afforded women in mainstream Western societies, not only did Buddha give women a place in his sangha, but, as the vinaya repeatedly shows, Buddha acted firmly to defend his nuns' dignity in the face of social opposition.

As a social institution, the monastic community proved an exceptionally effective base for ensuring the continuity of the Dharma in India, and for delivering it to other societies. Both the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī orders withstood the vast changes that transpired in Indian society over the course of the next millennium and a half. At the same time, as the Buddhadharma flourished across the Indian subcontinent, Buddha's teaching came to penetrate Indian life in myriad ways, leaving a deep and lasting mark on its art, literature, ethics, logic, medicine, modes of kingship and religion.



Sculpted in Sarnath, the site of the Buddha's first teaching, this third-century CE image depicts the Buddha as he turns the wheel of Dharma. This statue is a fine example of the exquisite skill and grace of Indian craftsmanship.  
*Huntington Archive at OSU:  
Photo by John C. Huntington  
and Eric R. Huntington*

## Early Spread – The Councils

The initial period following Buddha's mahāparinirvāṇa saw the sangha regrouping, and taking careful steps to safeguard the continuity of the monastic orders as well as of the Buddha's teachings. Just months after their teacher's passing, a gathering of 500 arhats met in Rājagṛha to ensure that the collection of discourses they would transmit thereafter truly reflected what the Buddha had taught. In what would later be known as the First Council, holders of each of the three major collections of teachings, or baskets, recited every text from memory. Only those teachings deemed authentic by all present were then officially accepted as teachings of the Buddha.

During his lifetime, Buddha had encouraged his monastics to disperse and spread the Dharma far and wide, yet he had also required monks and nuns to assemble for communal retreat during the three months of the rainy season. This advice permitted continuity and cohesiveness within the sangha, while simultaneously allowing the reach of the Dharma to expand. However, over time, with this geographic dispersion arose differences in the interpretation of various points of monastic discipline

as well as of doctrine. The First Council had set a precedent for determining important matters by consensus rather than by any single authority. In the 2nd century after Buddha's mahāparinirvāṇa, when significant differences arose on ten points of monastic discipline, a second council was convened in the city of Vaiśālī. After this Second Council, a group of monks who became known as the Theravāda (Sanskrit: Sthavira) split from the majority group (Mahāsāṅghika). Thus began the gradual process of the articulation of distinct Buddhist sects. As the monastic communities became separated geographically, further divisions occurred, until eventually 18 distinct sects emerged. Such a proliferation of schools was supported by the great variety of teachings given by the Buddha on different occasions to different audiences. Although each of the 18 sects retained its own unique interpretations of certain doctrinal and disciplinary points, all followed the same basic Buddhadharma.

## The Great Dharma King Aśoka

The 3rd century BCE marked a watershed in the history of Buddhism in India, for it was then that King Aśoka came to power. Expanding the already sizable Maurya kingdom he inherited from his father, Aśoka waged war after bloody war until his rule extended over most of the Indian subcontinent and into present-day Afghanistan. During the last and bloodiest of these wars against the fiercely independent and largely Buddhist Kalinga territory on India's east coast, Aśoka's army slaughtered 100,000 people. Following this conquest, the king had a meeting with a Buddhist monk that sparked a dramatic change of heart. Aśoka proclaimed his deep regret for the suffering he caused in this war in a stone edict that survives to this day. The king thereafter renounced violence, and became as vigorous in his pursuit of Dharma as he had earlier been in his pursuit of territory. The Buddhist accounts of Aśoka's rule provided a model for Buddhist kingship that would be emulated by later kings across the Buddhist world, applying principles of Dharma to governance, and using political power to promote the Dharma. During his lifetime, Aśoka offered extensive support to the sangha, built a legendary 84,000 stūpas, and sent emissaries to spread the Dharma in the furthest reaches of his empire and beyond. These emissaries delivered the message of Dharma to Gandhāra (now Pakistan) and Kashmir, to Sri Lanka and Burma, all of which would eventually go on to become major centers of Buddhist activity.



As Buddhism spread beyond India, monks practiced meditation in caves decorated with paintings such as these from Dambulla, Sri Lanka. *Photo by Bernard Gagnon*

## The Spread to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia

King Aśoka's deep personal commitment is clear from the fact that his son and daughter by his first queen both took monastic ordination on the same day. Years later, in 240 BCE, he sent each of the two separately to Sri Lanka—his son Mahinda to establish a bhikṣu order there, and his daughter Saṅghamittā to establish a bhikṣuṇī order. To his daughter Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghamittā, King Aśoka also entrusted the responsibility for transporting a sapling of the Bodhi Tree by sea to Sri Lanka. That tree, enshrined at Anurādhapura, remains one of the most sacred objects on the island to this day.

In subsequent centuries, Buddhism would travel from Sri Lanka along established trade routes linking the island to other parts of Southeast Asia. While Buddhism was practiced by people of all social classes in India, over time the connection between Buddhist monasteries and merchants took on a particular importance. Monks travelled along hazardous routes in the company of trading parties, while merchants found a familiar refuge in Buddhist monasteries far from home. Buddhist accounts from the beginning of the first millennium describe merchants asking to have monks assigned to travel with them on sea journeys, to provide Dharma during the long and dangerous trip. In a later phase of transmission of the Dharma, patterns of the movement of monastics carrying the Dharma to East Asia would again follow patterns of trade relations.

Sri Lankan monastics contributed to the strong presence of Theravāda Buddhism in Burma and Thailand, from where it would further spread to the surrounding territories of today's Laos, Cambodia and parts of Vietnam. A group of Sri Lankan bhikṣuṇīs undertook the dangerous sea journey to China in the 5th century CE in order to transmit the bhikṣuṇī lineage to China, from where it spread throughout East Asia.



This 12th-century Sanskrit manuscript of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* is illustrated with scenes from the Buddha's life. In the center, Buddha is flanked by Bhikṣu Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā as he performs miracles at Śrāvastī. To the right is his birth and to the left he is shown teaching the gods. *Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Los Angeles County Museum of Art*

## Mahāyāna Buddhism

By the beginning of the first millennium, many of the 18 Buddhist sects had taken shape and were thriving across India. The Sarvāstivāda sect had split from the Theravāda and become well-entrenched in northern India and central Asia. This sect had important centers in Kashmir, Gandhāra and Mathurā, all of which became major sites of Buddhist artistic and textual production. Connected to, but distinct from the Mūlasarvāstivāda whose vinaya was later adopted in Tibet, the Sarvāstivāda sect was known for its scholarly examination of Buddha's teachings. It was in areas dominated by the Sarvāstivāda sect that both the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika philosophical schools emerged, ensuring that the sect left a lasting influence on Buddhist thought.

As a teacher highly attentive to the particular needs and aptitudes of his audience, over the course of his life, the Buddha gave certain presentations of his teachings to certain audiences and not others. By the 1st century CE, a set of discourses known as the Mahāyāna sūtras, which had previously been transmitted only in closed circles, now began to be taught openly. This development was centered in South India, and particularly in modern-day Andhra Pradesh, where Ārya Nāgārjuna was born and studied. Among the Mahāyāna sūtras to enter open circulation in this early phase were the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. Both texts soon became the subject of intense recitation, study and devotion by Buddhists across the Indian subcontinent and into central Asia.

As the Mahāyāna sūtras were gaining visibility, Nāgārjuna composed his extraordinarily influential treatises presenting the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) view of Buddha's philosophy, as articulated in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. Nāgārjuna's disciple Āryadeva continued in his line, and was followed by a long procession of major thinkers, including Bhāvaviveka, Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti, each of whom contributed their own writings on Madhyamaka. Meanwhile, a second stream of philosophical interpretation, known as the Cittamātra or Yogācāra (Mind Only), arose based on other Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises, with Asaṅga and his brother Vasubandhu serving as important advocates of this view.

In the early first millennium, a major movement developed around the newly available Mahāyāna sūtras, inspiring lay and ordained Buddhists alike with its teaching that complete buddhahood is possible for all beings. Major commentarial and verse texts were composed to outline the bodhisattva path that all were now encouraged to pursue.

## The Spread to China and Central Asia

Buddhism received an additional infusion of support in the 1st century CE with the rise of the Kuṣāṇa empire, which was based in northwest India where the Sarvāstivāda sect was flourishing. The Kuṣāṇa king Kaniṣka served as a second major Dharma king in India during his reign in the early 2nd century CE. King Kaniṣka was also a patron of the great Buddhist poet Aśvaghōṣa. He is credited with convening a third Buddhist council, after which Buddhist scriptures were increasingly transmitted in written form.

The Kuṣāṇa empire was closely tied to major trade routes throughout central Asia, and Buddhism gained in strength along these routes during the Kuṣāṇa period. At the beginning of the first millennium, Buddhism had also begun to enter China via the Silk Road. Early Chinese exposure to the Buddhadharma coincided with the emergence of the Mahāyāna in India. Mahāyāna sūtras began to be translated into Chinese as early as the 1st century CE. As interest in the Dharma gathered momentum in China, Indian teachers began to travel to China. Over the centuries numerous Chinese pilgrims made the journey to India to study at the feet of masters there. They returned with massive numbers of texts for translation into classical Chinese. In time, Buddhism came to have a vast impact on Chinese literature, art and culture.

China in turn served as a springboard for the Dharma to spread to surrounding areas, including Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Each of these cultural areas long relied primarily on Chinese translations of Buddhist texts.

## Tantra and the Nālandā Era

The second half of the first millennium saw the development of large Buddhist monastic institutions in northern India. These institutions offered the opportunity for rigorous scholastic study alongside meditative practice. Among such monastic universities, the foremost were Nālandā and Vikramaśīla, located in modern-day Bihar, followed by Otantapūri and Somapūri. These reached their heyday under the patronage of the Gupta dynasty, which ruled India from the 4th to the 8th centuries, and continued to flourish during the Pāla dynasty that ruled from the 8th through the 12th centuries.

This period in Buddhist history coincided with the rising visibility of tantra in India. The tantras were initially transmitted covertly, much like the Mahāyāna sūtras. The widely dispersed sites for their early transmission included Amarāvātī in today's



Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghamittā played an instrumental role in transmitting the Dharma and monasticism to Sri Lanka, from where it spread throughout southeast Asia. This statue of Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghamittā is displayed in the personal library of His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa. *Photo by Karma Lekchoe*



As visible from its extensive ruins, Nālandā was once a thriving and influential monastic university. It attracted students from throughout Asia, transmitting Mahāyāna as well as tantric teachings. *Photo by Hideyuki Kamon*



Vikramaśīla Monastery remained a key center of Buddhist study and practice through the 12th century. Photo by Saurav Sen Tonandada

Andhra Pradesh and Oḍḍiyāna in northwest Pakistan. From the 3rd to 6th centuries, tantra was increasingly taught in the open, and from the 7th century onward, tantric practice and imagery formed part of the public face of Buddhism in India.

Records kept by Chinese monks who came to India for pilgrimage and study during the 5th to 7th centuries provide an invaluable source of information on the practice of Buddhism in India during this era. Xuanzang (Hsuan Tsang), a 7th-century monk from China, reports that only four of the 18 original sects of Buddhism

retained a strong presence in India during the time of his stay. His descriptions of life at Nālandā Monastery, where he studied for five years, show evidence of remarkable tolerance and diversity. The monastery housed several thousand residents, with members of diverse sects—who therefore followed diverse vinayas—all studying and practicing in a single institution that housed adherents of the Mahāyāna. Numerous other historical sources tell us that tantra was also practiced at Nālandā.

While tantra was practiced at Nālandā and other monasteries, over the centuries a vibrant tradition of yogic practice developed outside monasteries as well. History records 84 mahāsiddhas with especially high attainments, with Kashmir in northwest India hosting a particularly high concentration of such practitioners over the centuries.

Nālandā and Vikramaśīla, the two towering pillars of Buddhist learning and practice, were both destroyed by Turkic invaders at the end of the 12th century, dealing a devastating blow to the Dharma in India. By the end of the 13th century, the last remaining Buddhist dynasties in India—the Pāla in Bengal and the Sena in Bihar—had both fallen to Islamic invaders. As Buddhist monks migrated out of unreceptive territories, a warm welcome awaited those who would cross the Himalayas to Tibet. Indeed, the western kingdom of Guge was, at times, flooded with such refugees.

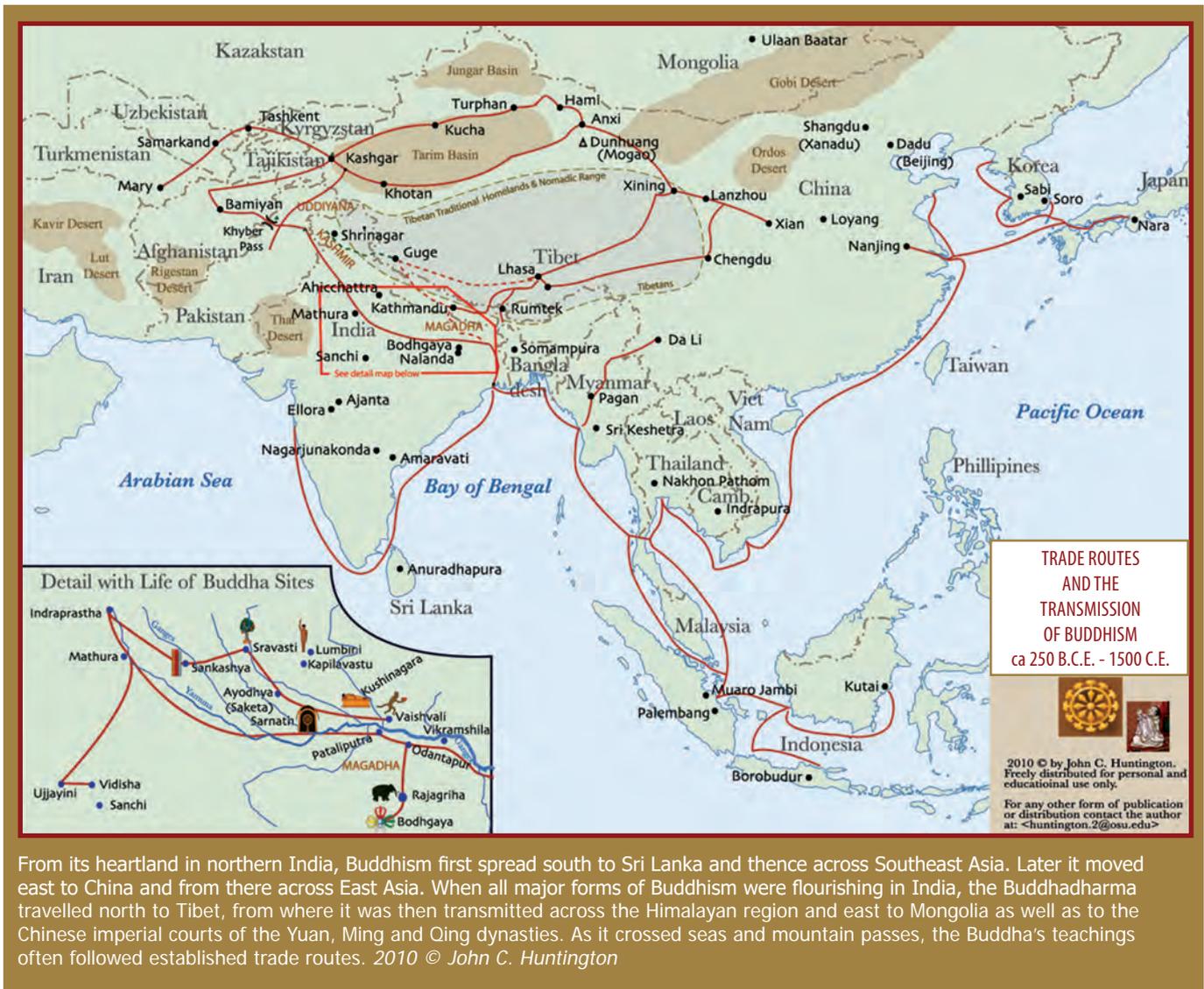
## The Spread to Tibet

It was during the fullness of the flowering of the Nālandā era in India that the Buddhadharmā first made its way north to find fertile new ground on the Tibetan plateau. All the elements of Buddhism in evidence in India during the Nālandā era were transmitted to Tibet. Monasticism based on the practice of vinaya, scholastic study and analysis of Mahāyāna treatises, and tantric meditation all took root in Tibetan soil from the 7th century onwards. Tibet then formed the springboard for a further expansion of the Dharma into Mongolia and portions of modern Russia, and throughout the Himalayan region.

During the first six centuries of the Dharma's spread in Tibet, Buddhism remained a living tradition in India, enabling a long-term direct engagement between the two cultures. Indian masters travelled to teach personally in Tibet,



In Mindroling monastery, a major Nyingma center of learning in central Tibet, monks engage in communal recitation of the entire canon of Buddha's discourses. Photo by Lhundup Damchö



while Tibetans in greater numbers sought out Buddhist texts, learning and practice, studying in the great monastic universities and engaging in intensive training with great masters outside the monasteries. In this way, before its demise in India, the Dharma found a receptive new home in the Land of Snows.

## Conclusion

When the Buddha left the shade of the Bodhi Tree and began to teach the Dharma for the well-being of the world, he set in motion a complex chain of events that are still unfolding today, 2,500 years later. By the time the social, political and economic conditions for Buddhism to flourish in India had been exhausted, the subcontinent had effectively served as a launching ground for Buddha’s teachings to travel to vast new territories—Sri Lanka and Burma, Thailand and Cambodia, China and Korea, Vietnam and Japan, and finally, Tibet and all the vast territory under its cultural sway.

Today, the Dharma that the Buddha proclaimed in the streets and villages of ancient India is taught in public auditoriums, broadcast on television and transmitted live over the Internet, potentially reaching every corner of the planet and touching every suffering sentient being’s heart. And the Tibetan people living in exile in India continue to impart the wisdom tradition they received so many centuries ago, once again planting the banner of living Dharma practice in India’s generous and patient soil. ☺



The arrival of the Indian master Padmasambhava in the 8th century was crucial for the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. This 18th-century thangka from Bhutan forms part of the collection of Tibetan art at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York. C2006.66.4 (HAR 12) Photo by Bruce M. White

## 3 ♦ Buddhism in Tibet

Tibet's encounter with Indian Buddhism came at a unique historical moment. Tibet was the last major culture in Asia to receive the Dharma directly from India. Due to its own phase of cultural development at the time, Tibet itself was unusually receptive to Indian influence. When Buddhism crossed from India into Tibet in the 7th century CE, all the major streams of Buddhist thought and practice in India were flowing openly. Tibet thus became heir to the full range of Indian Buddhist traditions, and made Mūlasarvāstivāda monasticism the basis for their conduct, Mahāyāna the basis for their view, and tantra the basis for meditative practice. As Tibetans assimilated this vast array of transformative wisdom, virtually every aspect of their culture would be indelibly marked by Indian Buddhism—from medicine to art to politics to literature.

When Tibet first began embracing the Buddhadharma in the 7th century, it was a rising military power whose vast territory would range from deep into China to the east and what is today Iran to the west. Prior to its engagement with Indian Buddhism, Tibet had no alphabet and thus no literature to speak of. What it did have was a spirit of openness to the new ideas that empire would bring within its reach. Indeed, despite the soaring confidence that comes with imperial expansion, it is remarkable that precisely at the moment of consolidating their military dominance over the region, Tibetans began wholeheartedly adapting their culture to the influence of Indian Buddhism. In time, the Tibetan empire would fall, but the Buddhadharma would persist, lending the sense of purpose to the Tibetan civilization that it had earlier derived from building and maintaining its empire.

The history of Buddhism in Tibet began with a massive multi-century project to imbibe and digest the dazzling abundance of ideas and practices that Tibetans were receiving from India. Buddhism remained a vital living tradition in India for the first six centuries that Tibetans were eagerly importing Buddhism from its source: inviting India's greatest masters to Tibet, sending their own best and brightest to India to study with masters there, and translating into Tibetan every Sanskrit Buddhist text they could



Songtsen Gampo sought to counteract forces hostile to the new Buddhist teachings, by building temples at key locations throughout the region. This immobilized indigenous forces, envisioned as a demoness, and converted Tibet into a land receptive to Buddhist teachings. Painted by Tsewang Tashi, a modern artist and associate professor in the School of Art at the Tibetan University in Lhasa. Photo by Tsewang Tashi

find. By the time India's last major Buddhist kingdoms fell to Muslim invasions in the 13th century, the practice and understanding of Buddhism within Tibet had matured to the point that Tibet itself could become a source of Dharma for other cultures. When Buddhism disappeared from India, Tibet—with its highly accomplished practitioners of meditation and rigorous scholastic study of Dharma—would replace India as the preferred destination for many of those seeking Buddhist texts and teachers. Chinese emperors from the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties sent parties to Tibet to invite Tibet's finest masters to teach in their courts. Mongolians, Tanguts and other Central Asians also turned to Tibet when they wished to drink of the Dharma at its rich reservoir north of the Himalayas. Today, Tibetan Buddhism continues to serve as a wellspring of Dharma for people all around the world seeking the wisdom that Buddha offered the world in India so long ago.

## Tibet's Three Dharma Kings

The full-fledged introduction of Buddhism to Tibet began in earnest in the 7th century, during the reign of Tibet's first emperor, Songtsen Gampo (d. 649/650 CE). Major contributions were made subsequently by two later kings: Trisong Detsen (ca. 742-797 CE) and Ralpachen (reigned 815-838 CE). It was Songtsen Gampo who first unified the Tibetan kingdom and who also first implemented Buddhism within Tibet. Forming strategic alliances with neighboring powers, he married princesses from Nepal and China: Bhṛkuṭī and Wencheng, respectively. Both were devout Buddhists, and each brought with her to Tibet an important Buddhist statue. In order to house their images, two major temples

were erected in Lhasa: the Ramoche and the Jokhang, as they are known today. The latter remains the most revered temple in Tibet even now. King Songtsen Gampo further constructed a series of temples across the territory of Tibet, symbolically staking down the non-Buddhist spirit of Tibet.

Songtsen Gampo initiated further crucial steps in the importation of Buddhism to Tibet: the study of Sanskrit and the creation of a script for the Tibetan language. Without an alphabet or script of its own and without scholars who could translate from Sanskrit, the vast world of Indian Buddhist literary culture was inaccessible to Tibetans when Songtsen Gampo assumed power. As a sign of the importance of the task, Songtsen Gampo sent his own minister Thonmi Sambhota (7th century) to India, where he spent years training with a Kashmiri paṇḍita. Thonmi Sambhota later created the script for the Tibetan language that remains in use today.

For several dynastic generations after Songtsen Gampo, Tibet had Buddhist temples, statues and texts, but still no monastics to lend them life. This crucial step would await the second great Dharma king, Trisong Detsen, whose most lasting contributions were the establishment of a Tibetan



Depicted on the wall of the Lukhang in Lhasa, Songtsen Gampo was the first emperor of Tibet, and was largely responsible for the initial import of Buddhism from India through his initiative and royal patronage. *Photo by Ariana Maki*

monastic sangha and the founding of the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery: Samye, founded in approximately 780 CE. To accomplish these aims, Trisong Detsen sent a delegation to India to invite Śāntarakṣita, the abbot of Nālandā, India's preeminent monastic university. Thus began Tibet's long pattern of bringing India's finest teachers to Tibet, while also sending promising young Tibetans to study in India. When the great bodhisattva-abbot Śāntarakṣita arrived in Tibet, his efforts to establish a Buddhist monastic base met with concerted opposition by indigenous forces.

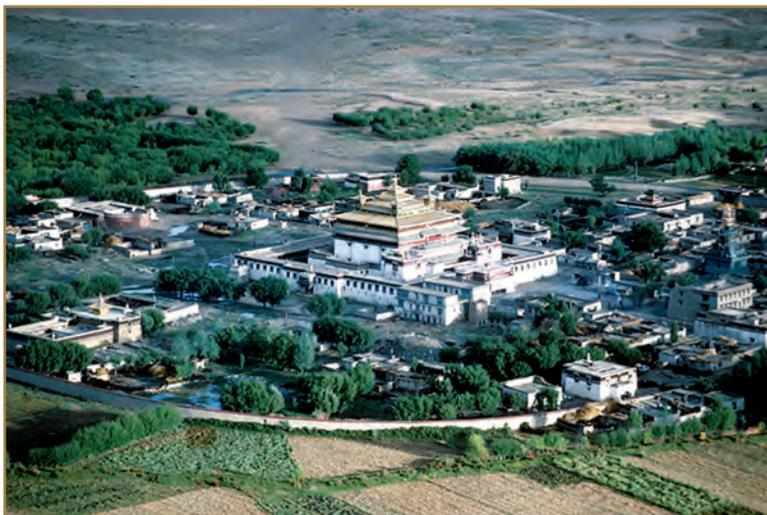
He counseled the king to solicit the aid of the Indian master-adept Padmasambhava. The king did so, and Padmasambhava was able to pave the ground for the construction of Samye Monastery. Śāntarakṣita returned later on a second visit to ordain a group of Tibetans from aristocratic families, and with this the Tibetan bhikṣu sangha was born.

At that point, both Indian and Chinese Buddhist teachings were circulating in Tibet. Concerned with ascertaining which of these divergent paths Tibetans should follow, King Trisong Detsen convened a council featuring a series of debates at Samye Monastery around 797 CE. The Indian debaters soundly defeated their Chinese counterparts, and thenceforth Tibetan commitment to Indian Buddhist traditions was official and unswerving.

Tibet's third major Dharma king Ralpachen took the throne in 815 CE. By that time, several initiatives were already underway to translate Buddhist texts into Tibetan, to which Ralpachen lent wholehearted royal support. In what became the standard pattern for translating from Sanskrit to Tibetan, Indian scholars, or paṇḍitas, worked in partnership with Tibetans, in Samye Monastery as well as in the important Silk Road town of Dunhuang, then under Tibetan rule. Translation work was both sponsored and regulated by the Tibetan kings from Trisong Detsen through Ralpachen, who created a standardized lexicon and mandated guidelines for translation. In the process, Tibetans developed a literary language that was virtually created to express the Buddhadharmā. Ralpachen further invited important paṇḍitas from India and instituted a system to ensure patronage for monks in Tibet, with seven households sharing the task of supporting the needs of one monk.

## Fragmentation and Recovery

This period of royal patronage and steady deepening of Buddhism's roots in Tibetan soil came to a violent and abrupt halt in 838 CE, with the assassination of Ralpachen and ascension to the throne of his younger brother, Langdarma (reigned 838-842). Langdarma initiated a brief but intense period of repression of Buddhism in Tibet. Though texts and statues were hidden for safekeeping, the monasteries were forcibly emptied of monastics. Translation work halted,



The first Buddhist monastery established in Tibet, Samye Monastery was founded around 780 CE and constructed through the efforts of the renowned Indian masters Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava. Samye hosted a key debate in the 8th century, one that ultimately determined Tibet's alliance with Indian Buddhism over that of China. Photo by Christian Luczanits



In the tenth century, the gifted and prolific translator Rinchen Zangpo greatly aided in reconnecting Tibetan Buddhism with its Indian roots through the translating of texts and building of monasteries. Huntington Archive at OSU: Photo by John C. Huntington

and other Buddhist activities were stripped of their means of support. When Langdarma was assassinated in turn in 842, the Tibetan Empire disintegrated, never to recover its former glory. Thus began a long period of fragmentation, characterized by repeated popular uprisings, the rule of warlords and a general deterioration of the practice of Dharma in Tibet.

Well over a century later, a group of several men eager to restore monasticism in central Tibet travelled to the eastern reaches of Tibetan territory. There, they received their full monastic vows from several others who had managed to maintain the ordination lineage throughout the intervening period. To complete the mandated quorum of five monks needed to confer the vows, two Chinese monks were invited to serve as official witnesses to the ordination ceremony. Their role is commemorated to this day by the blue trim that Tibetan monastics wear on their sleeves. When the newly ordained group returned to central Tibet in 980 CE, they prompted a revival of monastic practice with the refurbishment of Samye Monastery and the construction of numerous new temples.

In the meantime, one line of descendants of the Tibetan imperial family had resettled far to the west, in the kingdom of Guge. The Guge kings strove mightily to re-establish the Buddhadharmā on sure footing within Tibet. Among the numerous Indian scholars they invited to their territory was the acclaimed abbot of Vikramaśīla, Atiśa Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna (972/82-1054). This great Bengali scholar arrived in Tibet in 1042, to spend the remainder of his life teaching and training his many Tibetan disciples, first in Guge and later in central Tibet. Clarifying the considerable confusion that had arisen in Tibet regarding the relationship between tantra and other forms of Buddhist practice, Atiśa emphasized monasticism

and Mahāyāna practice as a foundation for tantra. In the *lam rim* (gradual path) genre of teachings that he pioneered, Atiśa advocated moving in stages from one level of practice to the next. His main disciple, Dromtönpa (1004/1005–1064), founded a school that became known as the Kadampa. With its strong focus on the cultivation of renunciation, compassion, and mind training, the Kadampa school would go on to influence all later schools, with first the Kagyu and later the Gelugpa particularly integrating the Kadampa teachings into their own streams of Dharma transmission. The Kadampa and later schools were referred to as *Sarma* or New Schools, and the set of teachings that had begun circulating prior to them became known as the *Nyingma*, or the Old School.

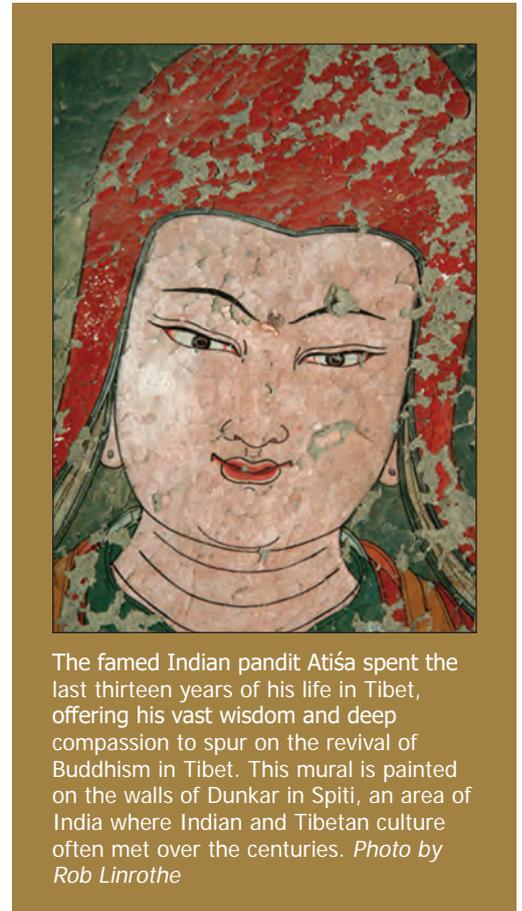


Under the rule and patronage of its enlightened kings, the Guge region revitalized and promoted Buddhism through textual translation, training and building activity in the 10th and 11th centuries. Here pictured is Tholing Monastery, said to be founded by Rinchen Zangpo. Photo by Christian Luczanits

## Translators and the Later Flourishing

The late 10th-century revival of monasticism in central Tibet, followed as it was by Atiśa's advent in the mid-11th century, ushered in a new era for Buddhism in Tibet. This era was known broadly as the Later Flourishing. The initial centuries of this second flourishing of the Dharma in Tibet were invigorated by repeated and close contact with living Indian masters—especially important given the emphasis in tantra on direct transmission and personal guidance of disciples by qualified spiritual masters or lamas (in Sanskrit, *gurus*). During this period, Tibetans generally reserved their respect and appreciation for texts composed by Indian masters, seldom daring to compose texts of their own. Instead, many of Tibet's best and brightest minds devoted their energies towards a colossal project to translate the many hundreds of volumes of Sanskrit texts still circulating at the time in Buddhist India. Those Tibetans who achieved the necessary level of learning to participate in this culture-wide effort were known as *lotsāwas*, and accorded tremendous respect. *Lotsāwas* risked life and limb to travel to India, where they would undergo years and often decades of intense hardships far from all that was familiar to them, in the service of bringing the wisdom of Indian Buddhism into the reach of their fellow Tibetans. Their efforts were all the greater a service to humanity, since these would turn out to be the last centuries before Buddhism in India was lost forever as a living tradition. Today, a vast number of Indian Buddhist texts exist only in the Tibetan translations that these *lotsāwas* sacrificed so much to produce.

In the late 10th century, before inviting Atiśa from India, the Guge king sent a group of over 20 promising young Tibetans across the mountains to Kashmir for training. One of only two to survive this mission, Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055 CE) returned in 988 CE from India to Western Tibet where he devoted the remainder of his life to the Dharma, founding major monasteries and translating copious texts from Sanskrit. A translators' council was convened by the Guge kings in 1076 and within a year, the highly influential scholar Patsab Lotsāwa (1055-ca. 1145) departed for Kashmir, where he studied Sanskrit and Buddhist philosophy for 24 years. Upon his return to Tibet, he translated major works of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka philosophy that would later become so fundamental to Tibetan Buddhism. As the era's most learned scholar on the subject, Patsab Lotsāwa taught at the monastery of Phenyul, a pre-eminent site for rigorous learning of the day. It was there that the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193), would read Madhyamaka philosophical texts with Patsab Lotsāwa. Sangphu in particular was a site for the development of the dialectical debate that forms the backbone of Tibetan monastic study programs to this day.



The famed Indian pandit Atiśa spent the last thirteen years of his life in Tibet, offering his vast wisdom and deep compassion to spur on the revival of Buddhism in Tibet. This mural is painted on the walls of Dunkar in Spiti, an area of India where Indian and Tibetan culture often met over the centuries. Photo by Rob Linrothe

## The Dharma Takes Root

The Tibetan people's deep reverence for Indian teachers, training and texts kept the authority for Buddhist knowledge vested in Indian masters, with Tibetans required to meet exceedingly high standards before their local production of knowledge could be accepted as authoritative. However, from the 11th century onwards, Tibet had matured to the point of producing not only its own great translators, but also highly realized practitioners and great scholars in their own right. During this period, Indian masters would increasingly entrust their lineage's teachings to Tibetan disciples. Two of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism would emerge in this period—Kagyü and Sakya—both of which would carry on lineages brought to Tibet from India by great Tibetan *lotsāwas*.

The life of Marpa Lotsāwa (1012-1097) provides a prime exemplar of this pattern. Making the arduous journey no fewer than three times, Marpa Lotsāwa trained directly under the great Indian mahāsiddhas Nāropa (1012/1016-1100) and Maitrīpa (ca. 1007-1085), and brought back not only texts and a knowledge

of Sanskrit, but the full transmission of these masters' realizations, along with spiritual realizations of his own. Once back in Tibet, Marpa began training the next generation of practitioners in Tibet, foremost among whom was Tibet's most universally revered yogi, the great Milarepa (1028/1040-1111/1123). (For more on Marpa Lotsāwa, and his disciple Milarepa, see Chapter Four in this volume.)

Before his trips to India and Nepal, Marpa had initially studied Sanskrit under the Tibetan translator Drogmi Lotsāwa Shakya Yeshe (b. 992/993 CE). Drogmi Lotsāwa too had spent many years training in India. Once settled back in Tibet, he transmitted the *lam-dre* teachings of the Indian mahāsiddha Virupa to Könchog Gyalpo (1034-1102) of the influential

Khön clan of central Tibet. In 1070, with the support of his family, Könchog Gyalpo founded Sakya Monastery in the Tsang region of central Tibet. Within a few generations, the patronage and erudition of the Khön clan would combine to establish the Sakya order on firm ground, and to this day religious leadership of the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism is passed down among members of the Khön family.

With Marpa's lineage, known as the Kagyü, producing such enlightened practitioners as Milarepa and Gampopa (1079-1153), and the Sakya tradition yielding such exceptional scholars as Sachen Kunga Nyingpo (1092-1158), Sönam Tsemo (1142-1182) and Drakpa Gyaltzen (1147-1216), the 11th and 12th centuries saw a tremendous increase in Tibetans' cultural and spiritual confidence. Around the same time, masters of the Nyingma order began to discover texts that had previously been left concealed in Tibet by Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and others, awaiting the time that Tibetans would be ready for such teachings. The growing number of such *terma* or 'revealed treasures,' coming into circulation was a further sign that the time was ripe for Tibetan Buddhism to come into its own.



Monks engage in philosophical debate in the courtyard of Tsurphu Monastery in Tibet. Debate ensures that monastics ground their understanding of the Dharma in reason, and requires skills of memory, logic and clarity of thought, within a collaborative learning environment. *Photo by Tenzin Dorje*

In the following centuries, the transmission of the Dharma to Tibetan soil had advanced far enough that Tibetans who had never trained with Indian masters could now become scholars capable of composing their own commentaries and adepts capable of guiding their own disciples to spiritual attainment. The caves and mountains of Tibet would fill with meditators inspired by the example of Milarepa and other accomplished Tibetan adepts, while the valleys and hilltops served as sites of intensive study and textual production.

In this way, 14th- and 15th-century Tibet witnessed a grand procession of great thinkers and practitioners. Working at Zhalu Monastery in the early 14th century, Butön Rinchen Drup (1290-1364) compiled and edited an authoritative canon of over 300 volumes of sūtras and śāstras (exegetical treatises) translated from Sanskrit. The commentaries and compositions of the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339) from this same period are still used today by both scholars and meditators. Meanwhile, Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen (1292-1361) initiated the Jonang school, with its masterful *zhentong* interpretation of Madhyamaka philosophy and exegesis of Kalachakra tantra. The prolific writer and master scholar Bodong Chogle Namgyel (1376-1451) was the main teacher of Chokyi Dronme (1422-1455), the First Samding Dorje Phagmo, Tibet's most eminent female reincarnation lineage. Bodong also inspired his own Bodong tradition, although neither the Jonang nor Bodong traditions would ever fully recover after the turmoil of the 17th century in Tibet. The Sakya scholar Rendawa Zhönu Lodrö (1348-1412) composed some of the first indigenous Tibetan commentaries on Indian Madhyamaka, and argued forcefully against the philosophical positions taken by the Jonang school. Rendawa in turn passed his philosophical views on to his disciple Tsongkhapa Lobsang Drakpa (1357-1419). Je Tsongkhapa, an original thinker in his own right, would found the last major school of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelugpa or Gandenpa.

## The Internationalization of Tibetan Buddhism

In this way, Tibetan religious culture was reaching its spiritual maturity just as Buddhism was nearing its end in India. By the 13th century, the Kadampa, Kagyu and Sakya orders all had thriving monasteries. Major monasteries would grow in size over the coming centuries and spawn smaller affiliated 'branch' monasteries. Intense training was conducted at the large monastic seats, while the smaller monasteries offered preliminary training and served the religious needs of their local communities. The monasteries and orders founded by the great adepts and scholars of earlier centuries thus reached a sufficient level of institutional stability and sophistication to consistently produce accomplished practitioners and masterful scholars.

Tibetan masters began to attract the attention of other powers across the region. First to do so, in the 12th century, were the Tangut rulers, who turned mainly to



Born in the 15th century, Chökyi Drönma was the first Samding Dorje Phagmo, Tibet's most prominent female reincarnation line. She was the main disciple of Bodong Chogle Namgyal. The portrait here is taken from a manuscript of his biography. *Photo by Hildegard Diemberger*



The 15th-century Ming Dynasty ruler of China, the Yongle emperor, invited the Fifth Karmapa to teach in his imperial court. Yongle became a great patron of Buddhist studies and the arts.

Kagyü masters. The pattern would continue throughout three successive dynasties in China—the Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912). Thus began the persistent relationship of ‘lama and patron’ that many senior Tibetan lamas would enjoy for over seven centuries with various regional rulers. The Tangut established a practice—later to be followed by the Mongolians—of appointing ‘national preceptors’ or ‘imperial preceptors,’ a title first given to a disciple of the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa. The connection between the Tangut people and their Kagyü spiritual teachers was such that after the Tanguts lost their kingdom to the Mongolians in the 13th century, they relocated to a predominantly Kagyü section of Kham, in eastern Tibet. There they would become known as the Minyag kingdom, and continue their close ties to the Karmapa lineage. Centuries later, when regional conflict prompted the Minyag people to migrate once again, they settled in modern-day Sikkim where they intermarried with local groups to produce the Sikkimese royal line. Thus the close historical relationship existing today between the Karmapas and the Sikkimese dates back over 800 years, to the very first century of the Karmapa reincarnation lineage.

The 13th century saw a major paradigm shift in the relationship between the secular and religious rule of Tibet, with Mongol involvement in Tibetan affairs. As the Tanguts had before them, the Mongols who ruled over China as emperors invited various Tibetan religious leaders to teach in their court, with the Second through Fourth Karmapas all visiting at different times. The great scholar Sakya Paṇḍita (1182-1251) arrived at the Mongol court in 1247 with his young nephew Phagspa (1235–1280), and subsequently entered into a relation of lama and patron with Godan Khan. Although he was a figure of religious and not secular authority in Tibet, Sakya Paṇḍita was offered an opportunity to surrender political control of Tibet to the Mongols. After a protracted stay in the imperial court, Sakya Paṇḍita’s nephew Phagspa, entered into an alliance with Godan’s successor Kublai Khan that effectively vested in Phagspa and his Sakya order the right to rule over Tibet, while simultaneously making Phagspa Kublai’s imperial preceptor. In 1264, Phagspa returned to Tibet with a Mongolian invasion force. For the next century, the Sakya order flourished as it ruled Tibet with Mongolian backing and amidst intermittent Mongolian military interventions on its behalf.

In the meantime, after the Yuan dynasty in China fell and was supplanted by the Ming, in the early 15th century the new emperor of China invited the Fifth Karmapa, Deshin Shegpa (1384-1415), to his court and offered him a similar arrangement to the Sakya-Mongol alliance. Such a pact would have granted the Karma Kagyü broad political powers within Tibet, under the patronage of the Ming emperors. However, the Karmapas historically have shunned political power. The Fifth Karmapa declined the offer, noting that religious pluralism was productive for Tibetan society, and appears to have further dissuaded the emperor from a planned invasion of Tibet. The following year the Ming emperor invited Je Tsongkhapa, who opted to send a disciple instead. The monk

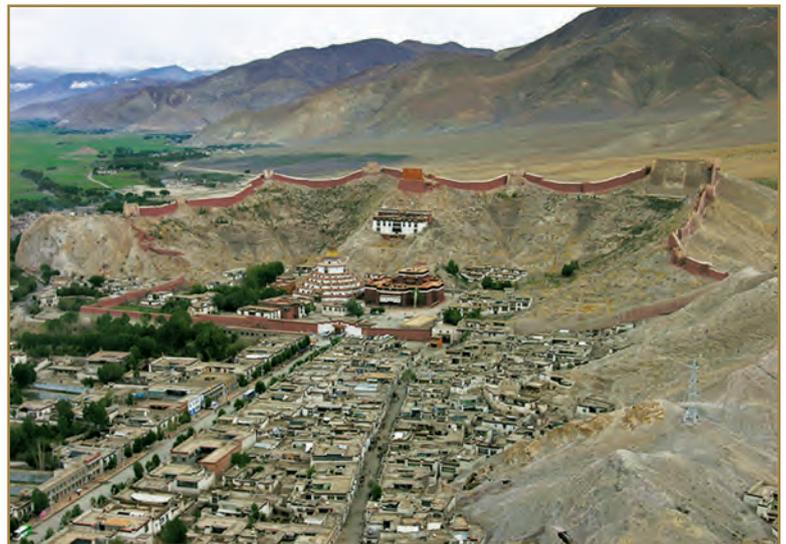
steered clear of a formal political alliance with his order, and from this time until an arrangement struck in the 17th century between the Gelugpa and a Mongol tribe, Tibet's Buddhist orders shunned foreign military support.

## The Phagdru, Rinpung and Tsangpa Periods

When the Mongols began to lose their grip on rule of China in the mid-14th century, Sakya rule over Tibet also faltered. After the Sakya period came to an end, there followed three centuries in which political power was passed among several powerful Tibetan clans, each devoted to various Kagyu masters.

It was Situ Jangchup Gyaltsen (1302-1364) of the Phagdru Kagyu order who first managed to wrest political control of central Tibet from the Sakya rulers. Asserting Tibetan independence from Mongol forces and evoking the great Dharma kings of Tibet's imperial period, Jangchup Gyaltsen replaced the Mongol law used by the Sakyas with a far more progressive Tibetan system of criminal justice. He further revamped the structure of administration and undertook a campaign of infrastructure development, constructing bridges, ferries and security posts to protect travelers in remote areas. As an early measure of environmental protection, he also encouraged the widespread planting of trees. Among the other contributions of the Phagdru era were the compilation and editing of the entire canonical corpus of Indian commentarial works, or Tengyur, comprising over 3,300 separate works. This massive literary project was completed by the great polymath Butön. Meanwhile, a separate edition of the canonical discourses of Buddha, known as the Tselpa Kangyur, was consecrated by the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, himself.

A succession of Phagdru rulers thus combined religious and secular rule for the following 100 years, until the Rinpung family stepped into a similar role in central Tibet in the mid-15th century. The Rinpung rulers were disciples of the Karmapas, other Karma Kagyu masters and Sakya lamas as well, and offered especially propitious conditions for the flourishing of the Karma Kagyu teachings. Yet during the Rinpung era, the Gelug order also underwent rapid growth, with enrollment in the three main Gelug monasteries around Lhasa swelling into the thousands, and the construction of the major Gelug seat of Tashilhunpo Monastery in Tsang. In the mid-16th century, the Rinpung family lost ground to the Tsangpa rulers, who were also strong supporters of the Karma Kagyu. The Tsangpa rulers retained power in central Tibet until the mid-17th century, when Mongol involvement would once again tip the balance, this time to place political control in the hands of the Gelug school.



The city plan of Gyantse reflects the culture's strong religious orientation, as all roads lead to Pelkhor Chode and Gyantse Kumbum, here pictured in the distance. *Photo by Christian Luczanits*



Built as a complete mandala, the Gyantse Kumbum contains 108 shrines dedicated to enlightened beings, protective figures and religious masters. Butön Rinchen Drup, a polymath of the Phagdru Kagyu era, played a major role in the design of this intricately adorned monument. *Photo by Lhundup Damchö*

The 15th and 16th centuries were a period of tremendous intellectual and artistic ferment in Tibet. Serious intellectual debates invigorated the scholarship of all the schools involved, with Shākya Chogden (1428-1507) and Goram Sönam Senge (1429-1489) arguing for the Sakya positions, the Eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorje (1507-1554) articulating Karma Kagyu views, and the Gelugpa scholar Sera Jetsünpa (1469-1544/1546) weighing in with the orthodox Gelugpa presentation. This period also saw a great flourishing of the arts. Among Tibet's major contributions to world artistic culture are its unique style of opera and its highly distinctive painting. Tradition holds that the first Tibetan opera performances were staged at the end of the 14th century, initially as fundraising efforts to finance the building of iron bridges in Tibet by the eclectic Tibetan Buddhist master Thangtong Gyalpo (1385-1464 or 1361-1485). Most of the major schools of Tibetan painting first emerged during these two centuries, including the Menri, Khyenri and Karma Gardri schools. The latter developed in the Great Encampment of the Karmapas, who historically have retained a particular commitment to Tibetan artistic production. Indeed, the Tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorje (1604-1674) was one of the most original and multi-faceted artists in Tibetan history. (See Chapter Six for more on his art.)

## The Era of the Ganden Palace Government

The 17th century brought a lasting shift in the religious and political landscape, as the Gelugpa school consolidated its dominant position in both areas. The school's influence had grown rapidly from the time of its founding in the early 15th century. Its founder Je Tsongkhapa was an exceptionally brilliant systematic thinker, and was followed by two important disciples—Gyaltsap (1364-1432), whose commentaries established Gelug orthodoxy for future generations, and Khedrup-je (1385-1438), a formidable polemicist who delighted in debate. From the outset, the Gelugpa school placed a strong emphasis on rigorous scholastic study and careful observance of monastic discipline. The school initially shied from political authority, with Je Tsongkhapa himself turning down repeated invitations by the Ming dynasty emperors.

Several generations later, however, an important Gelug reincarnate lama from Drepung named Sönam Gyatso (1543-1588) travelled to the Kokonor region of eastern Tibet to meet with the Mongol ruler Altan Khan (1507-1582). During this meeting, Sönam Gyatso urged Mongolians to embrace Buddhism and cease animal sacrifices and other non-Buddhist activities. Apparently deeply inspired by Sönam Gyatso's message, Altan Khan issued an edict banning blood sacrifices, long a Mongol custom. At this time, the title Dalai Lama was first conferred by the Khan. Thereafter, the Gelugpa sect began cultivating close ties to the Mongol court, and Mongolians converted to Tibetan Buddhism in vast numbers. With two previous Gelug masters retroactively identified as previous Dalai Lamas, Sönam Gyatso became known as the Third Dalai Lama. A great-grandson of Altan Khan was recognized as the Fourth Dalai Lama, much solidifying the relationship between the Gelugpa order and the Mongolian people.

The Fifth Dalai Lama, often referred to simply as “The Great Fifth,” in recognition of his major accomplishments, would build on these ties to the Mongolians. The general secretary of his administration invited the Mongolian military to support them in their struggles with the Tsangpa rulers. Consequently, by 1642, their victories would result in the consolidation of ecclesiastic and political authority in the hands of a government headed by the Dalai Lamas, and known as the Ganden Potrang, or Ganden Palace Government. Construction of the Potala Palace in Lhasa—the home of future Dalai Lamas and iconic symbol of the Ganden Potrang administration—commenced during the lifetime of the Great Fifth.

Other regional powers continued to treat Tibet as a rich resource for spiritual guidance throughout the 17th and into the 20th century. Tibetan Buddhism was enormously influential in China itself during the Qing, or Manchu, dynasty that lasted from 1644–1911, as members of the imperial court turned to Tibetan Buddhism as both practitioners and patrons.

For the following 300 years, the Gelugpa school led Tibet’s religious activities and effectively governed Tibet, in an arrangement that lasted until the invasion by communist China in the 1950s. During those centuries, the Gelugpa school rose to an overwhelming majority position among Tibetan Buddhism’s surviving traditions, unifying people across Tibet and lending a certain stability to Tibet’s political and religious terrain.



High above Lhasa, the Potala Palace stands as testament to the administrative power held by the Gelugpa school from the 17th century through the 1950s. It served as both the residence of the Dalai Lamas and the seat of the Tibetan government for three centuries. *Photo by Claire Pullinger*

## Non-Sectarian Movement of Eastern Tibet

Although the Great Fifth Dalai Lama himself had taken teachings from Nyingma, Sakya and Gelug masters, the tendency among Tibetan Buddhists subsequently became an increasingly strict adherence to the teachings and teachers of one’s own school and a reluctance to mix with those of other schools. However, the 19th century saw a broad-based movement against this trend in eastern Tibet, inspired primarily by the activities of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820–1892), Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye (1813–1899) and Chogyur Lingpa (1829–1870), each from a different school of Tibetan Buddhism. In what became known as the “Non-Sectarian” or Rimé movement, major scholars of the Nyingma, Kagyu and Sakya schools began studying one another’s texts, practicing one another’s meditation techniques, receiving initiations from one another, and emphatically reaching across sectarian boundaries.



A moving force in the Non-Sectarian Movement in the 19th century, Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye received transmissions from over 50 teachers. This image is currently housed in the Rubin Museum of Art, C2003.25.2 (HAR 65265) and was painted in Tibet in the late 19th century. The work is comprised of pigments on cloth, and measures 36 x 22 ½ in. (91.4 x 57.2 cm). Photo courtesy of the Rubin Museum of Art

With strong support from the 13th and 14th Dalai Lamas and the 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th Karmapas and many other lineage holders, this spirit of inclusiveness and mutual respect has continued to infuse Tibetan Buddhism to varying degrees thereafter.

## Into Exile

During the 1,350-year history of Tibetan Buddhism, the Buddhadharma radically transformed the social, intellectual and artistic landscape of the Tibetan plateau. While major historical figures were driving the broad direction of these changes, countless unnamed Tibetans were quietly taking the teachings of Buddha to heart throughout their lives.

The activities of Dharma kings, masterful teachers, and highly realized meditators and scholars may be most visible in any portrait of Buddhism in Tibet. Yet the canvas on which such portraits are painted was provided by the numberless anonymous individuals who were inspired by the Buddhist teachings to be more compassionate and more ethical in their everyday lives—individuals whose personal aspirations were shaped by the Buddhist mantras and prayers they recited daily, and whose imagination of their own future was fired by contact with those great figures who had already actualized the highest promise of Buddhist practice.

Even as the men and women whose diligent spiritual practice is not recorded by history provided the canvas to hold the Dharma in Tibet together, the Dharma in turn held together Tibetan society, lending it the grand sense of purpose and potential that

the quest for empire had once offered. The sense of personal and public meaning provided by the Dharma would be particularly crucial after the loss of their country in the mid-20th century, when Tibetans would need all the resources the Buddhadharma instilled in them simply to hold their culture and their personal lives together in exile and at home in Tibet.

With the arrival of the communist Chinese army on Tibetan soil in the 1950s and its forcible takeover of Lhasa in 1959, the seeds for spiritual growth that Tibetan Buddhists had so long cultivated in their own soil were violently wrenched from Tibetan hands. Upon the disappearance in their homeland of the conditions for practicing the Dharma that Tibetans had imported from India and treasured with such devotion and respect for so long, Tibetans turned for solace and refuge to what they call the “Noble Land” or “Holy Land”—India.

In a desperate bid to preserve their culture and the religion that was India’s greatest gift to them, Tibet’s great lamas, ordinary monks and nuns, yogis and laypeople alike braved the high Himalayan peaks, carrying the Dharma with them on their backs and in their hearts and minds. Setting off on foot, often pursued by Chinese soldiers, Tibetans crossed into India, bringing with them

their most treasured texts, their hard-won meditative attainments and the carefully preserved ordination lineages that they had originally received from the Noble Land.

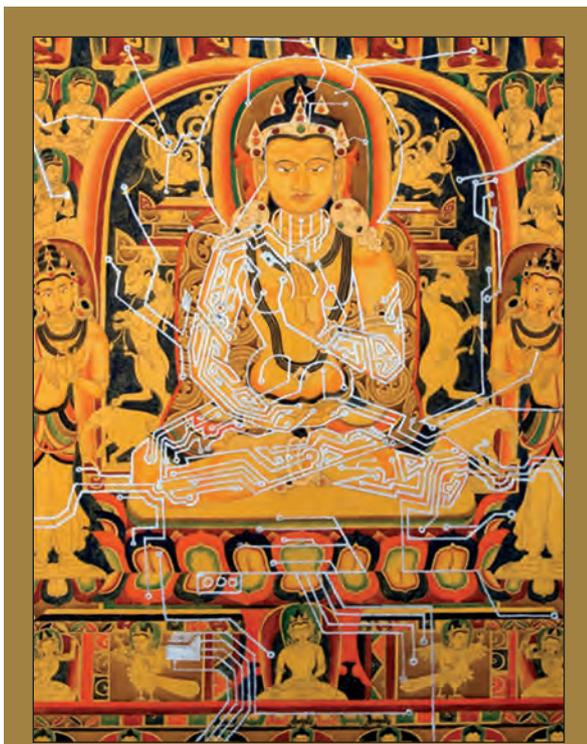
Back in Tibet, many of the monasteries and other cultural treasures left behind were subject to a furious decade of systematic desecration and destruction, during the Cultural Revolution that lasted from 1966 to 1976. Following that period, Tibetans within Tibet have made use of whatever fragile opportunities they find within the Chinese state to keep the Dharma alive on Tibetan soil. Particularly outside central Tibet, leaders such as Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog and Khenpo Achu in Amdo and Kham, respectively, found ways to keep the lifeblood of Dharma flowing within Tibetan hearts despite the adverse circumstances. Meanwhile, in India, on land kindly allocated to them by the Indian government, Tibetan monks, nuns and laypeople cleared jungle in Karnataka and split rocks to build roads in Himachal Pradesh, slowly constructing new conditions for the Dharma to flourish, now on the Indian soil whence it came.

With its arrival from Tibet back to its ancient home in India, the Buddhism that Tibetans had brought with them into exile gained international visibility on the

world's stage. From his seat-in-exile in Dharamsala, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama today carries Buddhism's message of compassion and tolerance as he travels the globe, earning India the world's gratitude as home to its most universally respected spiritual leader. ☪



During China's Cultural Revolution, hundreds of Buddhist monasteries and temples were demolished, their images stolen or destroyed and murals defaced. At other sites, such as the former stronghold of the Jonangpa tradition, now called Ganden Phuntsokling (above), the roofs were removed, allowing the elements to do their destructive work. *Photo by Christian Luczanits*



Art is but one of the many ways that Tibetan Buddhism has retained its relevancy for the present while remaining rooted in its past. Here, Buddhism is fully wired, in a 21st-century painting by Lhasa artist Jhamsang, a founding member of the Gedun Choephel Artists Guild in Lhasa. *Photo courtesy of Rossi & Rossi, London*



Marpa Lotsāwa receives Milarepa, as Dagme looks on. The inscription in the lower right of this painting tells us that it was painted by the Tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorje, and given to his disciple Kuntu Zangpo. Collection of Heidi and Ulrich von Schroeder. Photo by Ulrich von Schroeder

## 4 ♦ The Marpa Kagyu

Driven by an intense thirst for Dharma, in the early 11th century a young Tibetan named Marpa Chökyi Lodrö (1012-1097) journeyed overland from Tibet to India. There, he trained under a series of great Buddhist masters, foremost among whom was one of India’s most eminent mahāsiddhas, Nāropa (1012/1016-1100), an eminent scholar of Nālandā’s monastic university. Nāropa guided Marpa personally until Marpa gained full realization—an understanding that goes far beyond intellectual knowledge to permeate and transform one’s very being. Delighted with his disciple’s spiritual attainments, Nāropa authorized Marpa to transmit his lineage in Tibet. Once Marpa had made the return trip to his homeland, he deployed a variety of means to guide each of the many disciples who came seeking to train under him. In this way, as Marpa’s disciples began to realize the full force of the Buddhadharma within their own minds, the Marpa Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism came into being.

The quest for wisdom that led Marpa to India, and that had also driven the Buddha in his search for enlightenment, was not a mere love of knowledge for its own sake, but was imbued with a concern for suffering. The Buddhadharma teaches that the most basic cause of human suffering is profound ignorance, in the form of deeply held misconceptions about our own nature and the world we live in. Marpa was willing to sacrifice life and limb in search of Dharma teachings and texts, precisely because he understood that wisdom dispels suffering—his own and that of countless other beings. Once he had received and put the Dharma into practice, the full realization of that wisdom transformed every fiber of Marpa’s being, such that he became entirely oriented towards the production of realization in all those around him. This intense concern to accomplish the welfare of others has infused the Marpa Kagyu lineage since its inception nearly a millennium ago.

Indeed, its emphasis on the attainment of realization and on the transmission of those attainments to others has earned Marpa’s Kagyu lineage the epithet, ‘the practice lineage.’ Through the Mahāmudrā and other teachings that Marpa received from his Indian masters, and through their own personal meditative



Marpa and his lama Nāropa are seated together in the 15th-century Gyantse Kumbum in Tibet. *Photo by Orna Tsultem*

## Dagpo Kagyu Lineages: The Four Elder and Eight Younger

Marpa's lineage branched off after Je Gampopa into four direct lines of transmission, called the "four elder" or "senior," and eight indirect lines of transmission, passing through Gampopa's disciple, Phagmodrupa. The latter, because they are one generation removed from Gampopa himself, are commonly referred to as the "eight younger" or "junior." Because all twelve had sprung from Dagpo Rinpoche, also known as Je Gampopa, these four elder and eight younger lineages all came to be called collectively the "Dagpo Kagyu."

Buddha Vajradhara

Tilopa

Nāropa

Marpa

Milarepa

Gampopa

### Barom Kagyu

Founder: Barom Darma Wangchuk (1127-1199/1200)

Major sites of activity: Nagchu and Nangchen in Kham

### Karma Kagyu

Founder: The First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193)

Major monastic seats: Tsurphu in central Tibet, Karma Gönpön and Karma Nenang in Kham, eastern Tibet

The Karma Kagyu lineage thrives to this day.

### Phagmodrupa

Founder: Phagmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo (1110-1170)

Major monastic seats: Densathil and Tsethang

Apart from the eight lineages it produced in the early period, the Phagdrü saw a tremendous efflorescence in the 14th and 15th centuries.

### Tselpa Kagyu

Founder: Lama Zhang (Zhang Yudrakpa) (1121/1123-1193)

Major areas of activity: Tsel Gungthang

Active until the time of the Phagdrü rulers.

### Drigung Kagyu

Founder: Jigten Sumgön (1143-1217)

Major seats: Drigung Thil, founded 1179

Major lineage lamas: Drigung Kyabgön Chetsang Rinpoche and Drigung Kyabgön Chungtsang Rinpoche

Major areas of activity: Drigung valley in central Tibet, Nangchen in Kham, Western Tibet and Ladakh

The Drigung Kagyu lineage is thriving to this day.

### Drukpa Kagyu

Founders: Lingrepa Pema Dorje (1128-88) a disciple of Phagdrü, followed by Tsangpa Gyare (1161-1211)

Major seats: Druk Sang-ngag Chöling in southern Tibet

Major lineage lamas: Gyalwang Drukpa and Je Khenpos

Important sites of activity: Bhutan, where it has been designated the state religion; also Mt. Kailash

The Drukpa Kagyu lineage is thriving to this day.

### Taklung Kagyu

Founder: Taklung Thangpa Tashipal (1142-1209/1210)

Important reincarnation lineages: Taklung Shapdrung Rinpoche, Taklung Matrul Rinpoche and Tsatrul Rinpoche

### Trophu Kagyu

Co-founders: Gyaltsa (1118-95), a nephew of Phagdrü, and Trophu Lotsāwa Champa Pal (1173-1225)

Major seat: Trophu monastery in Tsang, central Tibet, founded 1212

Though the great polymath Butön Rinchen Drup (1290-1364) emerged from this lineage, the Trophu lost its independent identity even before the 17th century.

### Yelpa Kagyu

Founder: Drupthop Yeshe Tsekpa (1134-1194)

Major seats: Shar Yekphuk and Jang Tana

Its initial efflorescence was followed by a period of decline. Situ Panchen acted to reinvigorate Jang Tana, and the Yelpa Kagyu lineage today retains close ties to the Karma Kagyu.

### Martsang Kagyu

Founder: Marpa Drupthop Sherab Senge

Major seat: Sho in Kham

### Yazang Kagyu

Co-founder: Zarawa Kalden Yeshe Senge (d 1207), a student of Phagdrü, and his own disciple Yazang Chöje Chökyi Mönlam (1169-1233)

Major seat: Yazang, founded in 1206

### Shugseb Kagyu

Founder: Gyergom Tsultrim Senge (1144-1204)

Major seat: Shugseb Monastery in central Tibet

The lineage faltered in the turmoil of the 17th century and its main monastery is now an important Nyingma nunnery.

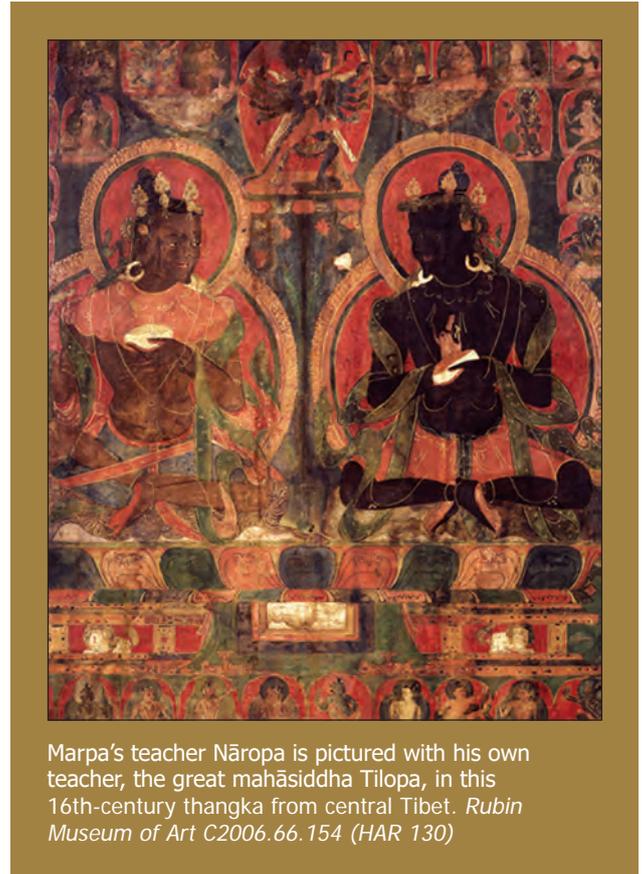
attainments, Kagyu lamas train their students to gain direct meditative experience of the luminous nature of their own minds. Marpa once described his teachings to Milarepa as “instructions that still carry the warm breath of the *dākinīs*,” and this vivid freshness of experience is precisely what animates the Kagyu school of Buddhism, Tibet’s ‘practice lineage.’

The term *Kagyu* itself emphasizes the way that the teachings and realization Marpa brought from India continue moving forward through time, ensuring that each successive generation has access not only to the theories of Buddhism, but also to the personal instructions they need to put them fully into practice. *Ka* refers to speech, or oral instructions, and *gyu* means lineage or transmission. Thus *Kagyu* is quintessentially a lineage of instructions spoken directly by teacher to disciple.

Within this context, the personal relationship between lama and disciple takes on central importance. Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye, who transmitted the Karma Kagyu teachings to the Fifteenth Karmapa, identified as one of the necessary qualities of authentic spiritual masters that they do not abandon their disciples even at the cost of their own lives. Indeed, it was the Kagyu school that produced the first great being in the history of Buddhism to conceive of establishing an intentional reincarnation line as a means of caring for disciples continuously life after life. That great being was, of course, the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa, whose birth is commemorated with this publication.

Just as a mighty mountain can produce many rivers that will take different courses as they wind their way down to the same ocean, so too from Marpa the Buddhadharmā flowed forth in a great abundance of transmission streams. While one stream of explanations was passed to Ngok Chöku Dorje (b. 1036), Marpa transmitted his practice lineage to Milarepa, the greatest yogi Tibet has known, and its most universally revered practitioner. Milarepa in turn passed his lineage to his moon-like disciple Rechung Dorje Drakpa (1085-1161) and to his sun-like disciple Je Gampopa, also known as Dagpo Rinpoche (1079-1153). Je Gampopa, himself a towering mountain of spiritual realizations, combined the Mahāmudrā lineage from Milarepa with the Kadampa teachings he had imbibed earlier in life. Gampopa integrated and passed these mutually reinforcing lineages to his heart disciple the First Karmapa and to other disciples, and thus emerged another great wealth of transmission streams, known as the Dagpo Kagyu (see chart, opposite.)

Over time, the paths of these distinct transmission streams would cross again and again. Some Kagyu lineages merged with others in the process, enriching and enlivening one another, as masters from different Kagyu lineages continued to exchange teachings and initiations over the centuries. And just as great



Marpa's teacher Nāropa is pictured with his own teacher, the great mahāsiddha Tilopa, in this 16th-century thangka from central Tibet. Rubin Museum of Art C2006.66.154 (HAR 130)



Marpa Lotsāwa

rivers bring life to many different fields as they course forwards to the sea, so the living Kagyu teachings flowing from Marpa continue to yield bountiful harvests in a vast number of minds and hearts around the world today.

## Marpa Lotsāwa (1012-1097)

Marpa Chökyi Lodrö was born in the early 11th century in Lhodrak, to a prosperous family with its own fields to farm and pasture to graze cattle. Though later in life he would blaze a trail to carry Nāropa's lineage from India to Tibet, in his youth Marpa did not appear a likely prospect for spiritual greatness. As a child, he was notably strong-willed and short-tempered. Fearing for his future if they did not find a way to curb his unruly tendencies, after he had first learned the fundamentals of reading and writing locally, Marpa's parents opted to send him to train in the Dharma. The great Drogmi Lotsāwa Shakya Yeshe (b. 992/993 CE), who would inspire the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism, had recently returned from India and was accepting students. Marpa undertook the journey across Tibet to meet the great translator, taking along with him his irascible personality, his budding interest in the Dharma and two full yak-loads of paper and other valuable gifts as offerings. Once there, he studied

Sanskrit and colloquial Indian languages for three years, but Drogmi would neither give him initiations nor even lend Marpa the books he wished to read. This served to intensify Marpa's yearning to taste the Dharma for himself at its source across the Himalayas.

Marpa's life story would prove correct his parents' expectations that the Dharma could positively transform even the most difficult character, like their son's. But upon his return from his stay with Drogmi, Marpa requested his inheritance in advance to fund his trip to India, sorely testing his parents' enthusiasm for his pursuit of Dharma. Horrified at the prospect of his exposing himself to the dangers of such a journey, his parents urged him to content himself with the teachings then available in Tibet. Marpa's persistence here proved an asset, and his parents ultimately relented. However, the friends Marpa had planned to travel with were unable to overcome their families' objections, and backed out of the plan at the last minute. Undeterred and extraordinarily determined, Marpa set off alone into the unknown.

Marpa's journey in search of the Dharma would have him crossing barren plains so vast that even horses collapsed from fatigue, and mountain passes so bitterly cold that water remained frozen even during the hottest summer months. Before he had delivered the Dharma back to Tibet, Marpa would face bandits, river crossings in dilapidated ferries, corrupt toll collectors, unscrupulous companions and greedy customs officers. His family would later remind him of the traumas of these experiences in an attempt to dissuade him—unsuccessfully—from future trips.

Along the way to India, Marpa joined a fellow Tibetan named Nyö who was also making the journey in search of Dharma. In the end, Nyö would end up inflicting the greatest harm Marpa experienced on his journey. But initially, because Nyö had ample gold to fund his stay in India, he offered to cover Marpa's travel costs if Marpa would serve as his attendant during the trip. Saving on travel expenses would allow Marpa to stay abroad longer and make larger offerings to his gurus, both of which Marpa was eager to do, and so he accepted Nyö's proposal. Once the two had descended into the lowlands of Nepal, the debilitating heat, humidity and low altitude wrought havoc on their bodies, already worn out by the arduous journey. They spent three years acclimatizing in Nepal and advancing their knowledge of Sanskrit, before proceeding to India. During their stay in Nepal, when Marpa and Nyö heard that two direct disciples of Nāropa were active in the area, the mere sound of Nāropa's name filled Marpa with faith. At once, he went with Nyö to meet them, but when Nyö overheard disparaging comments comparing Tibetans to animals, he turned his back in protest and refused to return later for more Dharma teachings. The incident illustrates the position of Tibetans in India at that time—as outsiders who could not count on respectful treatment or social acceptance, living utterly bereft of all that was familiar to them in a land where their own ways appeared barbaric to those surrounding them.

Yet Marpa persisted and developed a Dharma connection with the two disciples of Nāropa. When Marpa told them that he did not have much gold, they replied that Nāropa was the only guru who would teach him without expecting gold in return, and otherwise related much that kindled Marpa's faith in Nāropa.

Furnished with a letter of introduction from the two Nepali pundits, Marpa travelled with Nyö to India, to the great monastic university of Nālandā, only to learn that Nāropa was no longer there, having renounced his academic position in Nālandā to pursue esoteric meditation. Nyö declared that he would not seek out the Dharma from such a person, so Marpa continued his quest to meet

Nāropa alone.



This statue of the great scholar-mahāsiddha, Nāropa, was sculpted by the Tenth Karmapa Chöying Dorje.  
*Photo by Nik Douglas*

Nāropa's own teacher, Tilopa (988-1069), had subjected him to terrible ordeals in the course of conferring teachings on him. But after all the difficulties Marpa had undergone in travelling to India, Marpa was not confronted by further obstacles when he finally met Nāropa. Instead, Nāropa embraced Marpa fully as a heart disciple virtually from the outset, even sending a message to the disciples who were hosting Marpa telling them to bring "the Tibetan" to see him at his residence in Pullahari.

At last, the meeting for which Marpa had so long yearned took place, and Marpa met the supremely kind master who would show him



As Marpa travelled across north India, he encountered numerous small communities of tantric practitioners, such as the siddhas pictured here. This 17th-century thangka is a rare example of the early form taken by the Karma Gardri school of painting developed within the Great Encampment of the Karmapas. Rubin Museum of Art C2004.14.2 (HAR 65349). Photo by Bruce M. White

the nature of his own mind, offer him unstintingly all the initiations and instructions he requested and, finally, empower him to transmit his own lineage in Tibet. Marpa offered many full-length prostrations upon first seeing Nāropa, who astonished and delighted Marpa by pronouncing that Marpa had already been prophesied as his disciple and was “welcome to assume the regency.”

During his first year under Nāropa’s guidance, Marpa received initiation and instruction in Guhyasamāja tantra, and practiced until he had clear realization of it. (Marpa’s Guhyasamāja lineage would later spread widely in Tibet, and is still practiced within the Gelugpa school that would receive it from Marpa Kagyu lamas centuries later.) Marpa next asked for the Hevajra tantra, for which Nāropa sent him to Jñānagarbha, who trained him fully in the practice. Marpa then requested transmission of the Mahāmāyā mother tantra, and for that he was sent on a terrifying journey to meet the highly unconventional mahāsiddha Kukkuripa, who likewise generously instructed him fully in that and in other practices. For Mahāmudrā instruction, Nāropa entrusted his disciple to the great Indian adept Maitrīpa (1002–1077), who guided Marpa until he had experiences and realizations. To receive instructions in the *Catuḥpīṭha* and a treasury of other oral instructions, Nāropa dispatched Marpa to meet a female yoginī named Jñānaḍākinī. In this case and on several other occasions, Marpa learnt afterwards that, although Nāropa himself was fully qualified to grant him the instructions, he had encouraged Marpa to drink widely of the Dharma from numer-

ous sources. When Marpa had amassed numerous transmissions from these diverse masters, Nāropa offered him a further cycle of initiation and instruction in Cakrasaṃvara, the four special oral transmissions that Nāropa himself had united, the Six Yogas of Nāropa, and a second set of Mahāmudrā instructions.

The joy that permeated Marpa’s experiences during the years he received the Dharma under these remarkable Indian masters is conveyed in the spontaneous sacred songs, or *dohās*, that he offered to his teachers and vajra brothers and sisters. (See *Marpa’s song of experience*.)

In all, Marpa’s training during this first trip to India took 12 years—exactly the amount of time that the Sanskrit tradition specifies as necessary to become learned in the language. In any case, nearly all the gold Marpa had



This late 13th to early 14th-century image of Marpa from the Ladakhi site of Wanla may be one of the oldest surviving portrayals of the master. Photo by Christian Luczanits

brought with him was spent, save just enough to cover his return journey to Tibet. Intending to teach for some time in Tibet and then return to review his understanding and receive other transmissions in the future, Marpa vowed to come to see Nāropa again, and departed with his guru's blessing for Tibet.

Marpa journeyed once again in the company of Nyö, whose funds were also nearly expended. Along the way, the two had compared what they had learnt in India, and Nyö clearly perceived Marpa as a threat to his own fame and glory as a *lotsāwa* and Dharma teacher in Tibet. During one river crossing, Nyö urged Marpa to let a porter shoulder the bag that held all the treasured manuscripts Marpa had collected while in India. Nyö clandestinely bribed the porter to drop the bag into the water at some opportune moment, making it appear accidental. The porter did so, and Marpa was bereft of every text of instruction, every ritual manual, each and every written word he had intended to transmit and translate in Tibet. Although initially badly shaken by the incident, Marpa recalled his lama and was thus able to recover his equanimity in the face of a loss that was, for a would-be translator, an unmitigated disaster. When Nyö's role in the incident was revealed by the porter, Nyö asked Marpa not to tell people in Tibet what he had done, offering to lend Marpa his own books to copy in Tibet—a promise he never kept.

Despite the twelve long years he had spent acquiring the manuscripts with such tremendous effort, Marpa replied to Nyö's offer, "I prefer what I have in my mind to what you have in your books."

Indeed, Marpa continued his trip home, carrying with him in his own mind not only the words of the essential texts, but also the realization of their meaning that uniquely qualified him to guide others in Tibet. Once in Tibet, Marpa visited those who had supported him on his outbound journey. From there Marpa returned to his native village in Lhodrak, only to find that both his parents—who had so kindly set him off on his path to Dharma out of their concern

### A Spontaneous Song of Experience by Marpa

Lord, the Vajradhara for this age of strife,  
 Supreme being of ascetic practice,  
 Carried by all atop their crown,  
 Glorious Nāropa, with respect I bow at your feet.  
 I, Marpa Lotsāwa of Lhodrak,  
 Encountered Dharma at the age of twelve.  
 Surely this awakened imprints from training in the past.  
 First I learned to read and write.  
 Then I trained as a translator.  
 In the end I went south to Nepal and India.  
 I stayed three years in the center of Nepal.  
 From Newaris who have blessings  
 I heard the Catuḥpīṭha, a tantra renowned for its power,  
 And received the Dhūmāvātī devī as a protector.  
 Not satisfied even by this,  
 I went to India, for the Dharma.  
 I crossed lethal, poisonous rivers,  
 And my skin peeled just like a poisonous snake's.  
 I dared to cast away my life for the Dharma.  
 To that wonderful place the ḍākinīs prophesied,  
 Phullahari in the north, I went.  
 At this monastery imbued with siddhi,  
 From the gatekeeper, the great paṇḍita Nāropa,  
 I received the Hevajra, a tantra renowned for its profundity,  
 And the oral instructions of the union of mixing  
 and transference.  
 I especially requested the action mudrā of caṇḍālī,  
 And was introduced to the meaning of the whispered lineage.  
 ...  
 I crossed the Ganges, the river of siddhis, in the east.  
 At the quaking monastery in the mountains,  
 I touched the feet of the lord and master Maitrīpa,  
 And received Mañjuśrī-nāma-saṅgīti, the profound tantra of  
 praise raised in song.  
 I nurtured realization of the Dharma of Mahāmudrā.  
 I determined the actual nature of the mind,  
 And saw the essential meaning of the basis, dharmatā.



Marpa Lotsāwa and his heart disciple, Jetsun Milarepa. Rubin Museum of Art F1997.39.5 (HAR 562). Photo by Bruce M. White

for his well-being—had passed away during his long stay abroad. Disciples began to gather around him as he taught the Dharma in Lhodrak, and would accompany Marpa when he next embarked on a period of itinerant travel and teaching. Among those who came to train under Marpa during this period in Tibet was Ngok Chöku Dorje, also known as Ngoktön, one of Marpa's most important disciples, and the recipient of his explanation lineage.

Aware of other teaching cycles he had not managed to attain during his first stay in India, and mindful of his vow to see his lama again, Marpa determined to make a second journey to India. Several of his disciples offered to serve as his attendants on the trip, but he declined their assistance and, astonishingly, faced the dangers of the road again, this time alone. Upon arrival, Marpa was received warmly by Nāropa, who lovingly granted him the further initiations and instructions he sought, and sent Marpa to his other teachers to review his knowledge and request any additional teachings he wished. Once satisfied he had received all he might need, Marpa set about producing Tibetan translations of the many Sanskrit texts he had gathered, many of which are preserved to this day in the Tibetan canon. This work complete, Marpa bid his lama farewell a second time and returned to Tibet. He

was welcomed back by his deeply delighted students, grateful to see their master again, and eager to receive the fresh Dharma he had brought with him from its source in India. Once back, Marpa established a family, marrying Dagmema, farming the land and fully integrating the Dharma into his apparently ordinary life. At that time, Marpa's activities to spread the Dharma in Tibet prospered greatly.

It was during this second interval in Tibet that Marpa met the disciple who would carry forward his practice lineage: Jetsun Milarepa. Once he had firmly established his heart son on the path to his own awakening, Marpa would return to India a third time, driven by an unbearable longing to see the master who had so kindly guided him to realization, and prompted by the discovery that he still lacked a certain teaching on the transference of consciousness that his disciple Milarepa had dreamt the *dākinīs* wished him to receive. Appalled at the thought of his undertaking such a journey at his now advanced age, Marpa's family hid his gold to prevent his departure, yet he remained completely unswerving in his determination. Despite his advanced years, Marpa ignored their protests and completed a third trip to the land rich in the Dharma that he treasured so dearly. Upon arrival in India, Marpa underwent a heroic quest to reunite with his master Nāropa, who by all accounts had moved on to another stage in the evolution of his practice, and was nowhere to be found. In the end, Marpa was able to see his precious guru Nāropa one last time, and the two shared a brief but fruitful stay together. Explaining that earlier had not been the time to do so, Nāropa then granted Marpa numerous extremely rare teachings that brought his realization to unprecedented levels.



This statue, sculpted by the Tenth Karmapa Chöying Dorje, depicts Marpa Lotsāwa. *Photo by Nik Douglas*

This was a visit of numerous experiential teachings as well. Although the mahāsiddha made clear that he did not want it, Marpa persisted in urging Nāropa to accept his offering of a large quantity of gold he had brought for the purpose from Tibet. Nāropa then accepted the gold, but then tossed it casually into the forest. Marpa felt a sense of loss, recollecting how difficult it had been for him to amass. Seeing his reaction, Nāropa instantly recovered the gold, telling Marpa, “I don’t need gold. But if I did, all the land is gold.” He then stamped his foot once, and Marpa perceived all the earth around as, indeed, gold.

On another occasion, while Marpa was asleep nearby, Nāropa manifested a display in the sky of the maṇḍala of Hevajra with the nine emanation deities. Nāropa quickly awoke Marpa, telling him, “Son... your personal deity Hevajra has arrived. Will you prostrate to him or to me?” Marpa chose to prostrate to the Hevajra maṇḍala appearing so vividly before him, rather than to the guru whom he saw each day. At that, Nāropa chided him, pointing out that the vision of the deity was merely a display coming from the guru himself. Marpa fully understood that it was only through the guru that he had the ability to perceive the deity in the first place, and that, in general, seeing the kind guru who guides one directly is far greater than seeing numberless enlightened deities. Thereupon, Marpa literally became sick with regret over his spur-of-the-moment decision to prostrate to the Hevajra maṇḍala rather than to Nāropa.

The exceptional care that Nāropa took of Marpa as his heart disciple produced an exceptional spiritual master and translator. The great Tibetan historian Jonang Tāranātha (1575-1634/35) later observed that Marpa Lotsāwa had three major qualities not shared by the other great Tibetan translators. Firstly, Marpa had trained extensively in India in the correct practice of rituals, including the drawing of maṇḍalas, making of ritual offering cakes, or *tormas*, and so on. Secondly, Marpa had received explanations from numerous diverse lineages, thanks to Nāropa’s directing him to many other realized teachers, enabling him to offer a wide range of readings of various passages. Thirdly, Marpa’s spiritual guides in India had not only transmitted to him the various tantric cycles that were circulating widely then in India, but also the personal instructions associated with them that were then kept far more private. This lent an incomparable depth to Marpa’s knowledge. These three qualities endowed him with the ability to do far more than translate texts, as is clear from the disciples he guided to realization.

When his time in India was completed, Nāropa bid his heart disciple a final and tender farewell, prophesying that although Marpa’s biological children would not live to carry on his family line, his



Milarepa, as seen in the 15th-century Gyantse Kumbum in Tibet. *Photo by Christian Luczanits*



Milarepa, Lord of Yogis

## From Milarepa's Song on the Fulfillment of His Wishes

I supplicate the body of my lama,  
my master,  
Please bless this beggar to stay  
in his retreat.

My happiness not known to family,  
My pain not known to enemies—  
If I meet my end on this mountaintop,  
This yogi's wish will be fulfilled.

My aging not known to friends,  
My illness not known to my sister,  
No one to crowd around my corpse,  
No one to cry about my death—  
If I meet my end on this mountaintop,  
This yogi's wish will be fulfilled.

This prayer to die a beggar in  
Rocky, lonely mountain caves,  
Is made to benefit wandering beings.  
If granted, my wish will be fulfilled.

spiritual children would carry his teachings forward like a wide river for as long as the Buddhadharma remained in the world. Formally declaring Marpa his regent, Nāropa further prophesied that each generation of disciples would be better than the last.

Marpa passed away in 1097 CE in Tibet, at the age of 85. But, just as Nāropa predicted, the wide river of his Dharma lineage flows on, its current continually strengthened by each successive generation of spiritual heirs.

## Milarepa: Lord of Yogis (1028/1040 -1111/1123)

Marpa's chief disciple, Milarepa, remains Tibet's most widely venerated spiritual master, and is universally acknowledged to this day as Tibet's supreme yogi. His meditative insights and total commitment to practice are carried forward in the Kagyu lineage today, mingling with the strong stream of Dharma flowing from Marpa himself.

Milarepa was born in the first half of the 11th century, the only son of a wealthy family of land-holding merchants. His arrival was joyfully welcomed, and his father named him "Joy to Hear" or Thöpa, the name he carried until later in life when he became known as Milarepa. After an early childhood of luxury, the death of his father when he was seven plunged the young Milarepa into a life of terrible deprivation.

In his will, Milarepa's father had specified that Milarepa's aunt and uncle should manage his extensive properties until Milarepa came of age, at which point everything down to the last penny should be handed over to Milarepa. Ignoring both justice and public opinion, Milarepa's aunt and uncle appropriated all the family's property and goods for themselves, and forced Milarepa, his mother and sister to work as their servants. Tibet during this period lacked a central government, and significant tracts of the country had fallen under the sway of local figures whose power remained largely unchecked within their own territory. This system of highly localized rule left ample room for exploitation by the unscrupulous, and scant hope of protection for the exploited.

When Milarepa came of age, his mother organized a gathering at which she had her husband's last will and testament read aloud, and formally requested that it be honored. Her appeal to the aunt and uncle's conscience and to the local community's moral sup-

port failed miserably. Rather than acknowledge their rights to inheritance, the uncle berated and physically assaulted her and Milarepa and his younger sister. Thoroughly intimidated by the aunt and uncle and their aggressive sons, the public opted not to support her petition. Having exhausted all other means of protecting her children from their powerful aunt and uncle's abuse, Milarepa's

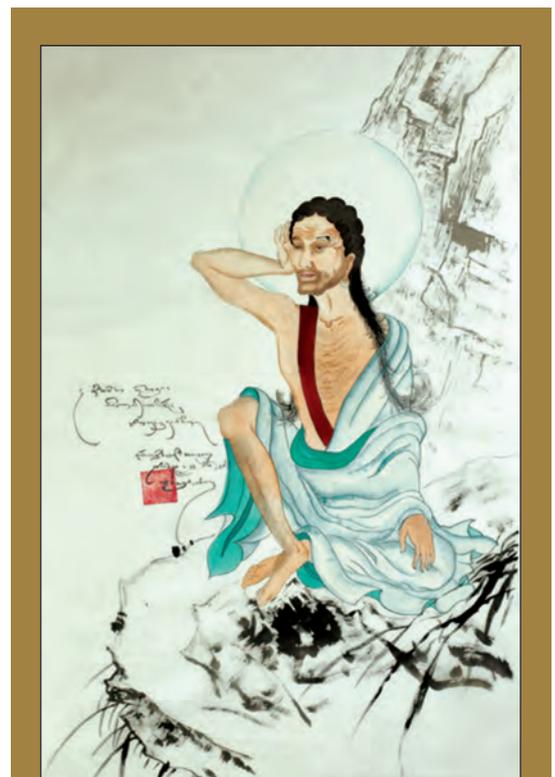
mother turned to the last resort of the powerless: sorcery, or shamanism. The practice of shamanism, for both benevolent and malevolent ends, had a long history in Tibet, pre-dating the 7th-century advent of Buddhism. Drawing on that tradition, Milarepa left home to apprentice himself to a powerful shaman, never to see his mother again.

Milarepa trained in shamanism with the aim of avenging his family, and was wildly successful in his training. Through his shamanic practice, he managed to bring the roof down on his uncle's house where his cousin was celebrating his wedding. Thirty-five people were killed, including his cousin and new bride. Yet Milarepa's mother remained unsatisfied, and asked him to send a hailstorm as well. He did so, completely destroying the community's annual crop and establishing without a doubt that his shamanic power was more than a match for his relatives' brute force.

Soon thereafter, however, Milarepa was overwhelmed with regret for the harm he had caused others, and became deeply concerned about its karmic implications for himself. By Milarepa's time, Buddhism had been slowly seeping into Tibetan culture for four centuries, and an understanding of the basic principles of karma already formed part of the fabric of life in Tibet. Hence Milarepa was aware that his murderous acts would inevitably bring him equally painful consequences, if not in that life then in the following. This clear awareness spurred Milarepa to seek out Dharma teachings that would allow him to move beyond the samsaric cycles driven by karma, and to be of benefit rather than of harm to others. Milarepa was passed from teacher to teacher until he arrived at the home of Marpa Lotsāwa, the immensely kind lama whose skillful guidance would allow Milarepa to fulfill both his own aims and his aim to benefit others.

Even before Milarepa asked to be accepted as his student, Marpa had had indications in his dreams that he was a worthy disciple, yet he initially put Milarepa through a long period of terrible hardship. Because he understood that Milarepa needed to undergo difficult experiences in order to purify the negative karma he had accumulated by his past actions, Marpa was able to lead Milarepa forward to enlightenment despite the heavy karmic burden Milarepa came carrying. With his intense compassion, Marpa was able to prepare a path for Milarepa to follow that would take him to the highest possible human attainment: enlightenment itself.

Although Marpa's treatment of Milarepa may have appeared harsh in outer appearance, with his penetrative wisdom Marpa perceived clearly that the alternative would be far more painful for his heart disciple. Not only did Marpa have him construct stone towers unassisted, he then had him demolish them and re-erect them again and again, until Milarepa's back became an excruciating mass of sores. Even then, Marpa placed a cloth on Milarepa's back and insisted that he persist in his labors. Marpa



His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa painted this portrait of Milarepa in 2009, while writing the original script for his play, *The Life of Milarepa*.



Small vignettes reveal scenes from the life of Milarepa (1052-1135) in this 18th-century painting. *Rubin Museum of Art C2006.66.26 (HAR 803)*. Photo by Bruce M. White

repeatedly denied his heart disciple the Dharma instructions that Milarepa so urgently sought, and treated him outwardly with disdain and contempt.

The relationship between Marpa and Milarepa may have been immensely fruitful, but it cannot serve as the norm for relationships between most lamas and disciples. Not only was Marpa an exceptional teacher, Milarepa was an exceptional disciple. Marpa himself cautioned Milarepa that the way he had treated Milarepa was not suitable for the majority of students. Throughout eight separate experiences that induced deep despair in him, Milarepa's trust in Marpa did not waver in the slightest. In the end, when Milarepa had been brought to the brink of suicide, Marpa joyfully declared him his disciple and offered him all the Dharma, tantric initiations and personal instructions that Milarepa needed, even supplying the facilities he needed for his retreats.

Milarepa developed a thorough renunciation for all worldly concerns, born of the combination of his own experience of suffering, his intense regret for his own harmful acts and the perspective offered by the Dharma he received from Marpa. In solitary retreat in mountain caves on snow-covered mountain slopes, clad in a sole piece of cotton cloth,

Milarepa persevered in the yogic practices Marpa had taught him. In the many joyful outbursts of song recorded in his collection of *Hundred Thousand Sacred Songs*, Milarepa expressed his heartfelt understanding that what he was gaining in practicing pure Dharma far outweighed what he was giving up in leaving worldly pursuits behind.

Milarepa persisted in his meditation under unthinkably harsh conditions. On one occasion, he explained his practice to his sister as follows: "Every single person in the world is extremely kind to us, just like our dear Father and Mother were. If I have to go through a little bit of trouble like this to free them from their suffering, it's nothing. Others might see me as pitiful and disgusting, living like a wild animal in the mountains, but it pleases all the buddhas and bodhisattvas everywhere. There is no happiness greater than this in the world."

For years, Milarepa subsisted on boiled nettles in freezing temperatures, with nothing to protect him from the elements but his tattered cloth and his fierce determination to awaken for the benefit of beings. Yet that fierce determination, harnessed by the Dharma he had received, was sufficient—for awaken he did, inspiring countless others with his living proof of the radical personal transformation that is possible within a single lifetime.

## Gampopa: Physician of Body and Mind (1079-1153)

Milarepa had two main heart disciples: Gampopa, also known as Dagpo Rinpoche, and Rechungpa. Together the two are described as the sun and the moon, and each radiated his distinct light on the world. Of the two, Gampopa was designated Milarepa's sun-like disciple, and it is his luminous presence that shines to this day through the Dagpo Kagyu lineages that collectively bear his name.

Like his lama Milarepa, Gampopa's pursuit of Dharma was fueled by direct experience of human suffering in its rawest form. Born in 1079 CE in Nyel in central Tibet, Gampopa was the eldest son in a family with a long and illustrious history. By all accounts, he was a bright and inquisitive youth. Recognizing his aptitude, his influential family provided him with a broad education, as well as training in the medical profession that many in his family practiced. At the age of 22, already acknowledged as a learned physician, Gampopa married and dedicated himself to the life of a householder. Soon thereafter, two children were born to Gampopa and his wife, one boy and one girl.

As such, Gampopa appeared to have laid the foundation for a successful life, both in terms of family and medical career. However, while his children were still small, an epidemic broke out, ravaging the area. As an eminent local physician, Gampopa attended patient after patient, yet even the fullest deployment of his medical knowledge was no match for the force of the illness. Gampopa found himself powerless to help as one patient after another suffered and then died, caught in the relentless grip of the disease.

As one who relied upon his knowledge to be able to control and combat illness, this experience alone could have sufficed to spark an existential crisis in the young physician. Yet Gampopa's encounter with the inevitability of suffering and death would penetrate even more deeply into the core of his being, when the epidemic struck his own family. First to contract the disease was his beloved son. All remedies failed, and Gampopa had thrust upon him the experience most feared by parents the world round: having to bury one's own child. Grief-stricken, Gampopa carried the tiny corpse to the burial site himself, said prayers for his son there, and headed back home. As he entered the house, his heart already heavily burdened by the experience, he discovered his daughter now also lying ill, having contracted the same disease. Days later, she too succumbed. Once again Gampopa took up in his arms the child in whom he had placed so much love and hope, and carried her to the same site he had taken his son.



In this 16th-century thangka, Gampopa is pictured alongside his heart disciple, Dusum Khyenpa. *Rubin Museum of Art, F1997.39.4 (HAR 561)*



Lord Gampopa

## From Gampopa's *Dharma Talks for the Community: A String of Pearls*

The Kagyu lineage is especially rich in a genre of Dharma texts known as *Dharma for the community*, or *tsog chö*, which record the oral discourses lamas gave to large assemblies of their students. Such teachings were an important means whereby Gampopa and other lamas cared for their communities of disciples. Such texts allow us in later generations to connect as disciples with earlier generations of lamas in the lineage, even after they have passed. The following is excerpted from Gampopa's *Dharma Talks for the Community: A String of Pearls*, a series of 20 teachings given by Gampopa, each a gleaming pearl in its own right. One of Gampopa's principal students, Lama Gomtsul, says he "wrote down exactly what the lama said, without adding or omitting a single word," giving us a rare taste of the exquisite Dharma just as Lord Gampopa dispensed it.

To awaken to buddhahood, even in the beginning you need a wish to work for the aims of sentient beings. To awaken to buddhahood, in the middle as well, you need to work for the aims of sentient beings. In the end too, once you have awakened to buddhahood, there is nothing but working for the aims of sentient beings.

Therefore, in the beginning, meditate on death and impermanence. In the middle, meditate on the defects of *saṃsāra*. At the end, work only for the aims of sentient beings, with love, compassion and *bodhichitta*. That is the cultivation of relative *bodhichitta*.

These three must come together when you are cultivating ultimate *bodhichitta*: training in previous lives, your own efforts, and the lama's blessings. If you had not trained in previous lives, you would lack your present leisure and resources, and the seven qualities of higher rebirth, so you need to have trained extensively in previous rebirths in gathering the collections. Further, without making efforts yourself, you will be left behind on the path of laziness and will not gain the path of the nobles ones. If the lama's blessings do not enter you, none of your positive qualities will increase. You will get nowhere. Whatever qualities do emerge will disappear, and your merit will seep away like spilt water.

As it says in the scriptures,

*If there is no lama, there is no liberation from saṃsāra.  
A boat with no oarsman  
Will not cross to the other side.*

Therefore, first is to have trained in the past, to practice with diligence yourself and to rely on a qualified lama.

Since the consummation of the path of secret mantra is *samaya*, strenuously guard your *samaya*. Just knowing the words of the instructions is of no benefit; it is like the recitation of a parrot. Therefore, since the lamas themselves gained their attainments through practice, we too must gain blessings in our being through our devotion for our lama, and engage in the practices as we are instructed. By doing so, various signs of attainment will emerge. Nāropa relied on his lama Tilopa for twelve years and practiced devotion for his lama. Even though Tilopa did not give instructions directly, due to his respect for his lama, Nāropa practiced just as the lama had said, and various signs of attainment appeared.

Thus when a qualified lama and a disciple who is a suitable recipient come together, all the positive qualities will be established within the disciple, in a single instant...

I have no other Dharma than this.

Upon his return home, he found his wife too presenting symptoms of the disease. Her condition deteriorated rapidly, and she swiftly reached the brink of death. As Gampopa looked on helpless, his wife hovered at the edge of life, battling for every breath and racked with pain, yet unable to let go. When it became clear to Gampopa that she was only postponing the inevitable and causing herself further torment in the process, Gampopa asked her what it was that kept her clinging to her failing body. She replied that it was her attachment to him, her husband, that prevented her from peacefully preparing for her passage to the next life. Her dying wish, she said, was that he devote the remainder of his life to the practice of Dharma, rather than establish a new family. Gampopa replied that his only aim after she was gone was to become a monk and spend his life in Dharma practice. His wife was pleased, but sought further assurances, and asked that he swear to his intentions before a witness. Once he had done so, she was able to rest in peace, and Gampopa buried the last remaining member of his fragile family.

After his wife's death, Gampopa made a stūpa for her, settled his worldly affairs and left to pursue the Dharma. In this way, Gampopa's renunciation for ordinary affairs was deeply grounded in his realization of the utter inadequacy of worldly knowledge to dispel the suffering of those he most wished to protect.

He entered solitary retreat, where it became clear that he had a strong aptitude for meditative practice. Yet Gampopa recognized that he would benefit from study and personal instruction, and so he departed for Phenyul, then a thriving center for the practice and study of the Kadampa teachings.

Gampopa received his monastic ordination from Kadampa masters, and immersed himself in the study of the major Kadampa treatises and tantras. He first sought out Geshe Potowa, but soon thereafter trained under a series of renowned Kadampa masters. At a certain point, Gampopa opted to devote more time to practice, and moved out of the monastery to a site nearby. It is said that during this period, he studied the Dharma by day and meditated by night, so intense was his thirst for the Dharma. As Gampopa continued his meditative practices, his concentration developed to the point where he was able to retain his focus for a full 13 days.

One day, Gampopa happened to overhear three mendicants praising the qualities of a great yogi by the name of "Milarepa." The mere sound of Milarepa's name awakened in Gampopa a sense of devotion so overpowering that Gampopa literally fell into a faint. The intensity of Gampopa's emotions upon hearing Milarepa's name is compared in the texts to the feeling of a young man upon seeing a beautiful woman for the first time. When he regained consciousness, Gampopa began prostrating repeatedly and then sat down to meditate. Despite his usual powers of concentration, Gampopa was unable to hold his mind still, so moved was he by the thought of meeting Milarepa. Later that evening, when he again attempted to meditate, his mind spontaneously entered a state of samādhi unlike anything he had known before, and Gampopa had an initial taste of the siddhis to come.



Gampopa spent the latter part of his life spreading the Dharma in the shadows of these peaks next to Daglha Gampo. Photo by Tenzin Dorje

Driven by his longing to see Milarepa's face and sit at his feet, Gampopa travelled across Tibet and at last was received by the great yogi far to the west. In stark contrast to Milarepa's initial encounter with his lama Marpa, Milarepa took Gampopa as a disciple at once. At that time, Milarepa declared that Gampopa would spread the lineage's teachings in all directions. Readied by his own life experience, his monastic ordination and the fierce commitment to the Kadampa teachings on renunciation and compassion, Gampopa arrived as a vessel perfectly pre-

pared to receive what Milarepa had to offer. Within a short time, Milarepa had transmitted his teachings to the eager and receptive Gampopa, and granted him full instructions on the practice of the Six Yogas of Naropa. Less than a year after he arrived, Milarepa perceived that Gampopa was ready, and sent him off to do retreat.

As they parted, Milarepa told Gampopa that he had one last piece of personal instruction that he had not yet transmitted to any of his disciples. As Gampopa was leaving, Milarepa called him back, saying that he alone would not let the instruction go to waste. As Gampopa sat expectantly awaiting the words of advice, Milarepa turned his back to Gampopa and lifted his cotton robes, to reveal the buttocks that had become completely hardened and callused during Milarepa's own long years of intense meditation. The most profound advice I have, Milarepa told Gampopa, is: to meditate.

Promising to return to see Milarepa once again, Gampopa left, taking this advice very much to heart. After his time in mountain retreat, on the return journey to see the lama who awakened such heartfelt devotion in him, Gampopa heard that Milarepa had already passed away. Upon learning of the loss, Gampopa was overcome with grief and wept.

Though now lacking the face-to-face guidance of the lama who so profoundly inspired him in his pursuit of enlightenment, Gampopa was not lacking any of the initiations, instructions or blessings he needed, and so determined to spend his life in practice. For seven years, in an area called Ölkha, Gampopa practiced Mahāmudrā and other meditations that Milarepa had transmitted to him.

Next Gampopa continued to what would become his own main seat, Daglha Gampo. There, he intended to enter a sealed retreat in which he would be completely plastered into a room with just a small opening for provisions to be passed in. Gampopa planned to seal himself in for 12 years, until he had a vision of ḍākinīs counseling him that it would be better to spend 12 years spreading the Dharma than 12 years in sealed retreat.

At that point, Kadam geshes, yogic practitioners and ordinary monks began arriving at Daglha Gampo seeking Gampopa's spiritual guidance. Along with his own realization and the blessings of the lineage, Gampopa offered his disciples

something that no other spiritual master in Tibet then could: teachings that integrated the Kadampa approach with the meditative instructions of Mahāmudrā. By integrating Kadampa and Mahāmudrā, Gampopa forged a powerful combination of sutra and tantra, with direct instructions for realizing the nature of the mind itself.

From that point onward, Gampopa’s activities to bring about the well-being of others and to spread the Dharma grew increasingly vast. Among the many disciples of Gampopa who attained realizations of their own were three extraordinary masters from Kham: Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193), Phagmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo (1110-1170), and Seltong Shogom (b. 12th century). In addition, Gampopa’s nephew Lama Gomtsul (Tsultrim Nyingpo, 1116-1169) became a teacher in his own right and would take over responsibility for Gampopa’s monastery after the master had passed.

Within a relatively short time, Gampopa had drawn literally thousands of disciples, and Daglha Gampo became a thriving center of Dharma activity. Gampopa’s presentation of the Dharma was grounded in the vivid awareness of the pervasive suffering of sentient beings that the loss of his family had impressed so deeply upon him. Yet the sheer size of the Dharma community he cared for indicates that Gampopa was able to move well beyond the particularities of his own life experiences, to connect with a broad range of disciples. Indeed, a major feature of Gampopa’s skill as a teacher was his ability to present the truths of Dharma in startlingly clear and direct terms accessible to listeners of many spiritual levels. Gampopa’s teachings sparkled with the freshness of his own experience and realization, as is palpable in the records of discourses he gave (*see page 50*).

Until his passing in 1153 CE, Gampopa dedicated his entire adult life to ensuring that others, too, found the way to transform their most painful and difficult experiences into a source of well-being for others. In this way, the brilliance of Milarepa’s sun-like disciple continues to shine across the centuries to offer light and life-giving warmth to the world. ☺



Lord Gampopa’s teachings are carried forward by a “golden rosary” of lineage masters, who make the Dagpo Kagyu teachings available to all the world today. A German disciple of the Karma Kagyu lineage offered this set of statues of the entire golden rosary to the Seventeenth Karmapa during the Karmapa 900 opening ceremony in Bodhgaya, in December, 2010. *Photo courtesy of Karmapa 900 Organizing Committee*



The First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa. Collection of Shelley and Donald Rubin. Himalayan Art Resources  
[www.himalayanart.org](http://www.himalayanart.org)

## 5 ♦ The First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193)

Nine hundred years ago, in 1110 CE, amidst the snow-capped peaks of eastern Tibet, there was born a spiritual master whose compassion for beings would shape the future of Buddhism in Tibet. This great master was the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa, who instituted the practice of intentional reincarnation in a way that disciples could recognize—a practice that forms the backbone of Tibetan Buddhism as we know it today.

Buddhism teaches that the sole aim of buddhas and bodhisattvas is to guide others to enlightenment. Since the time of the Buddha, countless bodhisattvas have perfected their training in compassion and skillful means and cared for their disciples wholeheartedly, yet at the moment of passing away have had to leave the ongoing care of those disciples to others. However, once such great beings have reached a certain level of spiritual attainment, they have the ability to remain aware through the death process and consciously choose their next place of birth. This ability makes it possible for them to indicate the place of their next rebirth before they pass away, so that they can be clearly identified and thus resume the guidance of their students and their broader work in the world. This is the meaning of the term “reincarnate lama.” Tibetan reincarnate lamas such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Gyalwang Karmapa have engaged in this practice for over a dozen lives already. Yet for the first 15 centuries of the Buddhadharma, no master conceived of this ideal means of caring for their disciples life after life—until Dusum Khyenpa, with his extraordinarily creative means and his intense commitment to his students’ well-being and the continuity of the teachings entrusted to him.

The totality with which Dusum Khyenpa embraced his responsibility as a spiritual guide to others was evident both in his deeds and his speech. On one occasion, Dusum Khyenpa and his fellow students had received a teaching by their lama Dagpo Rinpoche, or Lord Gampopa, in which he had identified great compassion as one of the indispensable qualities of a spiritual teacher. As the Dharma friends sat discussing this comment, Dusum Khyenpa offered his understanding of what this implied. As a spiritual teacher, Dusum Khyenpa said, even if one had to go to a hell realm oneself for the sake of a disciple, one would do so willingly, but under no circumstances would one abandon one’s disciples.



The original Dharma robes worn by Dusum Khyenpa, preserved in east Tibet. *Photo by Rokpa*

For the past 900 years, Dusum Khyenpa has fully lived up to his own definition of a spiritual guide to beings. Indeed, he has proven himself unwilling to abandon his students, even at the moment of death. After he passed away in 1193, Dusum Khyenpa intentionally returned as the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, and made it utterly clear that he was, in fact, the reincarnation of the First Karmapa. Since then, he has taken an uninterrupted series of rebirths as the Karmapa, returning again and again for 900 years to engage in a vast array of activities to benefit beings and the Buddhadharma.

Dusum Khyenpa was the first in Buddhist history to leave indications where he would be reborn so that his disciples could search for his reincarnation. He was also the first to identify himself to previous followers after he was reborn. But he was by no means the last. Indeed, Tibetan Buddhism today would be vastly different without the reincarnation lineages of the many great masters who adopted this practice as a highly effective means of accomplishing a variety of beneficial aims.

Intentionally reincarnating in a form that disciples can recognize allows lamas to maintain long-term, multi-life relationships with their disciples. Although with each new birth, the lama must pass through the natural stages of physical development, they begin that process with a mental maturity far beyond their physical years. This allows them to quickly take up their role as a spiritual guide to their students from the previous life. By resuming relationships with such disciples, they guarantee that they are returning to the situation in which they have the strongest possible karmic and social basis to be of benefit to others. At the same time, they may continue any wider projects initiated in their previous lives, such as developing their monastic establishments, study institutes or retreat centers and attend to the overall transmission of the teaching lineage under their care.

The unparalleled longevity of Buddhist institutions in Tibet is due in no small part to the remarkable resilience of such reincarnation lineages. Over the centuries, Tibetan Buddhism has survived wild fluctuations in political, military and economic conditions. In the 20th century, it managed to reconstitute itself in exile, bereft of all the material conditions that earlier sustained it in its native ground. Human beings have the capacity to adapt far more quickly than large institutions, and each new master in a reincarnation lineage may apply their wisdom and flexibility in response to changing historical circumstances, without losing the over-riding sense of purpose and direction that defines their lineage, and that led them to reincarnate in the first place. In this way, the institution of reincarnation has played a great part in allowing Tibetans to transmit the teachings brought from India over a millennium ago in unbroken lineages, and to cross back to India with that Dharma still a vitally relevant tradition.

What now seems so obvious a way to care for disciples and lineage over generations was not only not obvious in Dusum Khyenpa's time—it was unheard of. In order to fully comprehend who the First Karmapa was,



Known as “the speaking statue,” this likeness of Dusum Khyenpa was kept at Ripa Monastery, in Nangchen, Tibet. His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa selected this ancient statue, for the power of its blessings, to represent the Karmapa lineage at select Karmapa 900 events (see page 65). Photo by Karma Lekchoe

## In the Words of the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa

In all the discourses spoken by the completely enlightened Buddha Śākyamuni, there is nothing whatsoever that was not spoken as a means of taming the mind. It is extremely important to counsel and watch your own mind.

In the beginning, it is important to settle the unsettled mind. In the middle, it is important to settle it stably. In the end, the personal instructions for enhancing that stability are important.

Through the wisdom that comes from learning, you must recognize your afflictions. Through the wisdom that comes from reflecting, you must control your afflictions. Through the wisdom that comes from meditating, you must get rid of your afflictions from their root.

It is not enough to have received personal instructions. Putting them into practice is extremely important. It all boils down to this: when you are lying on your last bed, drinking your last drop of water, surrounded by your relatives, and drawing your last shallow breath, you need to go from light to light, and from happiness to happiness, and to have the yidams and ḍākinīs accompanying you.

It is important that, from now on, we brush the snow off our own coat sleeves.

- from Dusum Khyenpa's *Dharma Talks for the Community*



Dusum Khyenpa, in a thangka from a series from Palpung Monastery in Tibet depicting the Karma Kagyu lineage masters.

one would need to imagine so great a yearning for the well-being of the world, so firm a commitment to accomplish it himself, and so creative a thinker that he found a previously unimagined means of doing so.

## The Life of Dusum Khyenpa

Dusum Khyenpa was born in eastern Tibet in the year 1110 CE, to a mother named Lhathok Zagang Jam and a father named Gompa Dorje Gönpo. His birthplace lies in Dreshö, a part of Dreho, Kham, ringed by snow-covered mountains. Unlike those who preceded him in the Marpa Kagyu lineage, Dusum Khyenpa was born to a humble family with greater aptitude for spiritual practice than worldly success. His father was a particularly active practitioner, and the name given him as a child was Gephel, meaning Virtue Increases. His parents sought to ensure that he lived up to his name by teaching him the Dharma as an integral part of his upbringing from the very start. His father's main practice was Yamāntaka and his mother was described as a natural yoginī. Raised in such an environment, Dusum Khyenpa was steeped in the Dharma from birth. At the age of 11, he received initiation and instruction in the practice of Palden Lhamo



Central image of Dusum Khyenpa at his monastery in Pangbuk, eastern Tibet. Photo by Rokpa

from his father and Sherab Göñ, a family relative and serious practitioner. In a hint of the attainments to come later in his life, while he was engaging in the practice, Dusum Khyenpa had a direct vision of Palden Lhamo.

## His Difficult Adolescence

Although his childhood years helped prepare the young Dusum Khyenpa for the Dharma activities at which he would excel later in life, nothing could prepare him for the emotional storms that would arise in his adolescence. This series of events in his life is usually omitted from his biographies, or referred to only cryptically, or perhaps euphemistically, as “subduing his enemy.” A fuller version of this “subduing” appears in a text praising the life deeds of Dusum Khyenpa compiled by the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje. That account indicates that Dusum Khyenpa underwent a period of great inner turmoil during his teenage years. In an age-old scenario that is no less painful because it is so common, Dusum Khyenpa lost the young woman with whom he was romantically involved to another man. The woman was “stolen away” from him by the rival, as the biography

puts it. Dusum Khyenpa’s response showed every sign of jealous rage, for he sought out a means to kill the man. Using the black arts that Milarepa had likewise deployed, Dusum Khyenpa managed to accomplish his aim, and the man died. Shortly thereafter, Dusum Khyenpa left the householder’s life behind once and for all, to take monastic ordination at the age of 16.

Although his biography does not detail Dusum Khyenpa’s internal state during this time, the incident indicates that Dusum Khyenpa was caught in the grip of overwhelming attachment and the uncontrolled anger that so often arises when one is deprived of an object of strong attachment. However, the fact that he opted to ordain after this episode suggests that the experience awakened in him a deep sense of the futility of spending a life in pursuit of such objects of attachment. His direct experience of the destructive force of his own afflictive emotions surely served as a powerful empirical proof of the truth of the Buddha’s teachings that the causes of suffering lie within, and that the causes of happiness lie there as well.

With the certainty born of this harsh encounter with the suffering caused by his own afflictions, Dusum Khyenpa left behind the life of mundane pursuits once and for all, to enter the door of the Dharma. He was ordained as a novice monk by Dreho Chogi Lama (b. 1056), a 70-year old disciple of the great Tibetan translator Ngog Lotsāwa Loden Sherab (1059-1109). Upon receiving his monastic vows, Dusum Khyenpa had a vision that the Buddha presented him with a black hat. He later fashioned a physical hat modeled on the one in his vision,

and this became the first material hat associated with the Karmapa line. At this time, he was given his epithet “Karmapa,” or “Being of Enlightened Activity,” as a secret name.

## In Quest of Dharma

Within three years of his ordination, Dusum Khyenpa was on his way to central Tibet, to the preeminent sites for rigorous scholarly study as well as meditative practice. Unbeknownst to him, at the same time a fellow Khampa named Phagdrü Dorje Gyalpo, or Phagmodrupa (1110-1170), was also making the long journey from Kham to central Tibet in quest of the Dharma. Born in the same year, the two later met far from home, in the major study centers of the day in Tölung in central Tibet. They became close Dharma friends, and both later entrusted themselves to Gampopa for spiritual guidance. In time, Dusum Khyenpa and Phagmodrupa would prove to be most instrumental in safeguarding the future of Gampopa’s lineage. It was Dusum Khyenpa who founded the Karma Kagyu and Phagmodrupa who trained disciples who later founded the Drukpa Kagyu and Drigung Kagyu lineages. (The Karma Kagyu, Drukpa Kagyu and Drigung Kagyu are the three largest Kagyu lineages from Gampopa still thriving today.)

For the next nine years, Dusum Khyenpa immersed himself in study—first of the major Buddhist philosophical texts, and later of the tantras. At this point in history, Tibet was undergoing a tremendous upsurge in cultural confidence and spiritual maturity. During the 12th century, central Tibet in particular hosted a number of influential lotsāwas who were major teachers and authors in their own right. While in Tölung, Dusum Khyenpa read the most challenging Indian treatises with the finest teachers of the day. With no less illustrious a scholar than Gyamarpa (11th century) and his brilliant prodigy Chapa Chökyi Senge (1109-1169), Dusum Khyenpa studied the principal texts of Asaṅga and other important philosophical works, gaining a firm grounding in the views of the two major streams of Mahāyāna philosophy: Cittamātra and Madhyamaka.

His training in these texts complete, Dusum Khyenpa proceeded to the great Kadampa center of Phenyul. As a particularly promising student, he was taught the six treatises of Nāgārjuna by Patsab Lotsāwa, the 12th century’s greatest proponent of Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka philosophy. For a further six years, Dusum Khyenpa studied Kadampa texts under the Kadam master, Geshe Sharawa. He further trained in tantra, receiving the set of six yogic practices associated with the Kālacakra tantra, as well as the Kākamukha Mahākāla tantra.

During this period, Dusum Khyenpa took his bhikṣu ordination—the highest level of monastic ordination. Mel Dulwa Dzinpa (Holder of the Vinaya) acted as preceptor, and Yeshe Lodrö as ritual master. Dusum Khyenpa trained thoroughly in the foundational training for monastics, the vinaya, excelling to the point where he was asked to teach *vinaya* to others.



Damaru or ritual drum used by the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa. Photo by Rokpa



Phagmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo, a student of Gampopa and Dharma friend of Dusum Khyenpa, is surrounded by scenes of devotion and meditational deities in this 14th-century Taglung style painting. *Collection of the Rubin Museum of Art, C2002.24.3 (HAR 65119)*

## Meeting Gampopa

At the age of 30, Dusum Khyenpa decided to search out the master who would show him the greatest kindness, leading him to the highest realization on the path—Lord Gampopa, also known as Dagpo Rinpoche. As Dusum Khyenpa was heading to Gampopa’s seat at Daglha Gampo, he first encountered Gampopa’s nephew, Gomtsul (1116-1169), and took teachings from him.

Upon arrival in Daglha Gampo, Dusum Khyenpa was made to wait two months before Gampopa would receive him. With his six years of study of the Kadampa teachings and his deep knowledge of the Indian philosophical treatises, Dusum Khyenpa came to Gampopa with a strong intellectual understanding of the Dharma. Nevertheless, when Gampopa finally agreed to receive him, he initially granted Dusum Khyenpa only *lam rim* or “gradual path” teachings, which had already formed part of the basic curriculum that Dusum Khyenpa had studied for years under Kadampa masters. Gampopa offered the eager Dusum Khyenpa no secret transmissions or special instructions, but only advised him to practice the *lam rim*, saying, “I practiced this. You should do so too.”

Though Dusum Khyenpa may have expected more advanced or esoteric instruction, he diligently followed Gampopa’s advice. Later, after Gampopa granted him Vajrayana teachings, he entered solitary retreat for nine months. He engaged with full intensity in the meditative practices Gampopa had indicated for him, wearing only a single cotton cloth. He meditated with such exertion that the perspiration never dried from his hands for nine months.

Over the years, Gampopa guided Dusum Khyenpa with great skill, offering him instruction for some time and then sending this determined meditator off to practice in solitude. Gampopa directed Dusum Khyenpa to meditate in various sites across southern Tibet, ranging from Dagpo, Ölkha, into Tsang and down to a border region spanning an area now divided among Tibet, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. The latter territory was ruled by the Mön king, who granted Dusum Khyenpa right of passage so that he could wander and meditate at will. Though tigers frequented the territory, he remained steadfast in his resolve to follow Gampopa’s advice and persisted in his practice.

## Gaining Certainty

After training and meditating for several years in this way, Dusum Khyenpa went to see Gampopa to relate his experience and seek further instruction. After listening to Dusum Khyenpa’s descriptions of his meditative experiences, Gampopa responded: “I had great hopes in you before, but this is disappointing.

You have to keep meditating.” Following Gampopa’s advice, Dusum Khyenpa meditated for another six months, but saw no change in his meditation. Nevertheless, he had firm conviction in his own experience, despite Gampopa’s assertion of doubt. Dusum Khyenpa told Gampopa: “There’s no way this is wrong. Even if it is wrong, this is how I’m going to meditate.” In this way, Gampopa guided Dusum Khyenpa to the point of unshakable certainty in his meditation. This time, when Dusum Khyenpa returned to report again on his meditation, the great Gampopa placed his hand upon Dusum Khyenpa’s head and told him, “Son, you have already severed the bonds to saṃsāra.”

Dusum Khyenpa became renowned for his exceptional fortitude in meditation, and was considered supreme among the vast gathering of meditators practicing under Gampopa’s guidance. Although Dusum Khyenpa’s meditative prowess earned him a superior position among the Daglha Gampo practice community, accounts of his life indicate that he forged close and lasting ties of friendship with many of his fellow students. In general, his friends recognized that Dusum Khyenpa was utterly true to his word, and it is clear that he inspired similar loyalty in others.

While training primarily under Gampopa, Dusum Khyenpa also had the opportunity to meet Milarepa’s other disciple, Rechungpa (1085-1161), and to receive from him the full transmission of the six yogas of Nāropa as well as other instructions.

Gampopa himself gave Dusum Khyenpa personal instructions on Mahāmudrā, as well as instructions on Vajrayoginī practice. After he had done so, Gampopa advised Dusum Khyenpa to practice Mahāmudrā far to the east, in an area of Kham called Kampo Gangra. This would be of great benefit to beings, Gampopa told him.

Although Gampopa was guiding vast numbers of students at this point, Dusum Khyenpa’s tremendous devotion to Gampopa lent a distinct flavor to their lama-disciple relationship. During one of the periods Dusum Khyenpa was staying at Daglha Gampo, Gampopa distributed cloth to his three close disciples from Kham—Seltong Shogom (b. 12th century), Phagmodrupa and Dusum Khyenpa, known among Gampopa’s disciples as the Three Men from Kham. Gampopa instructed each of them to make a hat from the material. Dusum Khyenpa valued so highly the cloth he received from his lama that he painstakingly fashioned it into the most beautiful shape he could. Some time later, Gampopa called the three of them and asked them to bring the hats they had made. Seltong Shogom had neglected to attend to the task, but when the summons came, he hastily attempted to craft the material into a hat-like shape. Dusum Khyenpa, meanwhile, arrived with the resplendent hat he had taken such care to construct.

Dusum Khyenpa’s exertions with the fabric reveal a great deal about his character. His care in transforming what Gampopa had given him into a glorious crown was interpreted as an auspicious sign for the future of the lineage he had received from Gampopa and would himself pass on—the lineage known today

as the Karma Kagyu. Indeed, Dusum Khyenpa's efforts to preserve and value what Gampopa had given him have yielded beautiful and long-lasting results. A replica of this hat is still worn by the Karmapa today. Known as the Multi-Colored Hat, it serves as a substitute for the lama, who in many Tibetan Buddhist practices is visualized atop the crown of the disciple's head.

## Losing his Lama

In 1153, 14 years after Dusum Khyenpa met Gampopa, the lama who had cared for him so kindly passed away. Dusum Khyenpa learned of the loss when he met Gampopa's nephew Gomtsul and a second disciple named Phagpa in Ölkha. Clinging to Gomtsul, Dusum Khyenpa made supplications and wept. As he did so, a vision of Gampopa appeared in the sky, clearly visible to all three of them (see photo left). The astonishing apparition did much to assuage Dusum Khyenpa's pain, and he commented, "The lama came to dispel my grief."

Every year thereafter, Dusum Khyenpa marked the anniversary of Gampopa's death, and later established the practice of doing so in the monasteries he himself founded. Dusum Khyenpa retained a deep gratitude and a sense of commitment not only to Gampopa himself but also to his seat at Daglha Gampo. Throughout his life, when Dusum Khyenpa received large offerings, he frequently sent them to Daglha Gampo to support the community and facilities that Gampopa had founded.

Some time after the passing of the great master had been ritually marked in the customary manner, Dusum Khyenpa recollected the advice his lama had given him to travel east to Kham and practice Mahāmudrā in the area of Kampo Gangra. His decision to do so met with objections. In the absence of their teacher, and with a massive assembly of practitioners at Daglha Gampo needing guidance, Dusum Khyenpa had ample opportunities to benefit beings and the Dharma without leaving Daglha Gampo. As he prepared to depart for Kham, his Dharma friends attempted to dissuade him. His long-time friend Phagmodrupa urged Dusum Khyenpa not to go there, saying, "If you go to Kham, you will have to give many initiations. This will shorten your life." In general, giving tantric empowerments to those who have not guarded their samaya (or tantric commitments) purely can have a devastating impact on the health and lifespan of the lama conferring such empowerments. By leaving the community of meditators at Daglha Gampo, Phagmodrupa was concerned that Dusum Khyenpa was running a personal risk by interacting with less committed practitioners.

Dusum Khyenpa stated, "It is very kind of you to be concerned for me, but I am going to live to the age of 84, whether or not I give empowerments. There will be no premature death for me."

With the utmost confidence born of his own realization and his trust in his lama, Dusum Khyenpa departed for Kham in accordance with Gampopa's advice—and indeed he did live to the age of 84 as he predicted he would.



Upon hearing that Gampopa had passed away, Dusum Khyenpa experienced a vision of his teacher, shown at top left. Collection of the Rubin Museum of Art, C2006.66.6 (HAR107)

## Return to Kham

Three decades after he had left, at the age of 50, Dusum Khyenpa completed the journey back to his native region of Kham. As Gampopa had instructed, he meditated on Mahāmudrā in the Kampo Gangra area. During this period, Dusum Khyenpa engaged in dream yoga practice as well as Mahāmudrā, and attained a level of realization wherein he was able to dissolve the boundary between sleep and wakefulness and between meditation and his ordinary activities. His Mahāmudrā realization reached the fourth stage—that of non-meditation.

While in Kham, Dusum Khyenpa swiftly began to attract disciples, and before long the number of monks in his community exceeded 1,000. In 1164, Dusum Khyenpa founded Kampo Nenang monastery, on a spot tucked among gentle peaks (*see photo above*). There he established a retreat center and monastery, and devoted the next two decades of his life to cultivating realization in the many students who came seeking his guidance. As his first major seat, Kampo Nenang was powerfully imbued with Dusum Khyenpa's presence. To this day, the letter A appears on a boulder at Kampo Nenang whenever a Karmapa has been reborn in the world (*see photo, Chapter 8*).

At Kampo Nenang, Dusum Khyenpa received Drogön Rechen (also known as Sangye Rechen Peldrak, 1148-1218), his heart disciple. Along with transmitting Dusum Khyenpa's lineage, Drogön Rechen became instrumental in recognizing that the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, was, in fact, the reincarnation of Dusum Khyenpa. It was to Drogön Rechen that Dusum Khyenpa entrusted details of his next incarnation. Dusum Khyenpa declared that he would return, for the sake of one single being.

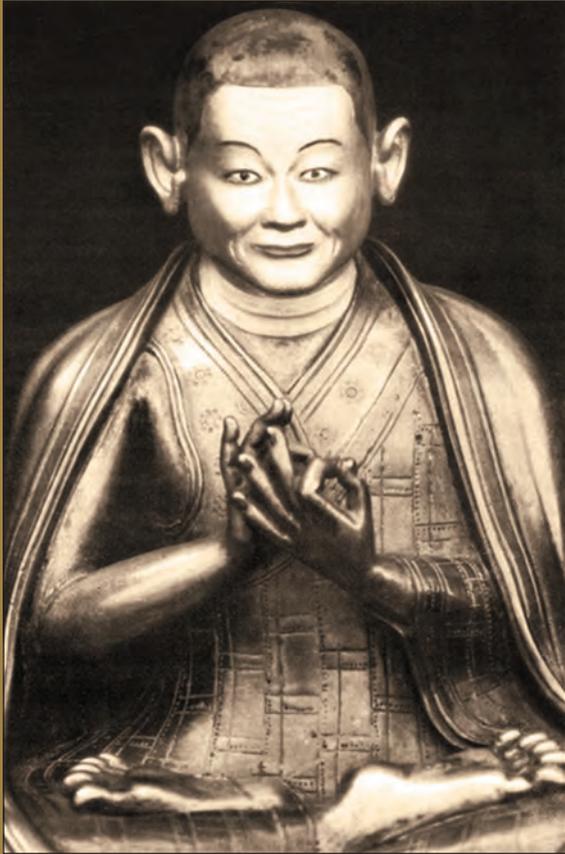
Along with fulfilling his life's purpose of caring for his students, Dusum Khyenpa was active in dispelling disputes, mediating between feuding factions across Kham. His skillful interventions, and in some cases his mere presence, repeatedly resulted in the resolution of deeply entrenched animosities and personal conflicts. This pattern of peace-making recurs again and again in the lives of Dusum Khyenpa's successors in the Karmapa reincarnation line, and forms a key component of their activity in the world.

At the age of 74, Dusum Khyenpa founded his second major seat, Karma Göñ monastery.

Throughout this time, even as he was developing his own monastic seats, Dusum Khyenpa continued sending offerings back to Daglha Gampo. On one occasion, he dispatched a caravan with 70 yak-loads of tea.



Kampo Nenang. Photo by Tenzin Dorje



Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193). Photo courtesy of Nik Douglas

## Deeds in Central Tibet

Years before, when Dusum Khyenpa was still residing in central Tibet, Gampopa's nephew, Gomtsul, had counseled him that, come what may, he should return to central Tibet after his time in Kham. Ever valuing each instruction he had received from his teachers, Dusum Khyenpa was determined to honor this advice, despite his advanced years. Marpa too had displayed similarly exceptional determination when he undertook his third trip to India in his old age. But unlike Marpa, Dusum Khyenpa harbored no hopes of reuniting with his lama at the other end of the journey, for by this time both Gampopa and Gomtsul had passed away. His huge circle of disciples at Kampo Nenang, Karma Göñ and elsewhere across the region offered him more than ample opportunity to be of benefit in Kham. Yet, in his late 70s, Dusum Khyenpa undertook the arduous journey, meeting his commitments to his teachers, and guided by his own sense of what more he might do for others.

Once he had reached central Tibet, Dusum Khyenpa first visited Daglha Gampo, where he taught extensively, oversaw reconstruction of buildings that had fallen into disrepair and offered a 100-volume

scriptural collection written by hand in gold to the monastery.

Dusum Khyenpa's powers to pacify disputes were urgently needed in central Tibet as well, for a celebrated master who was a fellow disciple of Gampopa named Lama Zhang (Tselpa Tsundru Drakpa, 1123/1121-1193) was exhibiting increasingly unconventional behavior that was incurring considerable social disapproval. Although many others had attempted to bring to an end the tensions, none had met with success. However, during a meeting with Dusum Khyenpa, the highly unconventional Lama Zhang is said to have danced wildly about the room, tugged on one of Dusum Khyenpa's fingers, and then immediately renounced his controversial behavior once and for all. Through his activities in negotiating with Lama Zhang, Dusum Khyenpa made an important contribution to peace in central Tibet.

Another major deed of Dusum Khyenpa during this period was the founding of Tsurphu Monastery, west of Lhasa in Tölung, the area where Dusum Khyenpa had himself first come to study as a young man. Tsurphu would go on to become a thriving center for study and practice, and an important site for the continuity of the Karmapa reincarnation line. For 900 years, in every single successive lifetime, the Karmapa has resided for some period at Tsurphu Monastery.

## His Final Teaching

With the far-ranging deeds of his life thus complete, in 1193, Dusum Khyenpa left his books and relics to his main student, Drogön Rechen, and gave away the remainder of his possessions to various Dharma communities in Gampopa's lineage. On the third day of the Tibetan New Year, Dusum Khyenpa gave a final Dharma teaching to the assembly at Tsurphu, lifted his gaze to the sky and entered meditation. He sat thus meditating for the remainder of the morning. At noon, the First Karmapa relinquished the body he had used so well to benefit beings in that lifetime, and moved on to take the next.

After the great master had passed on, Dusum Khyenpa's friend and Dharma brother from Daglha Gampo, Lholayapa, heard of Dusum Khyenpa's passing. He commented, "One should care for one's friend's main seats," and voluntarily gave up his own activities to oversee the transition at Tsurphu. Coming to care for Tsurphu Monastery for a few years, Dusum Khyenpa's friend helped to bridge the interim period before the Second Karmapa was discovered and could resume that responsibility. This generous act of Lholayapa's stands as one last testimony to the devotion and loyalty that Dusum Khyenpa inspired not only in his students but also in his friends.

From his early life—as he evolved from a teenager filled with jealous rage to one filled with deep remorse—to his determination to return to this world in a new body to carry on his work for beings, Dusum Khyenpa displayed the capacity to transform that is the true mark of a holy being. His overriding commitment to those under his care served as a driving force in his life and in his death. With the boundless creativity that remains a hallmark of the Karmapa reincarnation line to this day, Dusum Khyenpa found a previously unimagined way to guide his disciples all the way to enlightenment. In the end, not even death could prevent the Karmapa from continuing his care of his disciples and his transmission of the Buddhadharmā. ☺



This life-size statue of the First Karmapa was crafted under the direct artistic guidance of the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa, with the aim of producing a faithful likeness. It is pictured here on the stage during the opening ceremony of the Karmapa 900 celebration in Bodhgaya, India, 2010. *Photo courtesy of Maia Saabye Christensen*



The Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje. This portrait was painted in the style developed in the Great Encampment of the Karmapas, most likely during the lifetime of Wangchuk Dorje himself. *Collection of Shelley and Donald Rubin P1994.27.1 (HAR 163)*

## 6 ♦ The Second through Fifteenth Karmapas

The stream of reincarnations that Dusum Khyenpa initiated has flowed onward for the past nine centuries. In each successive life, through the shifting historical terrain, Dusum Khyenpa's reincarnations have found new pathways forward for the Dharma and for the disciples they are leading to enlightenment.

Through periods of tumult, and through periods of peace, the Karmapa incarnations have kept returning, repeatedly responding to changing times to find optimum ways to continue their work for the sake of beings and the Dharma.

In times of great flourishing of the Karma Kagyu teachings, Dusum Khyenpa's reincarnations presided over vast gatherings in their main seats and moved in great caravans across the Tibetan plateau to reach those who could not come to them. In adverse times, they guarded the advances that had been made and sought out other ways to be of benefit.

When conditions were conducive to their activities, they cared for their disciples and transmitted the teachings of the lineage. When conditions were not conducive for their activities, they cared for their disciples, transmitted the teachings of their lineage and improvised new forms of activity.

The very name of this reincarnation line, Karmapa, literally means "Being of Activity," and indicates that the Karmapa carries out the enlightened activities of the buddhas. Since buddhas themselves have limitless capacities, the activity of buddhas is by definition bound only by the limits of possibility. Historically, the Karmapa reincarnations on occasion have tested the limits of what ordinarily



The Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi. Courtesy of Michael J. and Beata McCormick Collection [www.himalayanart.org](http://www.himalayanart.org)

# Karmapa: 900 Years

seems possible, finding new spheres of activity to emphasize in different lives. Through these activities, they have contributed greatly to Tibetan culture through their literary and artistic contributions, and have shaped Tibetan history through their frequent activity as peacemakers.

All the activities of the Karmapa, like the activities of all buddhas, are animated by the aim of freeing beings from suffering and leading them to the highest form of happiness. Because they spring from a being whose mind is limitless, those activities manifest in as many forms as there are suffering beings. The Fifth Karmapa, Deshin Shegpa, declared that he had been born to tame the emperor of China, and his accomplishment of that aim resulted in centuries of peace in Tibet. The Tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorje, lived in a time when outer conditions were extremely adverse, but directed great energy towards the creation of deeply inspiring artwork and poetry. Born in Tibet under communist Chinese rule, at the age of fourteen, the Seventeenth Karmapa braved the dangers of a Himalayan crossing to India, in hopes of finding the needed conditions to function fully as Karmapa there.

With the same tenacity and fierce commitment Dusum Khyenpa displayed in his lifetime, each successive Karmapa has cultivated goodness in whatever soil they have encountered. Displaying the same creative capacities seen in Dusum Khyenpa's founding of the institution of reincarnate lamas, all the Karmapas have found a way to cultivate the most abundant flourishing possible—always leaving the soil far richer than they had found it. ☺



Fig. 1: Avalokiteśvara, currently housed in the Lhasa Jokhang Tsuklakhang.



Fig. 2: Avalokiteśvara seated on a cow, now housed in the Potala Palace's Lama Lhakhang.



Fig. 3: Green Tara. Rubin Museum of Art. Photo by Bruce M. White



Fig. 4: Two statues of Sarasvatī, now stored in the Lama Lhakhang of the Potala Palace in Tibet.

Figures 1, 2 and 4 appear as Plates 191, 192 and 194 in Ulrich von Schroeder. 2001. *Buddhist Sculptures in Tibet, Vol. Two: Tibet and China*. (Hong Kong: Visual Dharma Publications Ltd., 2001.) Photo: Ulrich von Schroeder, 1996

## The Art of Chöying Dorje

Chöying Dorje's extraordinary paintings, found on pages 8 and 36 of this book, as well as the statues pictured here, reveal this great master's unique vision and his ability to manifest that vision in artwork for others to view as well. At the same time, Chöying Dorje's art displays his responsiveness to many other forms, as he integrated elements ranging from Chinese landscape painting to Kashmiri sculptural styles. Whether produced while on the move as a refugee or while he was temporarily hosted by friendly territories in the border area between Tibet and China, his artistic activities reflect a quiet constancy of purpose and an unflinching commitment to be a source of goodness and joy to the world.



## The Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1206-1283)

Dusum Khyenpa returned as Karma Pakshi, as he had predicted in the letter he left with his heart disciple, Drogön Rechen (1148-1218). It was later revealed to Drogön Rechen's disciple Pomdrakpa (1170-1249), in startlingly clear visions, that Karma Pakshi was in fact the reincarnation of Dusum Khyenpa. As the first figure in history to be identified as the next reincarnation of a living master, it was incumbent on Karma Pakshi to display his exceptional qualities, to dispel the doubts that would surely arise. Indeed, Karma Pakshi is renowned as one of the greatest masters in Tibetan history in terms of his miraculous powers, and is often ranked in a class with Padmasambhava for such skills. The Karmapa generally engages in particular activities as central to each life's work. Karma Pakshi's major deed was the taming of Möngke Khan (1209-1259), who rapidly progressed spiritually under Karma Pakshi's guidance. Karma Pakshi had initially travelled to the court of his brother, Kublai (reigned 1260-1294), but left that court rather than become embroiled in its intensive politicized intrigues. When Kublai Khan succeeded Möngke Khan as emperor, he bitterly resented that earlier slight, and sought to have Karma Pakshi incarcerated and even killed, unsuccessfully. Karma Pakshi's equanimity and compassion throughout the terrible persecution later sparked a complete change of heart by the emperor, who apologized and requested Karma Pakshi to teach him Dharma. "Pakshi" is a Mongolian title to denote a highly revered teacher.



## The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339)

The Dharma is said to have two forms, the verbal form found in texts, and the realizations that arise in the minds of beings. The Third Karmapa made spectacular contributions in both forms, through the important scriptural works he composed and sponsored, and through the spiritual attainments of his students. In general, the greatness of one's students is a significant measure of a teacher's greatness—and the disciples of Rangjung Dorje who attained siddhis numbered 80. In terms of Dharma in its textual form, Rangjung Dorje was active in the movement of his day to compile and edit the Buddhist canonical collections. In the 1330s, in between two trips to teach at the Chinese imperial court, Rangjung Dorje commissioned and donated the materials for an edition of the entire canonical collection of Indian commentaries, known as the *Tengyur*. This edition commissioned by Rangjung Dorje was written by hand in gold and silver. Known as the "gold *Tengyur*" where it was produced, this is believed to be the very first edition of the commentarial canon in Tibet written in gold. A prolific author himself, Rangjung Dorje composed *The Hundred Past Lives of the Teacher*, a magnificent literary work describing 100 of Buddha's past lives. Until Rangjung Dorje's inspired work, the longest collection of Buddha's past lives had stopped at 34, the remaining 66 having been lost over time.



## The Fourth Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje (1340-1383)

The activities of the Fourth Karmapa left lasting marks not only in the spiritual realm, but also in terms of Tibetan culture and history. It was Rolpe Dorje who created the Great Encampment of the Karmapas, transforming his growing entourage into a structured mobile community of meditative practice, study and production. Rather than await the arrival of disciples in his main seats, Rolpe Dorje was able to reach out to offer the Dharma where necessary across Tibet. The Fourth Karmapa lived during a time of protracted conflict between the Sakya and Drigung Kagyu orders of Tibetan Buddhism. With courage and skill, he stepped into an active peacemaking role in this complex dispute. To that end, Rolpe Dorje exchanged initiations with Sönam Gyaltzen (1312-1375), one of the supreme Sakya lamas—making a powerful statement of respect and appreciation for that sect’s teachings—but he also directed material resources towards the restoration of the Drigung monastery. In this wise way, Rolpe Dorje cultivated harmonious relationships with both factions, and then used his influence to work for peace between them. The Fourth Karmapa additionally played a part in the inception of what would become Tibet’s largest sect, the Gelug, when he gave lay vows to Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) as a young boy and predicted that he would be of great importance to the future of Buddhism in Tibet.



## The Fifth Karmapa, Deshin Shegpa (1384-1415)

When the Fifth Karmapa was in his early 20s, he accepted an invitation from the ruler of Ming-dynasty China, Yongle Emperor, to travel to China and teach at the imperial court. Though his status as the emperor’s lama granted Deshin Shegpa enormous influence and power, he repeatedly declined to exercise that power to promote his own sect. The Yuan dynasty had sent military forces to Tibet with the consent or encouragement of Tibetan religious figures, as would the Qing dynasty emperors centuries later. But when the Fifth Karmapa was presented with a proposal by Yongle Emperor to send military forces to curtail other sects’ activities in Tibet and support the Karma Kagyu, Deshin Shegpa reportedly replied that a variety of teaching traditions were needed in Tibet, to suit the variety of disciples’ predispositions and needs, and that each sect made a distinct contribution. In this way, he was able to avert a planned invasion of Tibet by the Ming emperor. Due to the Fifth Karmapa’s truly enlightened perspective and his deft response to the emperor’s ambitions, the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) was dissuaded from pursuing imperial designs on Tibet. The fact that, for the three centuries of Ming rule, Tibet was able to pursue its religious and secular affairs free of external interference was a lasting contribution of the Fifth Karmapa, and may be counted among his major enlightened activities.



### The Sixth Karmapa, Tongwa Dönden (1416-1452)

The Sixth Karmapa, Tongwa Dönden, was the first Karmapa in two centuries to decline the Chinese emperor's invitation to teach at his court. After the actions of the Fifth Karmapa had laid the groundwork for centuries of peaceful relations between China and Tibet, the Sixth could remain on Tibetan territory, focusing his energy on matters closer at hand. Throughout his life, the Sixth Karmapa engaged in meditative retreats, ranged across Tibet with the Great Encampment, from Kham to Kongpo to Ü, teaching large assemblies and restoring monasteries he found in disrepair.

As a major deed of that incarnation, the Sixth Karmapa brought about a profound invigoration of ritual and tantric practice in the Karma Kagyu. Tongwa Dönden began composing tantric rituals at an exceptionally early age, and produced a vast number of meditation and ritual manuals. By the end of his life, Tongwa Dönden had created an entire liturgical corpus, which to this day forms the basis for ritual activity within the Karma Kagyu lineage. His lasting contribution is enacted, and his enlightened activity is present, each time a Karma Kagyu practitioner recites one of the ritual compositions that arose in his mind.



### The Seventh Karmapa, Chödrak Gyatso (1454-1506)

During the lifetime of the Seventh Karmapa, the Great Encampment of the Karmapas expanded greatly, earning him the epithet “Chödrak Gyatso of the Great Encampment.” Chödrak Gyatso created the practice of holding massive prayer festivals on the major Buddhist holidays, establishing the precedent for today's Kagyu Monlam Chenmo.

The widely learned Chödrak Gyatso introduced a formal study institute (*shedra*) into the Great Encampment itself, and similarly created a *shedra* at Tsurphu Monastery. An accomplished scholar, the Seventh Karmapa authored a number of influential commentaries on Indian philosophical treatises. His text on epistemology, the multi-volume *Ocean of Reasoning*, remains one of his most important works, alongside his commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the *Lamp of the Three Worlds*.

While these formed his major deeds, Chödrak Gyatso's varied activities to benefit beings also included bridge construction, the resolution of factional disputes and protection of animals. As had been the case in the Great Encampment since its inception, no meat whatsoever was consumed—or even allowed within the camp.



## The Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje (1507-1554)

Mikyö Dorje is among the greatest scholars Tibet has ever produced. He was an active participant in the rigorous intellectual debates of his day, making major contributions in virtually all areas of textual study. He was an accomplished Sanskritist, and wrote Sanskrit grammars alongside works ranging from poetry to art to tantra. The Eighth Karmapa's voluminous writings include substantial commentaries on all the principal Sanskrit texts, clarifying points of confusion and deeply engaging with their inner meaning.

The act of composing philosophical texts within the Karma Kagyu—a lineage so fully devoted to attaining realization through practice—is wholly unlike the act of producing philosophical texts in a modern academic or scholastic setting. Rather, the philosophical works of Mikyö Dorje point out the way to view reality in order to be liberated from the cycles of samsaric suffering. As such, his compositions are a supreme act of kindness.

It is said that Mikyö Dorje's deeds in recording his insight and understanding in his commentaries had the effect of doubling or tripling the lifespan of the Karma Kagyu lineage.



## The Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje (1556-1603)

In his ninth reincarnation, as Wangchuk Dorje, the Karmapa again took as a major activity the composition of texts that would guide his and future generations in their practice. Unlike Mikyö Dorje with his wide-ranging corpus of texts, Wangchuk Dorje focused primarily on Mahāmudrā.

Rooted in the direct encounter with ultimate reality, Mahāmudrā is often described as beyond words and beyond concepts. Training in Mahāmudrā must generally be conducted under the personal guidance of a qualified teacher who can point disciples to the direct experience of the nature of their own mind. As such, Wangchuk Dorje was accepting an enormously challenging explanatory task, since Mahāmudrā, by its very nature, eludes conceptual formulation.

Nevertheless, Wangchuk Dorje's own realizations of Mahāmudrā and his exceptional skill in articulating those realizations combined to bear fruit in the form of three texts: *Ocean of Definitive Meaning*, *Pointing Out the Dharmakāya* and *Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance*. These three compositions form the backbone of Mahāmudrā explanation in the Karma Kagyu today. As a later Karmapa pointed out, without these texts by Wangchuk Dorje, the Karma Kagyu today would have few written resources to turn to in order to explain Mahāmudrā practice.



## The Tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorje (1604-1674)

The Tenth Karmapa lived through a turbulent time that brought dramatic changes to the position of the Karma Kagyu in Tibet. Yet his response to those changes provides an inspiring example of perseverance, equanimity and pure goodness in the face of adversity. The 17th century's sectarianism resulted in the return of Mongol forces to Tibetan soil. In one terrible attack, the entire Great Encampment was demolished, its residents all killed. Only Chöying Dorje and an attendant managed to escape, and eventually made their way to the independent kingdom of Lijiang far to the east. Though Chöying Dorje found himself bereft of the usual conditions for spreading the teachings of his lineage, he inspired the Lijiang rulers to become devoted supporters who offered him a welcoming haven and new base for his activities. In order to safeguard the future of the lineage, the Tenth Karmapa reportedly made secret excursions into Kham and Amdo, traveling incognito, to bring the Seventh Shamarpa and other important young Karma Kagyu incarnations back to Lijiang for training. In the meantime, with the characteristic creativity and resolve of the Karmapa, Chöying Dorje found other activities that allowed him to bring beauty to the world. The Tenth Karmapa created at least one sacred image each and every day of his adult life.



## The Eleventh Karmapa, Yeshe Dorje (1676-1702)

Since the time of Dusum Khyenpa, the Karmapas frequently took rebirth in Kham, established ties with Karma Kagyu monasteries in eastern Tibet, and then made the long trek to take up residence at Tsurphu Monastery in central Tibet. This allowed the Karma Kagyu lineage to retain strong ties across widely dispersed geographical territories. Yeshe Dorje followed this pattern, and soon began engaging in the traditional activities of the Karmapas. After his formal enthronement at Tsurphu, he performed the Black Crown Ceremony, took ordination, received the transmissions of the lineage and studied the scriptural texts. He took teachings from Nyingma as well as Kagyu masters, including Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche.

Like Chöying Dorje before him, Yeshe Dorje enjoyed far less conducive conditions than previous Karmapas for acting to benefit the world widely. However, he acted fully on whatever terms he found, repairing the extensive damage that had been done to Tsurphu by the Mongolian army, caring for his disciples and training new lineage lamas. Yeshe Dorje was the shortest-lived of all the Karmapa reincarnations, passing away at the age of 27. During his brief lifetime, he worked with quiet determination to protect what had been left to him by the vicissitudes of history.



## The Twelfth Karmapa, Jangchup Dorje (1703-1732)

Also facing adverse conditions for the lineage, Jangchup Dorje invested great care in his ties to the major Karma Kagyu lineage lamas. He nurtured as his heart disciple the Eighth Tai Situpa Chökyi Jungne (1699-1774), also known as Situ Panchen in recognition of his enormous erudition. The Eighth Situpa became a great patron of the arts, as well as a productive scholar, who edited and oversaw the carving of the woodblock editions of the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur* canonical collections at Derge Monastery in Kham.

Taking his heart disciple Situ Panchen as well as the Eighth Shamar Rinpoche and the Seventh Goshir Gyaltsap Rinpoche with him, the Twelfth Karmapa undertook a pilgrimage to Nepal and India. Arriving in the Kathmandu valley, they were received with great honors by the Nepali king. At the time of the Karmapa's visit, an epidemic was sweeping the valley, which he was requested to dispel. He performed a blessing ceremony connected to Avalokiteśvara, and the epidemic did end, earning the king's devotion and gratitude. Meanwhile, Situ Panchen, a learned Sanskrit scholar, was able to debate with local paṇḍitas in Sanskrit. After teaching in Nepal for some time, Jangchup Dorje and his party continued their pilgrimage, visiting sacred Buddhist sites of India.



## The Thirteenth Karmapa, Düdul Dorje (1733-1797)

During the previous three reincarnations, relations between the Lhasa government and the Karma Kagyu order had remained difficult. Through his extraordinary skill, Düdul Dorje was able to begin the process of healing the relationship. He did so not through political negotiation, but through the pure exercise of his spiritual powers. One year when the Kyichu River breached its banks, threatening to flood Lhasa, it was recalled that Padmasambhava had made a relevant prophecy many centuries earlier, suggesting that if one day Lhasa was in danger of inundation, the Karmapa's help should be sought. When the city officials duly requested Düdul Dorje's assistance, he composed a special letter to be placed on the floodwaters, and from Tsurphu invoked the compassion of Avalokiteśvara. The waters receded, and, with them, some of the animosity that had complicated the Karma Kagyu relationship with the Lhasa-based government. He later visited Lhasa, and it is said that when he was offering a white scarf to the central Jowo image, its arms moved and have remained in the new position ever since. Düdul Dorje was also received by the Eighth Dalai Lama, in gratitude for his timely intervention during the threat of flooding. The Thirteenth Karmapa was broadly known for his overwhelming compassion for beings. The force of his compassion was so palpable that animals used to flock to him of their own accord—birds, mice, cats, rabbits and bees. Due to that, it is said that he was able to impart something of the Dharma to them in this way.



### The Fourteenth Karmapa, Thekchok Dorje (1798-1868)

From early in life, the Fourteenth Karmapa displayed an aptitude for enlightened activity in a wide range of domains. He was renowned for his personal asceticism and strict observance of monastic discipline, inspiring those around him to reach his high level of practice as well. A skilled artist, he also devoted a good deal of his time to the writing of poetry. A lasting contribution of Thekchok Dorje's creativity can be seen in the courtyards of Tsurphu and Rumtek monasteries to this day. It was he who established the distinctive Padmasambhava ritual dancing (or *cham*) that became a Tsurphu tradition, as well as Vajrakīlaya *cham* dancing. The two ritual dance practices were maintained as part of Tsurphu's tradition until 1959, when the Sixteenth Karmapa went into exile. Nowadays, both practices are preserved at Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, while Tsurphu maintains only the Padmasambhava ritual dancing. Anticipating his involvement in his next life as the Fifteenth Karmapa, Thekchok Dorje played an active role in the *Rimé*, or Non-Sectarian Movement, that began to sweep eastern Tibet during his lifetime. He exchanged teachings with the *Rimé* masters Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye (1813-1899), and Chogyur Lingpa (1829-1870).



### The Fifteenth Karmapa, Khakhyab Dorje (1871-1922)

From his very recognition and enthronement as the Fifteenth Karmapa, Khakhyab Dorje continued his previous incarnation's ties to the *Rimé* movement of eastern Tibet. Khakhyab Dorje was identified by a group of lamas that included two of the main figures driving the movement: Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892) and Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye. From an early age, Khakhyab Dorje directed his energies to his education, seeking out the most learned teachers and applying himself to his studies with great results. At the age of 15, he travelled from Tsurphu to Palpung Monastery to meet Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye, from whom he received the entire Kagyu transmission and Lodrö Thaye's own vast collection known as the Five Treasuries. From there, the Fifteenth Karmapa began traveling across eastern Tibet seeking out other transmissions and teachers—Sakya, Nyingma, Drukpa Kagyu, Shangpa Kagyu and his own Karma Kagyu. In this way, Khakhyab Dorje fully embodied the spirit of inclusiveness and openness that characterized the *Rimé* movement. The *Rimé* movement went well beyond mere tolerance of other sects, to become an active embracing of the wisdom that other lineages had preserved. Coming as it did after centuries of sectarian strife that placed many lineages at risk of extinction, one of the chief aims of the movement was to share transmissions to ensure they continued. *Rimé* was thus infused with the active wish to care for one another, for the well-being of all.

## Life in the Great Encampment of the Karmapas

For 300 years, the Gyalwang Karmapas moved freely across the wide open spaces of Tibet, accompanied by a vast mobile practice community known as the “Great Encampment of the Karmapas” or *Karme Garchen*. While they did visit major Karma Kagyu monastic seats along the way, the Fourth through the Ninth Karmapas spent the majority of their adult lives on the move, traveling to wherever they saw opportunities to be of benefit.

This unique institution of the Great Encampment allowed the Karmapas to move or stay put at will, setting up camp when conditions were right and continuing on when they were not. Yet unlike an ordinary camp, the determining factor was not what the location offered to those camping. Rather, it was what the camp could offer to the location, for the Great Encampment was effectively a vast means of reaching out to offer the Dharma in whatever place was then most receptive to it.

As they travelled in the company of the Gyalwang Karmapa—the glorious head of their lineage—members of the camp continued to engage in intensive study and practice. In its heyday, the Great Encampment included within it a full-scale institute for philosophical study (in Tibetan, *shedra*) and a tantric college. In addition, a series of solitary retreatants (or *chog dra* in Tibetan) engaged in intensive meditative practice, each housed in their own one-person tent. At its peak, the Great Encampment was home to a full 500 such roving retreatants. At the same time, a large number of the philosophical treatises and meditation manuals composed by the Karmapas during this period were written within the precinct of the Great Encampment.

Drawing on Tibet’s deeply rooted nomadic tradition, the encampment carried all it needed with it as it traversed the valleys and high passes of Tibet. Even when the Gyalwang Karmapa himself might be hosted within a local monastery, the Great Encampment could situate itself nearby without placing an undue burden on the Karmapa’s hosts. The mobility of the camp and its self-sufficiency allowed for a high degree of flexibility and spontaneity as well. From the time of the Seventh Karmapa, who founded the Kagyu Monlam Chenmo, the Kagyu Monlam itself was not fixed to any particular location, as it is today in Bodhgaya, but was simply held wherever the Great Encampment happened to be situated when the date for Monlam arrived.

Yet the Great Encampment was not simply an immense monastery on the move; it constituted a cultural institution unto itself. Every single person who joined the Great Encampment—even if only there to serve as a porter—was required to have completed certain minimal practice commitments, such as the accumulation of specific mantras. More broadly, the Great Encampment became renowned for its strict adherence to rules of discipline, which were enforced within the camp by a team of 30 full-time disciplinarians.

Almost incredibly, the Great Encampment defied the dependence on meat consumption that is integral to nomadic life on the arid Tibetan plateau. From the time of the Fourth Karmapa, who instituted it, until the Tenth, who witnessed its final destruction by Mongolian forces, the Great Encampment was completely vegetarian. For 300 years, it was strictly forbidden to even bring meat onto the encampment grounds, earning the Great Encampment the epithet of “The Buddhadharma of White Soup,” with “white” indicating that it was free of meat products.

From the art produced within it, it is clear that the Great Encampment offered a propitious climate for unbounded imagination. The Karma Kagyu lineage in general placed a high value on artistic production, but the Great Encampment offered particularly fertile ground for creative output. The camp evidently included mobile artists' studios, for one of the three major schools of Tibetan painting emerged from within it, and became known as the Karmapa Encampment Style, or Karma Gardri in Tibetan.



The Great Encampment of the Karmapas, as depicted in the thangka of the Eighth Karmapa from Palpung Monastery in eastern Tibet. Note individual retreat tent to left.

In short, during the three centuries it thrived, the Great Encampment served as an enormously vibrant and effective site for the production of art, scholarship and most importantly, realization. Its unique form was profoundly rooted in the Dagpo Kagyu itself, combining the Kadampa instructions for enhancing renunciation and bodhichitta with the fresh spontaneity yielded by Mahāmudrā practice.

The Great Encampment was established by the Fourth Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje, in the 14th century. When the number of people following the Karmapa and his entourage from place to place had grown unwieldy, Rolpe Dorje alighted on the idea of organizing his followers into a structured encampment. The Great Encampment reached its peak during the time of the Seventh Karmapa, Chödrak Gyatso. The size of the Great Encampment—then numbering in the thousands—was scaled down to more manageable proportions by the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje. In the 17th century, during the lifetime of the Tenth Karmapa, the encampment was attacked and its inhabitants slaughtered by Mongolian forces. The Tenth Karmapa only managed to escape with his life by flying off for parts unknown. After the Great Encampment was thus destroyed, subsequent Karmapas largely remained in residence at Tsurphu Monastery.

From the First Karmapa's creation of the Tibetan institution of reincarnation lineages to today's transmission of Dharma teachings live over the Internet, whenever existing means were inadequate, Karmapas have consistently found new ways of connecting with and caring for their disciples. For centuries, the Great Encampment served as an ideal means for Karmapas to reach their disciples wherever they might be, extending the range of their activities beyond each new horizon that presented itself. Defying the boundedness of place, the Great Encampment was a perfect manifestation of the Karmapas' quintessential quality of unbounded activity for the sake of beings. ☉



His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa. *Shambhala Archives*

## 7 ♦ His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa (1924-1981)

The Sixteenth Karmapa shepherded his disciples and his lineage through the most traumatic upheaval that Tibetan Buddhism has faced since the time of the First Karmapa. The Sixteenth Karmapa was born in the East and died in the West. In between, not only did he set the Karma Kagyu lineage on firm and stable ground in exile, he further spread the Buddha's teachings in the fertile soil he found farther afield, in Europe and America. With the adaptability typical of the Karmapa line, as he left his home in Tibet far behind, His Holiness was able to sow seeds of Dharma that flourished richly in the very different climate of Western minds.

For this sixteenth rebirth, the Karmapa chose the aristocratic Athup family of Kham. On the 15th day of the 6th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar, in 1924, the Sixteenth Karmapa was born.

Meanwhile, eager to find the reincarnation of their lama—the Fifteenth Karmapa—Situ Rinpoche and Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche opened the prediction letter that he had left with an attendant to guide them to his next birthplace. Inside, they found a description of the location of the home, mentioning the Athup family by name and specifying the date of birth as the 15th day of the 6th month. Situ Rinpoche and Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche sent a search party to determine whether a child might have been born to the family on such a date. The moment they met the remarkable son of the Athup family, the search was successfully concluded. The Eleventh Tai Situpa recognized him as the Sixteenth Karmapa, and sought the confirmation of that identification by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Gyalwang Karmapa was enthroned at the age of seven at Palpung Monastery, the seat of the Tai Situpa reincarnation line. Soon thereafter, he left for central Tibet, to take up residence at his main seat of Tsurphu Monastery.

From Tsurphu, the Gyalwang Karmapa travelled to Lhasa to meet His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai



His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa pictured with his teacher, His Eminence the Eleventh Tai Situpa. *Photo courtesy of Nik Douglas*



His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa in Tibet. Photo courtesy of Drateng Family

Lama, who performed a formal hair-cutting ceremony for the Gyalwang Karmapa. During their first meeting, the Karmapa wore his Action Crown. He removed the crown in order to perform the traditional prostrations to the Dalai Lama. When the Sixteenth Karmapa had completed his prostrations, His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked his chief minister why the Karmapa had not removed his second hat to prostrate. Astonished, the minister replied that the Gyalwang Karmapa had been completely bare-headed. When the Dalai Lama explained that the Karmapa had only removed the Action Crown, but not his other crown, all present realized that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had been able to perceive the Naturally Appearing Wisdom Crown that all Karmapas bear, but only those of pure view actually perceive. In 1955, in his own next life as the Fourteenth, the Dalai Lama visited Tsurphu to receive the Black Crown Ceremony from the Sixteenth Karmapa.

In the years to come, His Holiness Rangjung Rigpe Dorje received the training traditionally offered to each Karmapa, performed the Black Crown Ceremony, and generally resumed his work of ripening the minds of sentient beings. An account from the autobiography of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso

Rinpoche gives a sense of His Holiness' manner of guiding disciples. Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche had been doing meditative practice, mainly *chö*, in a number of caves and burial grounds in the vicinity of Tsurphu. When he sought an audience with the Karmapa, he was granted a private interview at once. As

Rinpoche relates in his autobiography:

*“What is the essence of your mind like?” [His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa] asked me. Immediately my mind became free of thoughts, and, for a brief while, I could not speak. Eventually, I replied, “When I analyze my mind, I cannot find it, but, when it is resting, it possesses clarity.”*

*He laughed and said, “Yeah, that’s it. All objects are appearance-emptiness inseparable. All mental states are clarity-emptiness inseparable. All feelings are bliss-emptiness inseparable. This is how they truly are; recognize them to be so.” For a moment, through the guru’s blessing, my mind once again became free of thoughts, and I sat silently. He gazed upon me and then said, “Practice like that in the cave.”*



The Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa in Nepal. Photo courtesy of Kagyu Samye Ling



His Holiness in Tibet shown engaging in intensive practice of the Six Yogas of Nāropa. *Photo courtesy of Günther Knoll*



Photo taken in Palpung Monastery in eastern Tibet in 1939. Pictured from left to right: The Second Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche, the Fourth Palpung Ongan Rinpoche, Second Beri Khyentse Rinpoche, the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa, the Eleventh Tai Situpa and two unidentified lamas. *Courtesy of Pim Willems*

*I returned to my practice cave once again, reflecting on the meaning of his words repeatedly. I gained strong certainty that, although his words were brief, they possessed profound and vast meaning. By contemplating these profound oral instructions, from the time I received them to the present, I have come to understand that they contain the profound, essential points of the view of all sūtra and tantra.*

## Into Exile

From His Holiness' words and deeds while in Tibet, it is clear that he had a certain foreknowledge of the traumatic events to come.

At the age of 17, he had composed a poem that included this verse, as translated in Michele Martin's *Music in the Sky*:

*Not now, but on a distant tomorrow it will be decided.  
Both the vulture and I know where to go.  
The vulture soars into the depths of space;  
We people do not stay, but go to India.  
In the springtime a cuckoo comes as a guest.  
In the fall when the harvest ripens, it knows where to go.  
Its only thought is travel to the east of India.*

With remarkable prescience, he began preparing for the flight from Tibet long in advance. During the 15 years before the communist Chinese invasion of Tibet, His Holiness made repeated pilgrimages to countries whose hospitality would ensure the future of Tibetan Buddhism and the Karma Kagyu lineage after Tibetans were forced into exile. The Gyalwang Karmapa visited Bhutan in 1944, and made subsequent trips to Nepal and India, where he cultivated numerous important relationships. In Sikkim, he built on the historical ties between the Karma Kagyu and the Sikkimese royalty that date to the very inception of the Karma Kagyu. Meanwhile, His Holiness acted for the welfare of people within Tibet as well. In 1954, at the invitation of the Chinese government, he accompanied His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and a number of other high officials on a trip to Beijing.

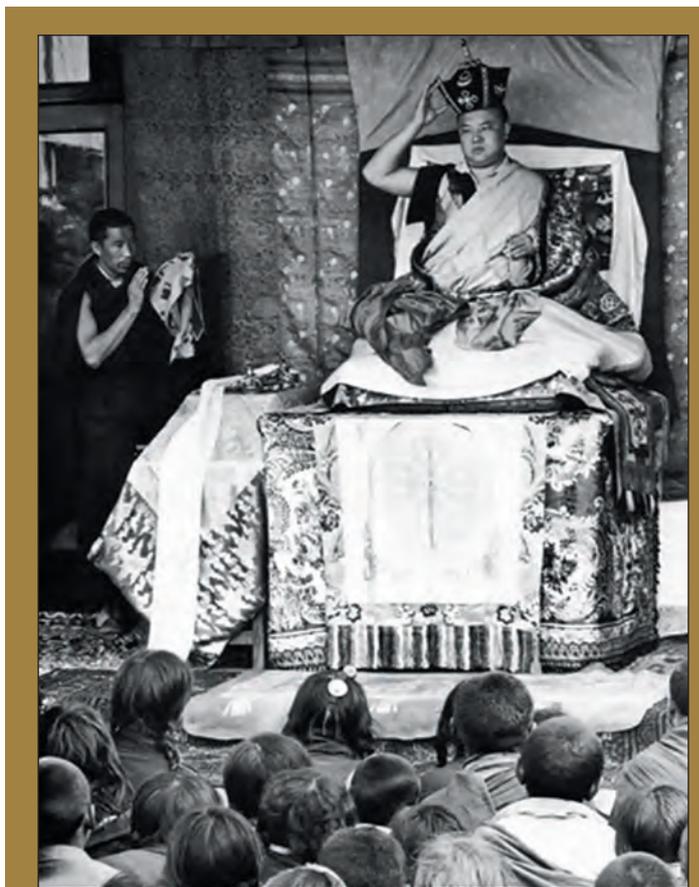


Left to Right: The Sikkimese king laying the foundation stone for the new Rumtek monastery in Sikkim, 1964. Construction work on the new Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim. Escorting the Kangyur collections of the Buddha's discourses to Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim. *Courtesy of Nik Douglas*

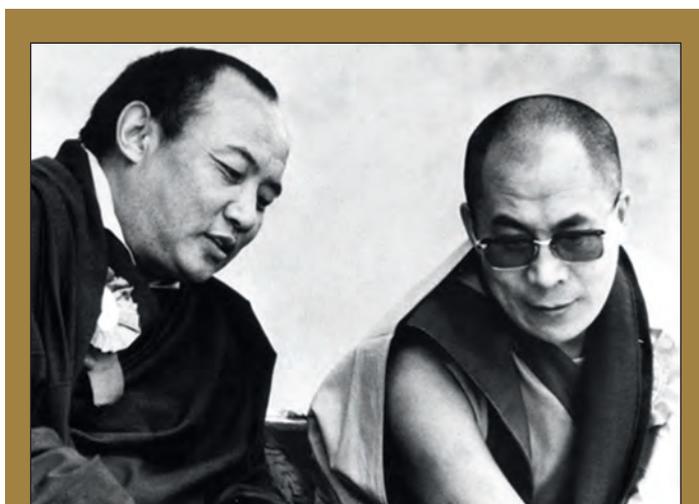
Later, once the Chinese army began taking over Tibet by force, His Holiness continued to protect his disciples in ways that only extraordinary masters can, as Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche relates in *Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma as Taught by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, Vol. Two*:

*When I was fleeing from the invading communist army, I was being shot at by a machine gun. In order that I not be killed, I was praying, "Karmapa khyenno, Karmapa khyenno," as I was running and actually visualizing the Karmapa covering my back. I managed to get away and was not hit by any of the bullets. About a month after that, when I reached Central Tibet in Tsurphu, where His Holiness was still living before he left Tibet, and a group of us had an audience with him, he said, "I am delighted that all of you were able to safely escape from the invading soldiers, but I wish to remind some among you that you are supposed to visualize your guru above your head, not on your back like some kind of cape."*

In 1959, after repeated petitions from his students to make his way to safety, His Holiness determined that the time had come to leave Tibet. Travelling overland for 21 days, the Gyalwang Karmapa and 160 of his disciples arrived safely in Bhutan, where the party was warmly received by Bhutanese government officials. After discussions with the Government of India as to where it would be best to resettle, and following the eager invitation of the Sikkimese king, it was agreed that His Holiness would establish a base for his lineage in Sikkim. Given his choice of land in the kingdom, His Holiness selected a site in Rumtek where the Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje, had founded a monastic establishment in the 16th century. That monastery had largely fallen into ruins, and was surrounded by dense jungle. The Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru generously offered the full support of the Indian government for the planned construction. With land and further funds provided by the Sikkimese royal house, the daunting task of clearing jungle and creating a new monastic seat commenced in 1962. During the rebuilding effort, 108 monks and laypeople offered their service to the work 10 hours a day. By 1966, His Holiness had entered his new seat in Rumtek, called Dharmachakra Centre, and monastic life in exile could begin in earnest.



His Holiness performing the Black Crown ceremony for Tibetan refugees in Delhi, during the early years of exile. Courtesy of Nik Douglas



His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa at a conference in Darjeeling, India, 1973/4. KTD Archives



His Holiness performing a puja at Rumtek ca. 1975. Also pictured are Situ Rinpoche, Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche, Shamar Rinpoche and Gyaltzap Rinpoche. *KTD Archives*

Thereafter, during the 1960s and into the 1970s, an important focus of the Gyalwang Karmapa's activities was training the four major Karma Kagyu lineage holders: Shamar Rinpoche, Tai Situ Rinpoche, Goshir Gyaltzap Rinpoche and Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche. All four were at a relatively early stage of their training, and the Gyalwang Karmapa guided them personally, as well as the remainder of the monastic community at Rumtek.

His Holiness placed tremendous emphasis on training in discipline, and the pure observance of monastic vows. He instituted a remarkable practice in support of such training at the new monastery in Rumtek. Each evening, the entire monastic assembly gathered for a detailed review

of the personal conduct of each member. His Holiness himself presided over these nightly sessions, which were called *saldep*, meaning that guidance is given by reminding students of what they already know. For between one and two hours, everyone was not only permitted, but actively encouraged, to speak up about any infractions of monastic discipline they had committed themselves or observed others commit. The structure was entirely democratic, with ordinary monks fully authorized to point out any lapses they had witnessed even by the highest of lamas present. The system echoed the monastic training instituted by the Buddha himself, wherein the correction and confession of physical and verbal misdeeds was similarly conducted in open forum.

In the early years at Rumtek, such sessions took place every day. Later in His Holiness' life, they were held three times a month. Under His Holiness' watchful care, Rumtek Monastery gained a reputation for maintaining exceptionally pure discipline. The results were inspiring, and earned Rumtek Monastery the widespread respect of the local Indian and Sikkimese communities.

## Turning to the West

Along with directing the re-establishment of Tibetan Buddhism in exile in India, a major deed of the Sixteenth Karmapa was his transmission of the Dharma to countries in the West.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, His Holiness made numerous Dharma connections with Western students who came to see him in India. He increasingly directed his energies towards the West in the mid-1970s, once his community was established at his seat in India, in Sikkim. His Holiness made a first tour of Western countries in 1974, visiting the United States, Canada and Europe. In 1975, he travelled to



With Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (left) and Akong Rinpoche (right), whom the Gyalwang Karmapa sent first to study English and later to the West, where they would host his visits to North America and Europe, respectively. *Photo courtesy of London Buddhist Society*

Rome to meet Pope Paul VI. On a subsequent and far lengthier tour from 1976 to 1977, the Gyalwang Karmapa met with other religious leaders, as well as important political and cultural figures.

In public, he performed the Black Crown Ceremony on numerous occasions across the West, and conferred tantric initiation. Through these activities, His Holiness created strong Dharma connections with the large assemblies who gathered for these events. In private, His Holiness gave spiritual advice to the many students who sought his counsel, directly guiding the meditative practice of Western disciples. In this way, his activities both drew in new disciples seeking a spiritual path, and ripened the minds of those who were ready to commit themselves to serious Dharma practice.

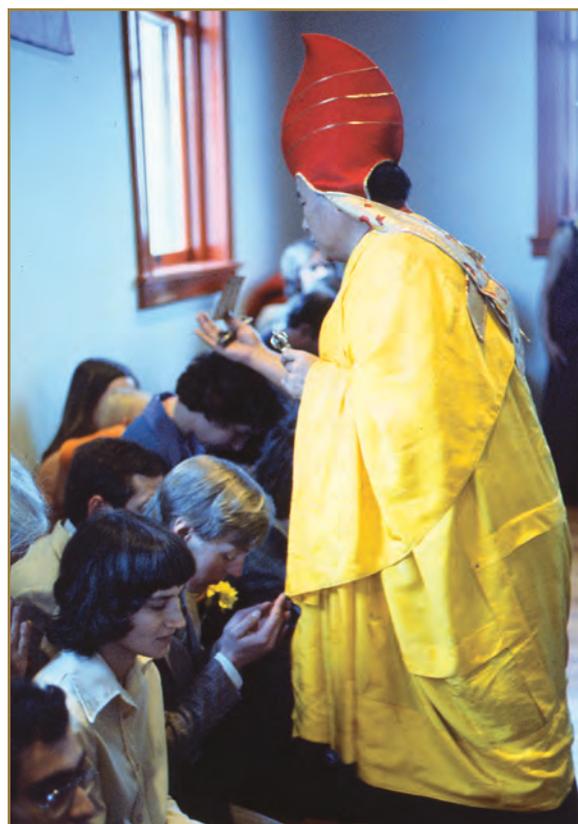
Throughout his activities, His Holiness used a myriad of means to collect his students and ripen their minds. Once, when His Holiness was visiting Samye Ling Dharma Centre in Scotland, he gave a teaching in the local village hall. A butterfly entered the hall, and after he directed his gaze toward it, the butterfly hovered motionless above him, until the teaching concluded. When His Holiness rose and left, the butterfly also left. As the audience dispersed into the night, everyone was astonished to see a rainbow-colored halo around the moon. When His Holiness was in Tibet, it was common for the public to witness such signs as these, and other signs far more extraordinary. However, because such verifiable displays of exceptional powers are rarely perceived by sceptical Westerners, their impact in the West was all the greater.

His Holiness travelled in the early days of the West's encounter with Tibetan lamas—from 1974 through 1981, well before the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to His Holiness the Dalai Lama put Tibet on the cultural map in 1989.

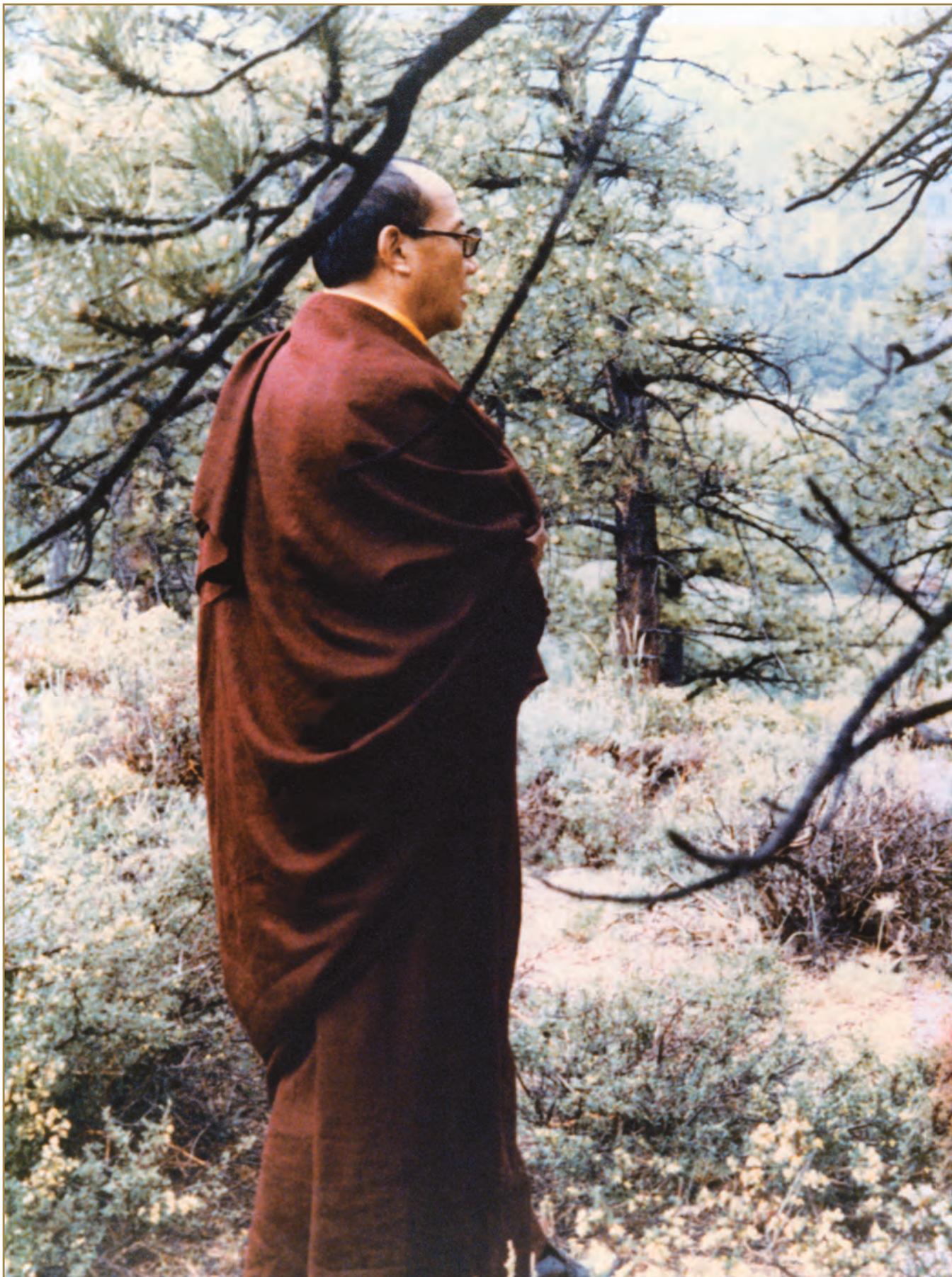
In many cases, Westerners did not know what to make of this extraordinary being who inspired such obvious veneration and awe in Tibetans, yet who walked amongst them with such joyful ease. But through his mere presence and the teachings he gave with his every gesture, the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa delivered the Dharma directly to the hearts and minds of all he met—in life and in his exceptional death.



His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa meets with Pope Paul VI in the Vatican, Rome, Italy, 1975. Akong Rinpoche appears behind His Holiness. *KTD Archives*



The Gyalwang Karmapa grants individual blessings during a Chenrezig empowerment in Boulder, Colorado, USA, in 1977. *George Holmes, photo courtesy of Shambhala Archives*



His Holiness at Rocky Mountain Dharma Centre, Colorado, 1970s. *Shambhala Archives*

## The Final Stage

It is generally explained that the principal way that buddhas perform enlightened activity in the world is through speech—public discourses, verbal explanations and oral instructions. His Holiness certainly did teach in these ways, but one of the hallmarks of his teaching was his ability to create experiences for others not only with his speech, but with his body and mind as well. When the Sixteenth Karmapa neared the end of his life, he elected to pass away in America. As he did, he used his physical illness as a glorious and deeply transformative teaching for his Western disciples as well as for the non-Buddhist medical staff who attended him.

The primary physician who attended His Holiness, Dr. Mitchell Levy, created a record of the medical events surrounding his passing away, seeking to make sense of the apparent discrepancies between what was scientifically possible and the empirical evidence that the entire medical staff was witness to. The following quotes are excerpted from that report, as published in Reginald Ray’s *Secret of the Vajra World*. The doctor relates the first medical interview with his “patient,” the Gyalwang Karmapa.

*“At the end, [His Holiness] said to me, ‘There is one thing that is very important for you to understand. If I am needed here to teach sentient beings, if I still have work to do here, then no disease will ever be able to overcome me. And if I am no longer really required to teach sentient beings, then you can tie me down, and I will not stay on this earth.’ This was certainly an interesting way to get introduced to one’s patient....*

*“People there—the hospital staff as well as visitors—were just completely overwhelmed by him. Most of them were Christian, and none of them knew the first thing about Buddhism, but they had no hesitancy whatever in calling him His Holiness. They never once said, ‘Karmapa,’ it was always ‘His Holiness.’ The staff couldn’t stop talking about his compassion and about how kind he seemed. After four or five days, the surgeon—a Filipino Christian—kept saying to me, ‘You know, His Holiness is not an ordinary man. He really doesn’t seem like an ordinary person.’ Just the force of his will and his presence were so powerful, that [everybody was] completely taken with it.*

*“... early on the day he actually died, we saw that his monitor had changed. The electrical impulses through his heart had altered in a way that indicated that it was starting to fail. And so we knew, the surgeons knew, that something was imminent...*



While visiting a park in Honolulu, Hawaii, 1977, peacocks flocked to His Holiness, who then fed them. *KTD Archives*



The Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa with the Third Jamgön Kongtrul, one of his heart disciples. *Photo courtesy of Kagyu Samye Ling*



Photo courtesy of Kagyu Samye Ling

“Then his heart stopped for about ten seconds. We resuscitated him, had a little trouble with his blood pressure, brought it back up, and then he was stable for about twenty-five minutes, thirty minutes, but it looked like he had had a heart attack. Then his blood pressure dropped all the way down. We couldn’t get it back up at all with medication. And we kept working, giving him medication, and then his heart stopped again. And so then we had to start pumping his chest and then, at that point, I knew that this was it. Because you could just see his heart dying in front of you on the monitor. But I felt that we needed to demonstrate our thoroughness as much as we could, to reassure the Rinpoches. So I kept the resuscitation going for almost forty-five minutes, much longer than I normally would have. Finally, I gave him two amps of intra-cardiac epinephrine and adrenaline and there was no response.

Calcium. No response. So we stopped and this was the point at which we finally gave up. I went outside to make the call to Trungpa Rinpoche to tell him that His Holiness had died. After that, I came back into the room, and people were starting to leave. By this time, His Holiness had been lying there for maybe fifteen minutes, and we started to take out the NG tube, and... all of a sudden I look and his blood pressure is 140 over 80. And my first instinct, I shouted out, ‘Who’s leaning on the pressure monitor?’ ... Because I knew that for pressure to go up like that, someone would have to be leaning on it with... well, it wouldn’t be possible.

“Then a nurse almost literally screamed, ‘He’s got a good pulse! He’s got a good pulse!’

“... His Holiness’ heart rate was 80 and his blood pressure was 140 over 80, and there was this moment in that room where I thought that I was going to pass out. And no one said a word. There was literally a moment of ‘This can’t be. This can’t be.’ A lot had happened with His Holiness, but this was clearly the most miraculous thing I had seen... This was not just an extraordinary event. This would have been an hour after his heart had stopped and fifteen minutes after we had stopped doing anything...

“To me, in that room, it had the feeling that His Holiness was coming back to check one more time: could his body support his consciousness?... Just the force of his consciousness coming back started the whole thing up again—I mean, this is just my simple-minded impression, but this is what it actually felt like, in that room.

“Shortly after we left the room, the surgeon came out and said, ‘He’s warm. He’s warm.’ And then... the nursing staff was saying, ‘Is he still warm?’ After all that had happened, they just accepted it. As much as all that had happened might have gone against their medical training, their cultural beliefs, and their religious upbringing, by this point they had no trouble just accepting what was actually occurring.”

His Holiness remained meditating in his hospital bed for three days, and then moved on to take his rebirth as the Seventeenth Karmapa. It was a mark of His Holiness’ wisdom and tremendous kindness toward his Western disciples

that he opted to display his death process in a hospital in Chicago, USA. In the case of masters as highly attained as the Karmapa, after their body apparently ceases functioning, there are often external signs indicating that they are still in a meditative state, controlling the transition to their next life. In Tibetan monasteries it is customary to permit people to view such masters as they sit in post-mortem meditation, their bodies still supple and fragrant. Seeing what serious spiritual practice makes possible greatly enhances viewers' faith, and also demystifies the death process.

For many Westerners, death is dreaded and feared, and the possibility of understanding it as a positive opportunity seems out of the question. Yet during what would have been a debilitating and painful process for any ordinary person, His Holiness remained thoroughly focused on the doctors, nurses and visitors surrounding him and disinterested in the details of his own physical condition. Choosing to remain in the hospital to the end, the Gyalwang Karmapa's warmth and joy were thrown into relief against the sterile clinical environment—vividly displaying the Buddhist truth that it is the mind that determines our experiences, and not our bodies or outer conditions. Enacting the Buddha's teachings even with his final breath, the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa was every bit as extraordinary in death as he was in life. ☺



On December 20, 1981, heart sons and important holders of the lineage perform puja as disciples from around the world pay their respects during the cremation of the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa. *Eleanor Mannika*

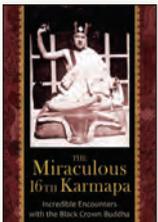
## Publications by and about His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje



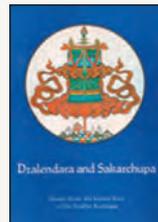
**DHARMA KING: THE LIFE OF THE 16TH GYALWA KARMAPA IN IMAGES**  
Produced under the guidance of the 17th Karmapa  
Author: Damcho Diana Finnegan  
Design: Louise Light  
KTD Publications and Altruism Press. 2015.  
Lavish visual biography commemorating the life and deeds of the 16th Karmapa, with a moving foreword by the 17th Karmapa.



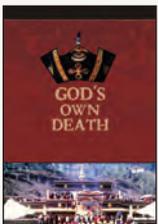
**THE RAIN OF WISDOM: THE ESSENCE OF THE OCEAN OF TRUE MEANING**  
Nalanda Translation Committee, Shambala Publications. 1999.  
Sacred songs of Kagyu teachers, including a proclamation by the Sixteenth Karmapa and several of his songs.



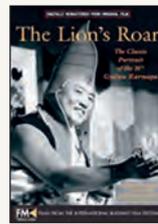
**THE MIRACULOUS 16TH KARMAPA: INCREDIBLE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE BLACK CROWN BUDDHA**  
Author: Norma Levine  
Shang Shung Publications. 2013.  
Students share personal impressions and memories of their encounters with the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa. Documents his lasting impact on many people's lives.



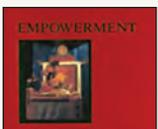
**FORMER LIVES OF THE KARMAPAS, DZALENDARA AND SAKARCHUPA**  
Ken & Katia Holmes  
Dzalendara.1981.  
Stories recounted by the Sixteenth Karmapa about his past lives.



**GOD'S OWN DEATH**  
Author: Raj Kotwal, M.D.  
Kwality Stores, Gangtok. 2013.  
Medical account of the last days of the Sixteenth Karmapa, by one of the physicians who attended him.



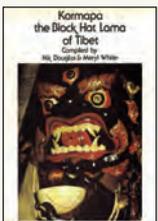
**LION'S ROAR: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HIS HOLINESS RANGJUNG RIGPE DORJE, THE 16TH KARMAPA**  
DVD. Mark Elliot, Festival Media. 2000.  
Follows the Sixteenth Karmapa across North America as he visits the Hopi Nation, visits zoos and performs the Black Crown Ceremony.



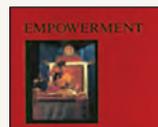
**EMPOWERMENT: THE VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS THE 16TH GYALWA KARMAPA TO THE UNITED STATES**  
Author: Chogyam Trungpa  
Vajradhatu Publications. 1976.  
Commemorates first visit of His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa to North America in 1974.



**RECALLING A BUDDHA**  
DVD. Gregg Eller.  
Tendrel Films. 2006.  
Life story of Sixteenth Karmapa, as told by those close to him.



**KARMAPA: THE BLACK HAT LAMA OF TIBET**  
Authors: Nik Douglas & Meryl White  
Luzac & Co. 1976.  
Documents many of the holy objects brought by the Sixteenth Karmapa from Tsurphu when he escaped Tibet.



**EMPOWERMENT**  
Kalapa Recordings. 1975.  
Audio CD, 47 minutes  
Liturgies recorded during His Holiness' first visit to the United States, including Black Crown Ceremony, Karma Pakshi and Mahākāla Sādhana.



His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa. *Photo courtesy of KTD Archives*



## 8 ♦ The Recognition Process

The Karmapas are unique not only for establishing the first reincarnation line, but also for the deliberate way they guide disciples in locating them in each subsequent rebirth. In the 900 years since Dusum Khyenpa instituted the first reincarnation lineage, countless other great masters reincarnated, were recognized by their disciples and carried on the work they had started in previous lives. Many of those reincarnation lineages do continue to this day, yet a great number vanished into anonymity after a few generations, as their disciples and monastery’s administration (Tibetan: *labrang*) failed to recognize subsequent reincarnations.

The longevity of any social institution—including a reincarnation lineage—depends on reliable mechanisms by which that institution can reproduce itself over time. Although the voluntary return of the Karmapas is the main means whereby the Karmapa reincarnations have persisted through time, it is also crucial that the Karmapa’s disciples be able to correctly identify each newly-born Karmapa incarnation. Compassion leads the lamas to find a way to return to where they can be located by their disciples; devotion leads the disciples to seek tirelessly until they find their reincarnated lama. Where compassion meets devotion, the Karmapas contribute their penetrative wisdom and skillful means to build a bridge that can span even the barrier of death.

One skillful means by which that bridge is built is the practice—initiated by Dusum Khyenpa himself—of leaving behind instructions indicating the Karmapa’s next place of birth. Such instructions are generally left in the hands of close disciples or, on occasion, trusted attendants. The letter that the Fifteenth Karmapa wrote and gave to an attendant inside a protection amulet included not only the date of his next birth, but a description of the house and name of the family into which he would be reborn. Although not every Karmapa writes letters giving such clear guidance, when they do, such prediction letters provide dazzling displays of the Karmapa’s extraordinary powers. Another unique means whereby the Karmapas have supported disciples in their search



Boulder near Kampo Nenang where the Tibetan letter A, below in red, is said to appear whenever a Karmapa has been reborn.  
Photo by Rokpa

## Who Recognizes the Karmapa

Karmapa	Recognized by
Second Karmapa (1206-1283)	Pomdrakpa (1170-1249)
Third Karmapa (1284-1339)	Drupthop Ugyenpa (a Drukpa Kagyu master)
Fourth Karmapa (1340-1383)	(No formal recognition process; Main teacher was Gyalwa Yungtonpa)
Fifth Karmapa (1384-1415)	First recognized by Lopön Güyi Gungpa Rinchen Pel (close disciple of the Fourth Karmapa); Confirmed by Second Shamar Rinpoche (Khachö Wangpo; 1350-1405)
Sixth Karmapa (1416-1452)	First recognized by Ngömpa Jadrel (b. 1370), close disciple of Fifth Karmapa; Subsequently formally recognized and enthroned by Third Shamar Rinpoche (Chöpel Yeshe; 1406-1452)
Seventh Karmapa (1454-1506)	First Gyaltsap Rinpoche (Paljor Döndrup; ca. 1424-1486)
Eighth Karmapa (1507-1554)	Second Gyaltsap Rinpoche (Tashi Namgyal; 1487-1515) and Third Situ Rinpoche (Tashi Paljor; ?-ca. 1512)
Ninth Karmapa (1556-1603)	Fifth Shamar Rinpoche (Könchok Yenlak; 1525-1583) and Fourth Situ Rinpoche (Mitruk Chökyi Gocha; ?-1561) headed the search
Tenth Karmapa (1604-1674)	Sixth Shamar Rinpoche (Chökyi Wangchuk; 1584-1630)
Eleventh Karmapa (1676-1702)	Sixth Gyaltsap Rinpoche (Norbu Sangpo; 1660-1698) and Seventh Shamar Rinpoche (Yeshe Nyingpo; 1631-1694)
Twelfth Karmapa (1703-1732)	Recognized by Tertön Yongey Mingyur Dorje (Important master transmitting Nyingma lineages; born 1628/41-1708) Enthroned: Eighth Shamar Rinpoche (Chökyi Döndrup; 1695-1732)
Thirteenth Karmapa (1733-1797)	Recognized by: Seventh Gyaltsap Rinpoche (Könchok Oser; 1699-1766)
Fourteenth Karmapa (1798-1868)	Eighth Gyalwang Drukpa (Chökyi Nangwa; 1768-1822—head of Drukpa Kagyu order)
Fifteenth Karmapa (1871-1922)	Recognized by Ninth Gyalwang Drukpa (Mingyur Wangi Gyalpo; 1823-1883—head of Drukpa Kagyu order); In harmony with determinations of Jamgön Kongtrul (Lodrö Thaye; 1813-1899), Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (Sakya master; 1820-1892) and Chogyur Lingpa (Nyingma master; 1829-1870)
Sixteenth Karmapa (1924-1981)	Eleventh Situ Rinpoche (Pema Wangchok Gyalpo; 1886-1952)
Recognizing Ogyen Trinley Dorje as the Seventeenth Karmapa (born 1985)	Twelfth Situ Rinpoche (born 1954) and Twelfth Gyaltsap Rinpoche (born 1954). Based on a prediction letter accepted by Situ Rinpoche, Gyaltsap Rinpoche, Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche (1954-1992) and also initially by (Tashi Tsepa line) Shamar Rinpoche (1952-2014)

for the next reincarnation are what are known as the intermediate deeds, or *nam thar bardoma*—exceptional signs that will take place between the passing of a Karmapa and their next birth. The fact that the Karmapas can predetermine not only the site of their next rebirth but also the conditions of their transition from one life to the next attests to their basic control over the process of their own death and rebirth. Further, it confirms what has long been said of the Karmapas—that they have a special ability to perceive the future as well as the past and present.

Karmapas have not always left their indications in such explicit forms as prediction letters. In the absence of such letters, their chief disciples might consult with one another to determine whether prophetic statements are contained within correspondence any of them received from the Karmapa or in any of the sacred songs (Tibetan: *gur*) or other poetic works composed by the Karmapa. The disciples might also take into consideration predictive comments made during the life of the previous Karmapa, and they would also watch their own dreams for further signs.

In general, Karmapas are often described as “self-recognizing.” Along with leaving descriptions of their next life, many Karmapas “self-recognize” by explicitly identifying themselves to others at a very young age. For example, at the age of three, the Fourth Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje, stated to his mother. “I’m Karma Pakshi’s reincarnation. I will have many students to teach.” His mother replied, “If you’re the reincarnation of Karma Pakshi, then aren’t you Rangjung Dorje [the Third Karmapa] too?” To this, the boy stated calmly, “The two are inseparable.” During his lifetime, the utter certainty surrounding his identity was so widespread that Rolpe Dorje underwent no formal recognition process, but was tacitly accepted by all as the Fourth Karmapa.

The process was adapted to the varying circumstances, and appears to have been highly collaborative. Often one or more people initially search for and identify the Karmapa. Another may confirm that identification in the form of official recognition and yet a third party might conduct the formal enthronement. This can make it difficult to name any one person as having “recognized” a given Karmapa. It also demonstrates the importance of multiple judgments to ensure not only that the right candidate is chosen but also that the harmony needed for the lineage to continue benefiting beings is preserved.

As the chart on page 94 makes clear, the task of recognizing the Karmapa is not assigned to any particular Karma Kagyu lineage lama. In fact, on numerous occasions highly attained masters from other lineages have been instrumental not only in locating but also in formally recognizing Karmapas. It was Lama Urgyenpa—an important Drukpa Kagyu lineage lama—who formally recognized the Third Karmapa, with whom the pattern of reincarnating moved beyond a one-time reappearance to become a fully established reincarnation line. Twice the task of recognizing the Karmapa was performed by Drukchen Rinpoches, head of the Drukpa Kagyu, a separate Kagyu order, while Sakya and Nyingma masters played key parts in other instances.

The task of recognizing a Karmapa generally falls to whomever the Karmapa had expressly appointed as his regent or regents before passing away. When the Karmapa did not make any clear public assignation of that duty, that role would be fulfilled by those close disciples to whom the Karmapa had transmitted the teachings of his lineage during his lifetime. This preference for close disciples to head the search consistently took precedence over other considerations. In this way, the devotion of their close disciples joins with the compassion of the lama to bring lama and disciple together once again.

## The Case of Mikyö Dorje

When the normal procedures are not respected, confusion can ensue and harmony among the followers of the lineage can be threatened. There were a number of instances in the course of the Karmapa's 900-year history when diverse groups proposed different candidates. This could result in initial periods of uncertainty, which were resolved because lineage lamas came together and assessed the candidates in an open and amicable manner. Such was the case in the lifetime of the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje, when two promising young boys were initially put forward by different parties—one from eastern Tibet and the other from the west.

It is not possible for two reincarnations of the Karmapa to exist in the world simultaneously, because the Karmapa is a single being. As Buddha explained in his discourses, every sentient being has a single, distinct stream of awareness that moves from lifetime to lifetime. One stream of awareness never splits into two or more beings, and the streams of awareness of two beings cannot combine into one. With the Karmapa, his awareness has moved from one body to the next as a single continuum through all his incarnations. Although it is not done in the Karmapa reincarnation lineage, in some other lineages, lamas appear with multiple emanations that are present in the world simultaneously. In such cases, the lama's awareness takes rebirth in a single body, which is known as the reincarnation (Tibetan: *yangsi* or *ku kye*). With that body as the basis (Tibetan: *trulshi*), the lama then sends forth multiple emanations (Tibetan: *trulku*), which are not separate awarenesses, but rather are understood to be bodies emanated from a single awareness. There is always a single body that is the main incarnation and the basis for any emanations. Thus, while a single lama can produce multiple emanations, that lama has only one reincarnation and one continuum of awareness. For these reasons, those seeking the Eighth Karmapa had to ascertain which of the two boys was the actual—and sole—reincarnation of the Seventh Karmapa.

Among the senior lineage lamas whom the Seventh Karmapa had trained, there was a sufficient level of mutual respect and harmony to allow the uncertainty to be dispelled. Without holding to either candidate with partiality or any sense of 'mine,' Gyaltsap Rinpoche travelled to meet the candidate that Situ Rinpoche had proposed, and felt convinced simply upon entering the boy's presence that this was indeed his guru, the Karmapa. Nevertheless, to dispel others' doubts, Situ Rinpoche and Gyaltsap Rinpoche devised a means of testing the young boy—a practice later adopted for assessing other reincarnations, including the

Dalai Lamas. Once the correct boy had been thus identified and enthroned, the matter was closed. In the end, the vast deeds of the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje—a towering figure and one of Tibet’s greatest scholars—provided the ultimate confirmation that the boy Gyaltsap Rinpoche and Situ Rinpoche had identified was indeed the Karmapa, and the second boy was later determined to be the reincarnation of another lama.

## After the Sixteenth

During the lifetimes of the first 16 Karmapas, the procedures for recognizing a Karmapa reincarnation were respected and followed. This ensured that the Karma Kagyu was led by the actual Karmapa, and that harmony was preserved, allowing the Karma Kagyu lineage to continue intact. After the Sixteenth Karmapa passed away, his four heart disciples—Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Gyaltsap Rinpoche and Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche—initiated the recognition process in a manner harmonious both with tradition and with their current conditions.

All four of these chief heart disciples were of similar age and all had been directly trained from their youth by His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa. Situ Rinpoche was the reincarnation of the Sixteenth Karmapa’s own root lama, while Shamar Rinpoche was the senior-most in terms of lineage hierarchy. Yet His Holiness transmitted the teachings of his lineage to all four of his heart sons together while they were under his care in exile. At the time the Sixteenth Karmapa passed away, he was not generally known to have singled out any of his heart disciples for any special role in identifying his next incarnation. Responding to this situation, the General Secretary of Tsurphu Labrang, Damchö Yongdu—who carried the burden of overseeing the administration of the Karmapa’s affairs—asked the four heart disciples to form a council of regents to cooperate in caring for the Karma Kagyu lineage during the interregnum and in identifying the Sixteenth Karmapa’s reincarnation. Since the four were clearly his main students and the Sixteenth Karmapa had not publicly assigned any of them a special role in recognizing his next reincarnation, the choice to have the four collaborate to locate their beloved root lama seemed perfectly suited to the historical conditions and in keeping with tradition as well. All four agreed to join the council of regents, and thus combined their spiritual talents as well as their karmic connections with His Holiness.

In many ways, the case of the Sixteenth Karmapa proceeded much as had other recognition processes. As had happened on other occasions in the past, the Gyalwang Karmapa did not appear to have left any explicit instructions to guide his disciples to his next place of rebirth—at least initially. Despite their collective efforts to identify other indications that could serve them in their quest for their lama, the four made little progress. Meanwhile, thousands of disciples around the world were waiting.



His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa and his four heart sons.  
*KTD Archives*

The grief experienced by disciples of a reincarnate lama is unlike ordinary grief, for it is lightened by the knowledge that the parting is not permanent. The compassion of the Karmapa for his disciples is palpable, and the commitment to return so firm it has weathered 900 years of history. Disciples of the Sixteenth Karmapa endured the period until the Seventeenth was recognized with the confidence that he would come back, a confidence reinforced by the conscious

way the Sixteenth had departed his life. Yet the separation from their guru was painful nonetheless, and the longing for reunion intense during the years of waiting for word of his return. The first signs of that return finally begin to dawn at the end of 1990. At that time, Situ Rinpoche entered a retreat, during which the guidance that the Karmapa's heart disciples had yearned and prayed to find would at last come to light.

## Lama's Compassion, Disciples' Devotion

During the retreat, Situ Rinpoche recalled a protective amulet that the Sixteenth Karmapa had given him with the comment that it would one day be

useful to him. "This is a very important protection," Gyalwang Karmapa had said. "It will be very beneficial for you." At the time Situ Rinpoche had assumed His Holiness meant the usual protection that such amulets offer, but recalling those comments during the retreat, Rinpoche was emboldened to undo the stitching binding it together. Within, Situ Rinpoche found a sealed envelope marked in his revered master's own hand: "To be opened during the Iron Horse year"—precisely the year it then was, according to Tibetan reckoning.

Given the potential momentousness of what he had in his hands, and mindful of the joint responsibility he shared with the other three lineage lamas, Situ Rinpoche deferred the act of reading the letter, in order to do so together with the other three regents. However, this was already ten years after the passing of the Sixteenth Karmapa, whose powerful presence had held the four so closely together. In his absence, to varying degrees the heart disciples had begun to develop their own separate bases of activity and pursue their own travel schedules. It took over a year before all four would come together, in response to Situ Rinpoche's requests for a meeting on the matter. At last, in March 1992, the four heart disciples were reunited at the monastic seat of Rumtek in Sikkim, and the contents of the long-awaited prediction letter could be read. Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche wrote down the interpretation they made of the letter, including its more poetic allusions. What the letter contained was the name of the Seventeenth Karmapa's father and mother—Döndrup and Lolaga—a reference to the nomadic setting as well as the name of the region and part of the name of the valley where he would be born.



The Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa trained his heart disciples and other important lineage lamas directly, carefully transmitting the Karma Kagyu teachings to them and reinforcing the close bonds of lama and disciple that follow them life after life. *Photo courtesy of Kagyu Samye Ling*

As Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche told a documentary filmmaker a few days later, the instructions of the Gyalwang Karmapa are “very clear. They are very clear and very precise. That is why we are all very confident about finding His Holiness.” At the suggestion of the council of regents, Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche accepted the responsibility for traveling to Tibet to locate the reborn Karmapa. But a tragic car accident took the heart disciple’s life before he could do so.

Situ Rinpoche and Gyaltsap Rinpoche then sent senior members of their own staff to Tibet to organize a search party in cooperation with officials from Tsurphu Monastery, the ancient seat of the Karmapas in Tibet. With the unambiguous direction the Sixteenth Karmapa had given in the letter, the search party was able to locate an exceptional child born to a father and mother named Döndrup and Lolaga, living as nomads in the region and valley matching the names specified in the letter. The correspondence between the prediction left by the Sixteenth and the birth of the Seventeenth could not have been clearer. When word of the successful conclusion

of the search was relayed to Situ Rinpoche and Gyaltsap Rinpoche, they at once communicated the joyful news to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama had already had a remarkable dream that matched what the search party from Tsurphu found, and then investigated further using traditional methods. With the power of his own insight, His Holiness the Dalai Lama thus ascertained that this boy was indeed the reincarnation of the Sixteenth Karmapa, and provided his official confirmation of that determination.

The lives of many tens of thousands of people around the world had been radically transformed by encounters with the Sixteenth Karmapa. His enlightened presence had awakened seeds of goodness in countless disciples, whose connection with the Sixteenth Karmapa had been a source of tremendous joy and hope in their lives. Not only the four heart disciples, but thousands of other hearts suffered great yearning during these long years with no sign of his return. The pain of over a decade of separation from their lama was cleared away in an instant when they first heard the news: the Karmapa had been found! Many disciples literally wept tears of unbounded joy. Families gathered to celebrate together, dancing and sharing their happiness as they would if a long-awaited child had been born to their own family. Indeed, many experienced the news of the return of their spiritual master very much like the reunion of a long parted mother and child.

Once the Karmapa had been found, the search party in Tibet approached the Chinese government for the necessary permissions to bring the young Karmapa to his seat in central Tibet to take up his role as Karmapa. The officials agreed, and



In a process that is repeated life after life, the newly reincarnated Karmapa is enthroned by a close disciple from his past life. Here, compassion meets devotion, as a heart disciple of the Sixteenth Karmapa—the Twelfth Situ Rinpoche, left—is pictured during the enthronement ceremony of the Seventeenth Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, at the Karmapas’ main seat of Tsurphu Monastery in Tibet. *Photo by Michele Martin*



Relying on the power of his own insight, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama determined that the boy located following the prediction letter was indeed the reincarnation of the Karmapa. *Photo courtesy of Tsurphu Labrang Media*

the Chinese government later made an official acknowledgement of the reincarnation of the Karmapa. In doing so, they took the occasion to proclaim a right to control all aspects of life in Tibet, even as their acknowledgment appeared to signal a softening of their restrictive policies regarding the practice of religion in Tibet. In any case, this paved the way for the Seventeenth Karmapa's enthronement to be held in the monastic seat founded by the very first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa. Situ Rinpoche and Gyaltsap Rinpoche travelled personally to Tibet to conduct the enthronement ceremony, which was held at Tsurphu Monastery. On September 27, 1992, the Karmapa once again took his seat, as over a decade of longing for reunion with their departed guru ended for hundreds of thousands of disciples worldwide. The recognition process was complete.

Nothing could overshadow the sheer joy of knowing that their lama's reincarnation had been found. For twelve years, the Sixteenth Karmapa's disciples had contented themselves with visualizing their lama in his former form on the crown of their heads or within their hearts. Now, at long last, they could see their beloved guru in his new living form in his ancient seat of Tsurphu Monastery. They could once again hear his voice and resume the fullness of their relationship to him as

the enlightened guru guiding them to their own enlightenment. The heart longing of countless disciples of the Sixteenth Karmapa had finally been satisfied.

## The Dalai Lamas' Historical Role

There are many reasons that the Karmapas have their disciples recognize them in successive rebirths. One is because stepping back into the relationships with those disciples is the most effective way to continue guiding them to enlightenment. Another is that, as the head of the Karma Kagyu order, the presence in the world of a Karmapa recognized as the Karmapa is necessary for the Karma Kagyu order itself to continue, and to act vastly to benefit numberless beings. To accomplish these aims, on occasion, even after the recognition process was completed, broader social acknowledgement was necessary so that each could perform the deeds of a Karmapa. In such cases, Karma Kagyu masters and the Karmapas themselves have accepted formal acknowledgement of their identity as Karmapa by various political authorities. The Dalai Lamas have been the political leaders of Tibet as well as spiritual leaders since the 17th century, the centuries of the Ganden Palace rule of Tibet (*see page 32*). Dalai Lamas or their regents formally confirmed the recognition of every Karmapa from the Eleventh Karmapa onwards. For example, the Seventh Dalai Lama confirmed the recognition of the Thirteenth Karmapa, while it was the Thirteenth Dalai Lama who endorsed the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa's recognition. In practical terms, the acknowledgement of the Dalai Lama or his office was

required not only for Karmapas, but for all major reincarnations of the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as important lamas holding hereditary titles, such as Sakya Tridzin of the Sakya school and Minling Trichen of the Nyingma.

Despite this expedient acceptance of the acknowledgement of the Dalai Lamas as political authority in Tibet, the Karmapa is neither an elected position nor a negotiated appointment. The Karmapa is an individual who has been intentionally reincarnating life after life since the 11th century, out of compassion for the world. ‘Karmapa’ is the name given to that series of reincarnations started by Dusum Khyenpa, and the

Seventeenth Karmapa is simply the reincarnation of the Sixteenth Karmapa. To identify the Karmapa’s reincarnation requires the ability to interpret a number of signs that indicate where the Karmapa has been reborn. This entails some ability to see into past lives. As such, it is ultimately a matter for highly evolved spiritual masters to decide.

Nowadays, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama’s authority to confirm who the real Karmapa is stems not so much from his political role but rather from his universally respected standing as a spiritual master. It is the Dalai Lama’s advanced level of spiritual development and his impeccable ethical integrity that ensure his ability to ascertain who is and is not the Karmapa, as well as his neutrality in the matter.

In the end, the disciples of the Karma Kagyu lineage may draw their confidence in the recognition process of the Seventeenth Karmapa from the collective determination of most of the heart disciples on the council of regents. They may sustain their conviction from the prophetic letter providing clear details of the Karmapa’s conscious trajectory from one life to the next. They may deepen their certainty with the knowledge that the unfailing insight of His Holiness the Dalai Lama has confirmed the identification made by the Karma Kagyu lineage masters. For those who have had the great fortune of meeting the Gyalwang Karmapa in person, deep confidence may be gained from direct encounters with him, for the enlightened presence of this great being is simply undeniable. Yet as compelling as all these factors may be, as in the case of the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje, the deeds themselves offer the ultimate confirmation that the boy recognized by Situ Rinpoche and Gyaltsap Rinpoche was indeed the Karmapa. In the case of the Seventeenth Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, observing his activities and hearing the heart-piercingly fresh Dharma that he teaches, it is clear that one is witnessing the personal qualities and vast deeds of a Karmapa in action. ●



Under the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, India, the Seventeenth Karmapa is here flanked by two of his heart disciples—Gyaltsap Rinpoche and Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche—and surrounded by other important lineage lamas. Seated, from left to right, are Tenga Rinpoche, Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche is standing to the left, while Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche and Khenpo Donyo Lodrö Rinpoche are standing to the right. *Photo courtesy of Tsurphu Labrang Media*



His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje. *Dharamsala*, 2010

# 9 • His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

As the Karmapa born in the late 20th century, it is the task of the Seventeenth Karmapa to bring spiritual teachings nurtured in the mountain hermitages of Tibet fully into the era of globalization, when those teachings are so urgently needed. To do so, on June 19, 1985, the reincarnation lineage of the Karmapas took form for the seventeenth time, with the birth of a young boy in Tibet. As he had indicated in his previous life as the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa, His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa was born in eastern Tibet, to a mother named Lolaga and a father named Döndrup. For the first years of his childhood, the Gyalwang Karmapa shared his family's simple nomadic life in a remote and rugged corner of Tibet's high plateau. When he was just seven years old, a search party arrived at his family's camp. Following the detailed instructions of the letter written by his previous incarnation, the Sixteenth Karmapa, the party was able to locate the young Karmapa. The child's identification as the Karmapa was verified not only by Tai Situ Rinpoche, Goshir Gyaltsap Rinpoche and many other major Karma Kagyu lamas, but also by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

His Holiness returned with the search party to Tsurphu Monastery in central Tibet, where he was enthroned and given his initial monastic ordination. He thereafter commenced the process of study and training traditional for Karmapas, yet began offering spiritual instruction to others almost at once. His first public teaching, given at Tsurphu in Tibet when he was just eight years old, was attended by over 20,000 people. However, the major Karma Kagyu lineage holders were denied permission to enter Tibet to transmit the essential instructions of the lineage to him, a situation that constituted an insurmountable obstacle to his functioning fully as Karmapa in the world. When the young Karmapa found his situation in Tibet intolerable, at the age of 14, he escaped from Tibet to India, seeking freedom to fulfill his role as a world spiritual leader and to meet his responsibilities as head of the Karma Kagyu lineage.

Crossing the Himalayas by jeep and on horseback, on foot and by helicopter, Gyalwang Karmapa reached Dharamsala, India, on January 5, 2000. There, he was received warmly by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, with whom the Gyalwang Karmapa has since continued to enjoy a close relationship of mentor and protégé. During the 15 years he has lived in India as a refugee, the Gyalwang Karmapa has undergone a traditional monastic training and philosophical education, while also pursuing a private modern education. His Holiness receives tens of thousands of visitors each year from all over the world at his residence in Dharamsala. Since 2004, he has led the Kagyu Monlam Chenmo, an annual winter Dharma gathering in Bodhgaya that draws thousands of attendees from many different Buddhist traditions around the world.

# Karmapa: 900 Years

In May 2008, His Holiness made his first long-awaited trip to the West, travelling to the United States where he visited many spiritual centers under his guidance. This was followed by a second visit to the U.S. in 2011. In 2014, he visited Europe for the first time, teaching to massive crowds in Berlin and near his European seat of Kamalashila in Germany. When His Holiness spoke at a TED conference in Bangalore in 2009, he became the youngest person ever to do so. In January 2010 in Bodhgaya, 12,000 people attended the live performance of a play he wrote and produced on the life of Milarepa, combining elements of traditional Tibetan opera and modern theatre.

Along with his efforts to preserve and present Tibetan culture, the Gyalwang Karmapa has also travelled across India to participate in the cultural and religious life of his adopted home. From inaugurating temples for Sai Baba in Tamil Nadu to commemorating Mother Teresa's 100th birthday in Calcutta, His Holiness has met with many other spiritual leaders in a spirit of mutual respect and tolerance. He further serves as a Dharma teacher to the Buddha Vikas Sangh and other communities of Indian Buddhists around the country.

Out of reverence for the origins of Buddhism in India, His Holiness introduced the use of Sanskrit prayers in the massive Kagyu Monlam prayer gatherings he directs and has revived lost Indian Buddhist song traditions. After seeking out the original Sanskrit texts of sacred songs (*dohā*) from his Dharma lineage, the Gyalwang Karmapa invited Indian classical singers to present them, marking the first time they were performed in India in nearly a millennium.

Two issues that His Holiness has particularly championed are women's rights and environmental protection. He has instituted numerous practical programs to care for the environment as a way of caring for future generations, and has personally committed to ensuring that in the future, women will have the opportunity to receive full ordination as nuns within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

In this way, the Seventeenth Karmapa acts within a vast horizon of benefit, yet his forward-looking deeds remain deeply grounded in a respect for the past. As a scholar and meditation master, as well as painter, poet, songwriter and playwright, the Seventeenth Karmapa embodies a wide range of the activities that Karmapas have engaged in over the centuries. As an environmental activist and world spiritual leader whose teachings are often webcast live, His Holiness is clearly bringing the Karmapa lineage's activities fully into the 21st century. ●

## Publications by & about His Holiness the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje



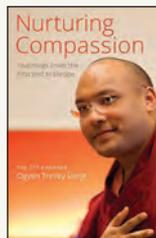
### INTERCONNECTED: EMBRACING LIFE IN OUR GLOBAL SOCIETY

Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa. Wisdom Publications. 2017. This book shows not only that we are all endlessly and intimately connected, but also how we can embrace that fact to live happier lives and create a healthier global society.



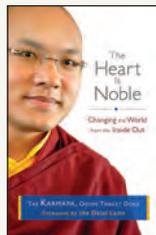
### MILAREPA: TIBET'S SUPREME YOGI A PLAY IN SIX ACTS

Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa. KTD Publications. 2017. Original script of the play of the life of Milarepa first produced in Bodhgaya, 2010, illustrated with images from a rare thangka collection.



### NURTURING COMPASSION: FIRST TEACHINGS IN EUROPE

Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa. KFE Publications. 2015. Public teachings for a meaningful life and Dharma teachings on ngondro and Mahamudra, delivered during his very first visit to Europe.



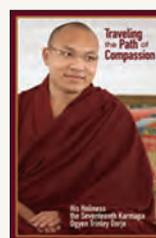
### THE HEART IS NOBLE: CHANGING THE WORLD FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa. Shambhala Publications. 2013. Based on conversations with university students, the Karmapa outlines his vision for bringing social action into daily life, exploring such topics as gender issues, conflict resolution and food justice.



### NGONDRO FOR OUR CURRENT DAY

Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa. KTD Publications. 2010. Guides students through the four traditional preliminary practices, based on a shortened practice text especially composed by the Karmapa.

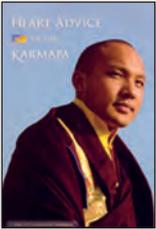


### TRAVELING THE PATH OF COMPASSION: A COMMENTARY ON THE THIRTY-SEVEN PRACTICES OF A BODHISATTVA

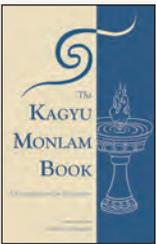
Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa. KTD Publications. 2009. Offers deeply inspiring yet eminently practical guidance for walking the bodhisattva path in the 21st century.



**THE FUTURE IS NOW: TIMELY ADVICE FOR CREATING A BETTER WORLD**  
 Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa.  
 Hay House. 2009.  
 Pairs contemporary photography with 108 sayings on how to live more consciously.



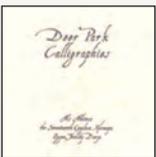
**HEART ADVICE OF THE KARMAPA**  
 Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa.  
 Altruism Press. Sidhpur, India. 2008.  
 Collection of talks on an array of topics, including the environment, loving-kindness and compassion, karma, and inter-faith harmony.



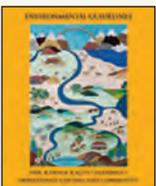
**KAGYU MONLAM BOOK: A COMPILATION FOR RECITATION**  
 Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa.  
 Altruism Press. Sidhpur, India. 2009.  
 In the Karmapa's characteristic non-sectarian spirit, this collection of prayers and practices for use at the annual Kagyu Monlam Chenmo includes texts from a wide variety of Buddhist traditions.



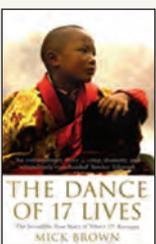
**CEREMONY OF OFFERING TO THE GURUS**  
 Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa.  
 KTD Publications. 2007.  
 Offering to the gurus (guru puja) practice text composed by the Seventeenth Karmapa.



**DEER PARK CALLIGRAPHIES**  
 Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa.  
 KTD Publications. 2004.  
 Reproductions of 19 original calligraphies drawn by the Seventeenth Karmapa during a stay in Sarnath, India.



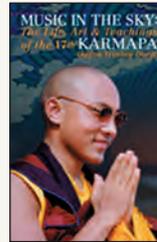
**ENVIRONMENTAL GUIDELINES FOR KARMA KAGYU BUDDHIST MONASTERIES, CENTERS AND COMMUNITY**  
 Author: The Seventeenth Karmapa.  
 Downloadable at [www.khoryug.com](http://www.khoryug.com)  
 Outlines His Holiness' vision of caring for the environment as a way of caring for beings.



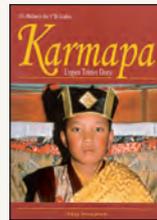
**DANCE OF 17 LIVES: THE INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY OF TIBET'S 17TH KARMAPA**  
 Author: Mick Brown.  
 Bloomsbury USA. 2005.  
 Details the extraordinary story of the exiled Tibetan teenager, who has been hailed as one of the greatest spiritual leaders of the coming age.



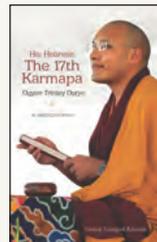
**KARMAPA: THE POLITICS OF REINCARNATION**  
 Author: Lea Terhune.  
 Wisdom Publications. 2004.  
 Biography recounts the Karmapa's escape from Tibet and its political aftermath. Explores the process of his recognition, as well as the splitting off of a faction backing another candidate.



**MUSIC IN THE SKY: THE LIFE, ART AND TEACHINGS OF THE 17TH KARMAPA, OGYEN TRINLEY DORJE**  
 Author: Michele Martin.  
 Snow Lion, Ithaca, NY. 2003.  
 Offers detailed account of His Holiness' childhood and escape from Tibet, as well as selections of his early poetry and teachings.



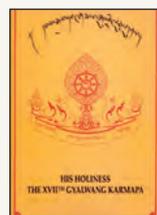
**KARMAPA: URGYEN TRINLEY DORJE**  
 Author: Ken Holmes.  
 Altea. 1995.  
 Presents information on such topics as the Karmapa's lineage, reincarnation, Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism itself.



**HIS HOLINESS THE 17TH KARMAPA OGYEN TRINLEY DORJE: A BIOGRAPHY**  
 Author: Tsering Namgyal Khortsa.  
 Hay House. 2013.  
 Mixture of biography, travelogue and reportage depicts the Karmapa grappling with immense challenges to modernize spirituality.



**THE LIFE OF MILAREPA**  
 DVD, 255 minutes.  
 Universal Music Taiwan. 2010.  
 Play written and produced by the Seventeenth Karmapa combines elements of traditional Tibetan opera and modern theatre, for a world-class theatrical event staged in Bodhgaya.



**HIS HOLINESS THE XVIIITH GYALWANG KARMAPA**  
 Karma Lekshey Ling Publications, Nepal. Photo essay on the early years of the Seventeenth Karmapa's life, supplemented with a concise biography.



The Gyalwang Karmapa conferring the Black Crown ceremony. Rumtek, Sikkim, 1975. *Lars Gammeltoft*

## 10 • The Black Crown

In the early 1400s, the Fifth Karmapa, Deshin Shegpa, accepted an invitation from the emperor of China to visit and teach in the imperial court. The journey from Tibet took three years, as the Gyalwang Karmapa moved slowly with his large camp, spreading the Dharma as he passed through the vast stretch of land separating Tibet from the Chinese capital of Nanjing. As he travelled, Deshin Shegpa was following in the footsteps of the Second, Third and Fourth Karmapa, each of whom had made the same long trek. As had his predecessors, the Fifth Karmapa cultivated close relations with the emperor of China at the end of his journey, and established Dharma relationships with local communities along the way. When Deshin Shegpa did reach Nanjing at last, thousands of monks were waiting to welcome him as he entered the Chinese capital.

A month after his arrival, the Gyalwang Karmapa began to teach. Over the course of 22 days, he offered the emperor and his court what by all accounts was an extraordinary series of teachings and initiations. During the course of this great transmission of Dharma by the Karmapa, those present were witness to a daily display of remarkable and auspicious signs. Chinese court historians compiled a detailed daily record of these events, meticulously documenting the exceptional nature of the Dharma conferred by the Karmapa. The emperor had these events chronicled on a 50-foot long silk-backed scroll with illustrations and narrative accounts in five scripts. A copy of the magnificent scroll was offered to the Karmapa, and for centuries was stored in Tsurphu Monastery, but is today housed in Lhasa Museum in Tibet.

These displays of the Karmapa's exceptional powers prepared the Yongle Emperor's mind to perceive the magnificence of the Gyalwang Karmapa. During a ritual ceremony one day, the Yongle Emperor, full of faith, suddenly perceived a black crown hovering above the head of the Fifth Karmapa. Deeply inspired by the experience, the emperor sought Deshin Shegpa's permission to make a faithful replica of what he had seen. The



The original Action Crown worn by the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, preserved since the 13th century. *Rokpa*



His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa wearing the Action Crown during the Karmapa 900 opening ceremony in 2010 in Bodhgaya. *Photo courtesy of Karmapa 900 Organizing Committee*



His Holiness arrives with the Black Crown at the Berlin airport, 1977. Photo by Günter Denk

Karmapa consented, and the emperor then guided artisans in recreating the crown he had seen. Though deep blue in color, from a distance it appears black, and became known as the Black Crown. The jewel-studded Black Crown worn by Karmapas during the Black Crown Ceremony allows viewers to witness the inspiring reflection of the Karmapas' qualities, as they were seen in 1407 by a disciple of great faith.

## What the Emperor Saw: The Naturally Appearing Crown

The emperor had sought an explanation for what he had seen, and learned that the crown was a naturally occurring feature of the physical presence of all Karmapas. Well before his birth as Dusum Khyenpa, in a previous lifetime, the First Karmapa had attained the tenth bodhisattva *bhūmi*, an exceptionally high level of spiritual accomplishment. Whenever a bodhisattva attains such a state, all the buddhas gather and confer a special crown initiation, or *abhiṣeka*, on the new tenth-level bodhisattva. In the case of the being

who would become the Karmapa, from the moment of that initiation, this crown has formed a naturally occurring aspect of his being. Called the Naturally Appearing Wisdom Crown (in Tibetan, *yeshe rangnang gi chöpen*), it can only be seen by those with the rare purity of vision to actually discern buddhas in their true visible form, or *sambhogakāya* in Sanskrit. Though imperceptible to most ordinary beings, if a disciple purifies his or her mind with great and unshakable faith, the naturally appearing crown can become visible.

Extraordinary as the emperor's vision of the crown may have been, the inner qualities of all great practitioners do manifest outwardly once they reach certain levels of spiritual attainment. Such external indications of internal qualities are well-documented in the biographies of the Buddha. Today, when in the presence of highly accomplished spiritual masters, some people may vaguely sense their extraordinary qualities. However, the rampant cynicism of our era and the competitiveness that disinclines us to hold others in high esteem constitute serious obstacles to our ability to appreciate the presence of greatness among us.

Even in the time of the first Karmapas, only a scarce few were capable of comprehending many of their exceptional qualities. Yet due to the kindness of the Yongle Emperor in creating a replica from ordinary materials, for the past 600 years ordinary beings have had the opportunity to experience a glimpse of what is normally veiled from their view. That glimpse, in fact, is so powerful that it is said to have a liberating effect merely upon sight. This quality is reflected in the crown's formal name: The Crown that Liberates When Seen (*Üsha Thong Dröl*).

## The Ceremony

The "Crown that Liberates When Seen" serves not only as an important physical representation of the mental qualities embodied by the Karmapas, but also as a means whereby those qualities can inspire and benefit beings. To that end, past Karmapas developed the ceremony that has come to be known as the Vajra or Black Crown Ceremony. Although witnesses to the crown ceremony may be but ordinary beings, the experience of seeing the Karmapa wearing the material crown anticipates a time in the future when their purified minds will be able to perceive the full qualities of enlightened beings, without the aid of any external supports.

The ceremony itself begins with a *maṅḍala* offering, followed by a traditional seven-part practice. Thereafter, the Gyalwang Karmapa enters profound meditation, visualizing himself as the Buddha of Compassion, Avalokiteśvara, before donning the crown, while reciting Avalokiteśvara’s six-syllable mantra: *oṃ maṇi padme huṃ*.

In exile, His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa adopted the Black Crown ceremony as a crucial form of activity to benefit beings. He chose to confer its blessings numerous times across Europe, North America and South Asia. Many Western disciples practicing Buddhism in the Karma Kagyu tradition today first entered the lineage as a result of their contact with the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa as he performed the crown empowerment.

History does not record when the very first Black Crown Ceremony was conducted, but it is clear that the practice had become widespread by the time of the Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje (1556-1603). In his biography of the Third Dalai Lama, Sönam Gyatso (1543-1588), the Great Fifth Dalai Lama describes a meeting between the Ninth Karmapa and the Third Dalai Lama. At that time, the Third Dalai Lama made abundant offerings and requested the Ninth Karmapa to perform the Black Crown Ceremony for him. Upon the conclusion of the ceremony, the Third Dalai Lama sought permission to touch and don the crown himself. The Ninth Karmapa agreed, and the biography reports that auspicious signs were visible when he did so. As such, it is clear that fairly soon after the material crown had been made, the Black Crown Ceremony had taken on great significance.

## The Karmapas’ Other Crowns

The Black Crown is by no means the only hat associated with the Karmapa. The Karmapa lineage was also the recipient of another unique crown, one woven of the hair of thousands of *ḍākinīs*, and spontaneously offered by them to the Karmapa. In Tibet, this gleaming black crown was kept by the Karmapas under strict seal, and was not publicly displayed.

A third distinctive hat of the Karmapas, which is still worn today in public on certain occasions, is the Action Crown (*le shu*). Upon receiving his initial monastic ordination, the First Karmapa Dusum Khyenpa had a vision in which a buddha offered him a black hat. Dusum Khyenpa later fashioned a facsimile of this hat, which came to be known as the *le shu*. The original *le shu* worn by the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, appears on page 107, and that of the present Gyalwang Karmapa just below it on the same page. After the time of the Fourth Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje, additional ornamentation was added to the *le shu*. Over time, this *le shu* began to share features with the crown that had been made by the Yongle Emperor. Though in paintings the Action Crown is often misidentified as the Crown that Liberates When Seen, it is in fact entirely distinct from it.

The Crown that Liberates When Seen of the Karmapas is stored today in Rumtek Monastery, in Sikkim, northern India. While engaging in various forms of activity to benefit beings and on certain special occasions, the Gyalwang Karmapa can also be seen wearing the Action Crown and a number of other crowns. By contrast, the Naturally Appearing Wisdom Crown is seen only by the very few. Yet, as Dusum Khyenpa’s successive reincarnations act in human form to bring goodness to beings, it is said that the crown rests always atop their head, a sign of their glorious presence in the world. ☺



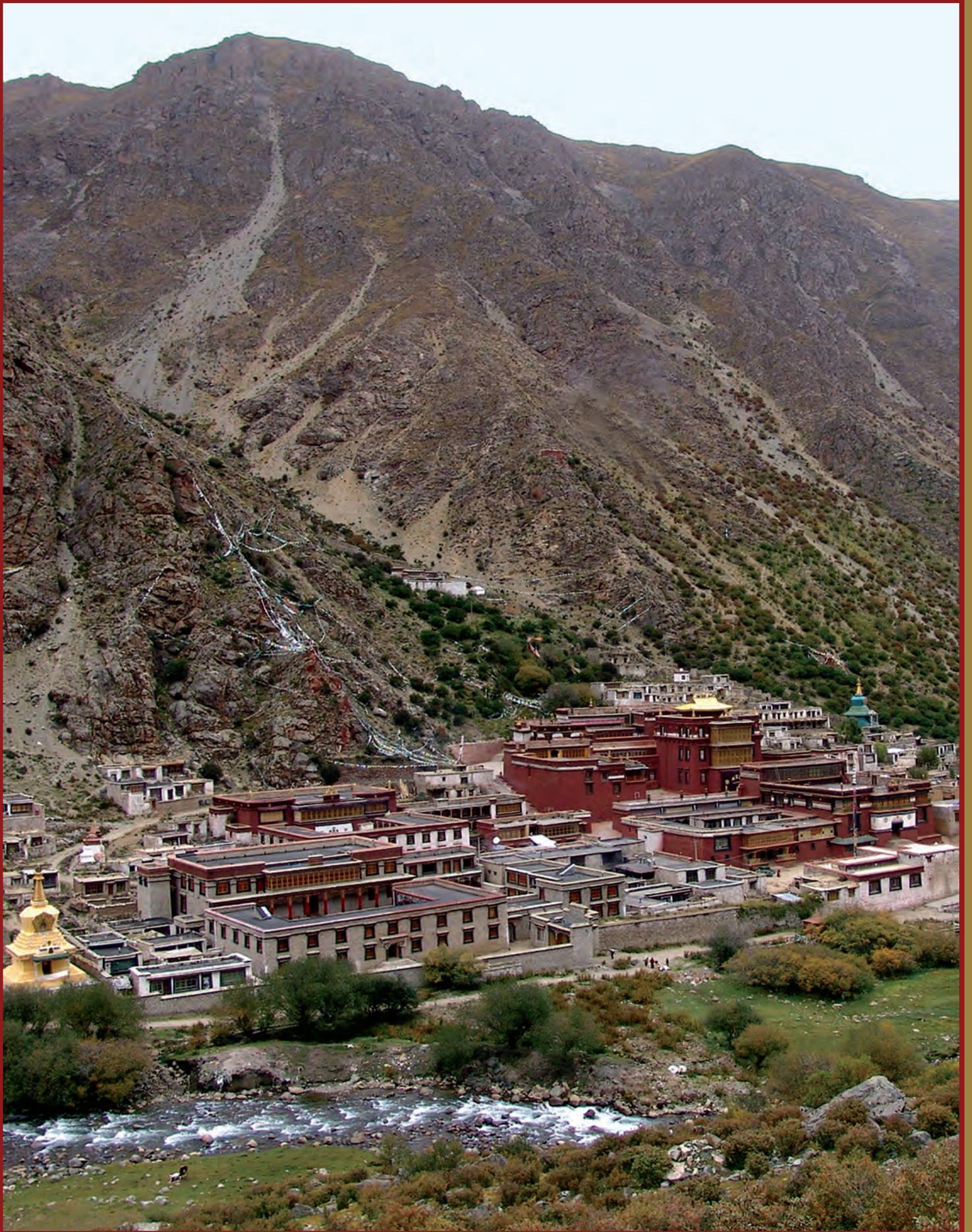
As His Holiness prepares to confer the Black Crown Ceremony in 1974 in San Francisco, an initial mandala offering is made to request the privilege of viewing the Black Crown Ceremony. *Shambhala Archives, photo by Tharpa Chotron*



His Holiness removes the Black Crown from its box during a ceremony in 1974, San Francisco. *Shambhala Archives, photo by Tharpa Chotron*



The audience for the Black Crown Ceremony in San Francisco, in 1974. *Shambhala Archives, photo by Tharpa Chotron*

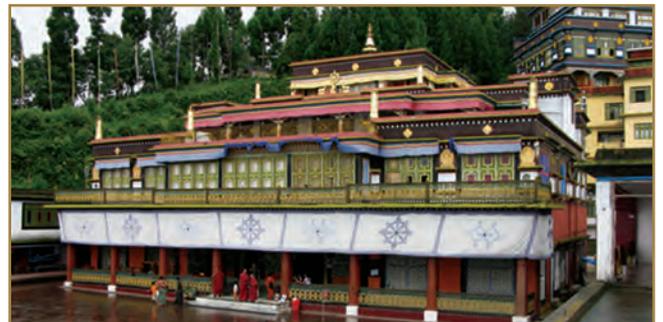


Tsurphu Monastery in Tibet. Photo by Karma Jinpa

## 11 ♦ The Three Main Seats

As the Buddha passed away, he advised Buddhists of the future to visit the major sites of his activities and think to themselves, “Here the Buddha was enlightened; here the Buddha first taught the Dharma...” Thus from the very inception of Buddhism, physical places have served as a way for disciples to defy the tyranny of time to connect with the great masters of the past. Kampo Nenang, Karma Gön and Tsurphu—the monastic seats founded by Dusum Khyenpa—similarly offer an opportunity to create bridges that span vast stretches of time. The Karmapa’s main seats have ensured that not only his future disciples but also his future reincarnations have a lasting base to which they can turn to connect with the lineage generation after generation. Indeed, since Dusum Khyenpa, every successive Karmapa has made his residence at Tsurphu Monastery for some period of time. Yet the large monasteries of the Karma Kagyu do much more than provide lasting shelter to the transient generations who inhabit them. Most importantly, they ensure that the insight and wisdom cultivated by exceptional practitioners is not lost with their passing. Compared to the enduring masses of stone from which Tibetan monasteries are built, human bodies are painfully fragile and short-lived. Even when many strong practitioners come together in one generation, if there is no physical center to hold them together, the practice community inevitably disperses when the great masters move on. In the case of the Karmapa, the continuity of practice would be disrupted if the communities had to be repeatedly reconstituted at new sites. For this reason, the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa’s first major deed in exile was to construct a new seat, at Rumtek in Sikkim.

The Karma Kagyu monastic seats have played an important role in safeguarding the transmission of the practice lineage over the centuries. Many monastic institutions in Tibet were situated at strategic points along trade routes and on the outskirts of major cities, which aided in ensuring material support for the monastery and outreach to the local communities. However, for the three main seats he founded, Dusum Khyenpa selected spots tucked among the mountains, far-removed from the bustling cities and towns. In this way, the very location of the Karmapas’ three main seats supported the Karma Kagyu lineage’s strong focus on meditative practice. The monastery itself served as the center of the practice community, with surrounding buildings or caves where both lay practitioners and monastics could engage in isolated retreat. Just as founding the main seats formed a part of Dusum Khyenpa’s compassionate care for his disciples and lineage, the fact that all three seats stand today is also a sign of his enduring determination to serve beings and the teachings. ☉



Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, India. Photo by John C. Huntington

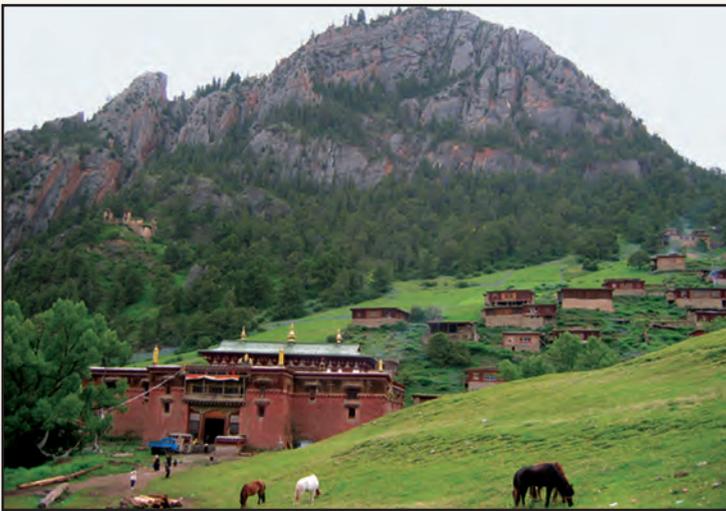


Kampo Nenang in eastern Tibet. *Photo by Tenzin Dorje*

## Kampo Nenang

Dusum Khyenpa founded Kampo Nenang, the first of his monastic seats, in 1164. At that time, he was already in his 50s, having returned to his native Kham following three long decades training in central Tibet.

When a vast practice community gathered around him, he established Kampo Nenang as a base to care for their practice needs, physically as well as spiritually. Indeed, Kampo Nenang is particularly said to represent the body of Dusum



Karma Gön in eastern Tibet. *Photo courtesy of The Fourth Karma Khenchen Rinpoche*

## Karma Gön

Twenty years after he had established Kampo Nenang, Dusum Khyenpa created a second major seat, nestled among the hills alongside the banks of the Dzachu River in Chamdo, Kham.

Until the Eighth Tai Situpa (1700-1774) founded his own seat at Palpung Monastery in the 18th century, Karma Gön was the main center of the activities of the Situpa reincarnation line.

The very first Tai Situpa (1377-1448) was appointed the principal teacher of Karma Gön,



Tsurphu Monastery. *Photo by Karma Jinpa*

## Tsurphu

Situated in the Tölung valley of central Tibet, in 1189 Tsurphu became the last institutional seat founded by Dusum Khyenpa. In 1159, shortly before his return to Kham, he had laid the basis for this seat, by propitiating the local protectors. Decades later, complying with instructions he had received from Lama Gomtsul, the First Karmapa journeyed from Kham to this site west of Lhasa to establish Tsurphu Monastery. He was nearly 80 years old at the time, and it was here that Dusum Khyenpa passed away in 1193. Over the centuries, successive Karmapas have continually imbued Tsurphu Monastery with their

Khyenpa, while Karma Gön represents his speech and Tsurphu represents his mind.

Over the centuries, with the rising fortunes of other sects, Kampo Nenang passed in and out of Kagyu hands. For some time it was home to monks of the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism, and today serves as a Gelug monastery.

For nearly 850 years, Kampo Nenang's ancient walls and surrounding peaks have thus patiently endured the centuries and generously hosted whatever spiritual practitioners history sent their way.



Monks debating at Kampo Nenang. *Photo by Tenzin Dorje*

and subsequent Tai Situpas accepted primary responsibility for the care of Karma Gön. Through the sustained Karma Kagyu interest in the arts, of which Tai Situpas were particularly talented examples, over the centuries Karma Gön came to be richly embellished with murals, statues and thangkas. Its library housed a fine collection of Sanskrit texts, and was among the largest in Tibet.

Largely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, efforts are underway today to rebuild Karma Gön in Tibet, even as its Karma Kagyu monks maintain the continuity of practice there.



Procession inaugurating the annual rains retreat at Karma Gön. *Photo courtesy of The Fourth Karma Khenchen Rinpoche*

powerful living presence. Tsurphu also served to house their bodily relics, which were enshrined in stūpas and clay statues called *tsatsas*.

By the end of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, the entire monastic complex was razed and nothing but uninhabitable ruins remained. When the political situation improved, the Sixteenth Karmapa sent Drupön Dechen Rinpoche back from India to Tibet to begin reconstructing Tsurphu. While he resided at Tsurphu in his youth, the Seventeenth Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, became active in rebuilding this monastery. Today, most of the original complex has been recreated, and a study institute, or *shedra*, has also been established at Tsurphu.



Ritual dance at Tsurphu. *Photo by Tenzin Dorje*



In this magnificent example of the Karmapa Encampment painting style, the central figure is identified differently by various art historians, yet all are confident that it is one of the Karmapa's heart disciples who have a red crown: Shamar or Situ Rinpoche. The direction of the clouds on the red crown and landscape elements suggests that this is a Situpa, likely Situ Panchen. Other elements suggest it is one of the Shamarpas. The Rubin Museum, which owns the thangka, identifies it as a thangka of a Shamarpa, painted in Tibet in the 18th century. *Courtesy of Rubin Museum of Art C2006.66.495 (HAR 961)*

## 12 ♦ The Heart Disciples

For 900 years, the Karmapas have stood as the towering pillars of the Karma Kagyu order. Life after life, the Karmapas sustain the house of the Karma Kamtsang with the support of a suite of lineage lamas. Each of the following lamas entered the lineage as a disciple of a Karmapa, and went on to become one of the Karmapa's six heart disciples. Each then went on to make their own distinctive contributions to the flourishing of the Karma Kagyu teachings. Their individual qualities and activities each served to enrich the Karma Kagyu lineage as a whole.

Situ Rinpoche's monastery in eastern Tibet has served as the second most important monastery in the lineage (after Tsurphu) since its founding in 1729, and sustains the strong presence that the Karma Kagyu maintains in Kham to this day. The name Gyaltsap literally means regent, and the Gyaltsap Rinpoche line bears a particular responsibility in the transition from one Karmapa to the next. Shamar Rinpoches have made enormous contributions to Karma Kagyu scholarship, and their connections to Tibet's rulers in the 15th and 16th centuries aided the flourishing of the lineage in those times. The skillful means of Treho Rinpoche and Gyaltsap Rinpoche were crucial in maintaining the Karma Kagyu lineage during the major historical challenges of the 17th and 18th centuries. Due to complicated events in the 18th century surrounding the Tenth Shamarpa, the Tibetan government banned the enthronement of Shamar reincarnations, and thus for political reasons, the Shamar Rinpoches could not play a major role in the transmission of the Karma Kagyu teachings from the late 18th century until the mid-20th. It was during this era that the Jamgön Kongtrul reincarnations entered as heart disciples of the Karmapas, lending their great learning and inclusive spirit to the Karma Kagyu order.

Although each Karmapa is born a vessel perfectly shaped to hold the lineage, the process of filling that vessel fully with the transmissions of the lineage is repeated in each successive reincarnation. Though the Karmapas generally recognize the reincarnations of their six heart disciples, no one heart disciple has the job of recognizing a Karmapa. Historically, heart disciples have tended to share the duty (see chart in the chapter on the Recognition Process). Every lifetime the Karmapa receives anew the initiations, instructions and oral transmissions of the Karma Kagyu lineage, most often from great masters who had themselves received that lineage directly from the previous Karmapa. The lineage lamas thus act as bridges linking past and present Karmapa incarnations, and hold the teachings and transmissions in trust until they can hand them back when each successive Karmapa comes of age in their new bodily form. In this way, the Karmapas and the other major lineage lamas of the Karma Kagyu remain closely connected to one another in relationships of mutual caretaking and cooperation that extend over many lifetimes. ☺



## Shamar Rinpoche

The First Shamar Rinpoche, Dragpa Senge (1283-1349), was a disciple of the Third Karmapa. Numerous important Karma Kagyu texts were composed by reincarnations of the Shamar Rinpoche line, which included many highly learned scholars. Shamar Rinpoches also played political roles, counseling Phagdru rulers and the Tsang family when they held political control.

After the Ninth Shamarpa passed away, two candidates were identified by different lamas as the Shamar reincarnation, and the two became known as the Shamar of Tashi Tsepa and the Namling Shamar. The name of the Shamar of Tashi Tsepa was drawn by lottery, and he was then enthroned as the Tenth Shamarpa. After the Tenth Shamar Rinpoche (of Tashi Tsepa) passed away, no further Shamarpas were enthroned officially until the time of the Sixteenth Karmapa. The Namling Shamar reincarnation lineage continued to be recognized and enthroned, although not as the official Shamarpa.

### The Shamar Reincarnations

1. Dragpa Senge (1283-1349)
2. Khachö Wangpo (1350-1405)
3. Chöpel Yeshe (1406-1452)
4. Chökyi Dragpa Yeshe Pal Sangpo (1453-1524)
5. Könchok Yenlak (1525-1583)
6. Chökyi Wangchuk (1584-1630)
7. Yeshe Nyingpo (1631-1694)
8. Chökyi Döndrup (1695-1732)
9. Könchok Gewe Jungne (1733-1740)
- (Tashi Tsepa) Shamar
10. Shamar Chödrup Gyatso (1741/42-1792)
- reinstated as 13: Shamar Chökyi Lodrö (1952-2014)

#### (Namling) Shamar

1. Konchog Garwang Gyatso (1735?-1792?)
2. Tenzin Trinley Namgyal (born 1793?)
3. Jampal Ngawang
4. Garwang Karma Khedrup

The most recent Namling Shamar was recognized by the 15th Karmapa, Khakhyab Dorje, and passed away in 1982.

## Tai Situ Rinpoche

The first Tai Situ Rinpoche, Chökyi Gyaltzen, was a disciple of the Fifth Karmapa. Though he spent a great deal of his life meditating in caves, his renown spread so widely that the Ming emperor granted him the title of Tai Situ. The Eighth Tai Situpa (1699-1774; pictured here) was a veritable renaissance master: a brilliant Sanskritist, accomplished scholar and an artist who also sponsored many works of art. His vast learning earned him the epithet of Situ Panchen (Situ the Great Erudite or Great Paṇḍita).

The main seat of the Tai Situpas, Palpung Monastery in Kham, served as a focal point for Karma Kagyu activities in eastern Tibet. The Tai Situpas have often been great patrons of the arts as well as scholars, and frequently played important roles in teaching successive Karmapas. Traditionally, it is said that the Situ Rinpoche lineage holds the responsibility for bringing the Karmapas' enlightened activities to completion.

### The Tai Situ Reincarnations

1. Chökyi Gyaltzen
2. Tashi Namgyal
3. Tashi Paljor (?-ca.1512)
4. Mitruk Chökyi Gocha (?-1561)
5. Norbu Samphel (1566-1578)
6. Chökyi Gyaltzen Gelek Pelsang (1586-1632)
7. Mipham Trinle Rabten
8. Chökyi Jungne aka Situ Panchen (1699-1774)
9. Pema Nyinche Wangpo (1774-1853)
10. Pema Kunsang (1854-1885)
11. Pema Wangchok Gyalpo (1886-1952)
12. Pema Donyö Drupa (born 1954)

## Gyaltsap Rinpoche

The first Goshir Gyaltsap Rinpoche, Paljor Döndrup (ca.1424-1486; pictured here), was a scholar of exceptionally wide learning. He became a disciple and general secretary of the Sixth Karmapa, and offered his service fully to the Karmapas. The Sixth Karmapa designated him to be the tutor of his subsequent incarnation as the Seventh Karmapa.

This line of reincarnations historically has a strong practice emphasis, and an exceptional commitment to working for harmony among disputing communities. During the tumultuous seventeenth century, the Fifth Gyaltsap Rinpoche (1616-1658) was able to retain friendly relations with the Fifth Dalai Lama, and prevented the appropriation of many important Karma Kagyu monasteries, including Tsurphu and Yangpachen, which were handed over to him. Once tensions eased, Gyaltsap Rinpoche offered the monasteries back to their original head lamas. 'Gyaltsap' means regent, and the Goshir Gyaltsap Rinpoches are traditionally responsible for caring for Tsurphu Monastery and the Karmapas' interests until each subsequent Karmapa is found and comes of age.

### The Goshir Gyaltsap Reincarnations

1. Paljor Döndrup (ca.1424-1486)
2. Tashi Namgyal (1487-1515)
3. Dragpa Paljor (1516-1546)
4. Dragpa Döndrup (1547-1613)
5. Dragpa Chok-yang (1616-1658)
6. Norbu Sangpo (1660-1698)
7. Könchok Oser (1699-1766)
8. Chöpal Sangpo (1769-1822)
9. Dragpa Yeshe (ca.1823-1862)
10. Tenpe Nyima (ca.1863-1894)
11. Dragpa Gyatso (1895-1952)
12. Dragpa Migyur Gocha (born 1954)



## Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche

The first Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche, Lodrö Thaye (1813-1899; pictured here), was a disciple of the Fourteenth Karmapa as well as of the Ninth Tai Situpa.

An exceptional scholar and deeply inclusive practitioner, Lodrö Thaye was a central figure in the Rimé (Non-Sectarian) movement that spread throughout eastern Tibet in the late Nineteenth century.

His efforts to seek out and preserve fragile teachings and transmissions saved numerous Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug Dharma lineages from extinction.

He was the teacher of the Fifteenth Karmapa, to whom he transmitted the lineage. The Second Jamgön Kongtrul received the Karma Kagyu transmissions from the Fifteenth Karmapa, and passed them to the Sixteenth.

## The Jamgön Kongtrul Reincarnations

1. Jamgön Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (1813-1899)
2. Jamgön Kongtrul Khyentse Ozer (1904-1953)
3. Chökyi Senge (1954-1992)
4. Lodrö Chökyi Nyima (born 1995)



## Pawo Rinpoche

Initially trained in the Nyingma school, the first Pawo Rinpoche (1440-1503) became a disciple of the Seventh Karmapa, and established a major monastic seat at Sekhar Guthok, where Milarepa had constructed the nine-story tower upon Marpa's instruction. His next reincarnation, as Pawo Tsuglak Trengwa (1504-1566; pictured above), was one of Tibet's greatest historians. He composed numerous important philosophical, historical and astrological treatises. An important link to Nepal was forged when the Seventh Pawo Rinpoche (1719-1781) oversaw renovations of the Swayambhu Stūpa in Nepal.

The highly learned Tenth Pawo Rinpoche (1912-1991) was asked by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to teach at the Sanskrit University in Varanasi, and also taught widely in the West later in his life. The current Pawo Rinpoche (born 1994) was reborn in Tibet, and is today one of the highest-ranking lamas living in Chinese-ruled Tibet.

## The Nenang Pawo Reincarnations

1. Chöwang Lhundrup (1440-1503)
2. Tsuglak Trengwa (1504-1566)
3. Tsuglak Gyatso (1567/68-1633)
4. Tsuglak Kunsang (1633-1649)
5. Tsuglak Trinley Gyatso (1650-1699)
6. Tsuglak Chökyi Döndrup (1701-1718)
7. Tsuglak Gawa (1719-1781)
8. Tsuglak Chökyi Gyalpo (1782-1841?)
9. Tsuglak Nyingje (?-1910)
10. Tsuglak Mawe Wangchuk (1912-1991)
11. Tsuglak Tenzin Künsang Chökyi Nyima (born 1994)

Photo above: Third Pawo Rinpoche, Tsuglak Gyatso, *Rubin Museum of Art C2006.66.29 (HAR 825)*



## Treho Rinpoche

The history of the Treho lineage is less densely documented than that of the other five heart sons. Generally, the Treho Shabdrung reincarnation lineage dates to the 16th century, and has its seat at Tagna monastery, also known as Shang Namling in northern Tsang, Tibet. The Treho Rinpoches came to play an important role in the Karma Kagyu lineage during the time of the third reincarnation, Treho Tenzin Dargye (1653-1730/1731). After receiving teachings from the Tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorje (1676-1702), Treho Tenzin Dargye (pictured above) later became teacher to the highly learned Situ Panchen, the Eighth Situ Rinpoche (1699-1774). Treho Tenzin Dargye presided over the funerals of both the Tenth and Eleventh Karmapas.

In the twentieth century, the Tenth Treho Rinpoche (Gelek Pel Sangpo) was born into the Yabshi Lalu family—an important family from which both the Eighth and Twelfth Dalai Lamas hailed. He was the son of one of the ministers of Tibet, Lalu Tsewang Dorje, and lived most of his life in Tibet after the communist Chinese invasion, surviving the Cultural Revolution.

## The Treho Shabdrung Reincarnations

1. Khedrup Chökyi Gyatso (lived 16th century)
2. Pagsam Wangpo (d. mid-17th century)
3. Tenzin Dargye (1653-1730/31)
4. Jangchup Chökyi Nyingpo (aka Losang Chökyi Wangpo)
5. Chökyi Wangpo
6. Chökyi Norbu
7. Chime Drupa
8. Trinle Wangpo
9. Karma Jigdrak Mawe Wangpo
10. Gelek Pel Sangpo (deceased early 21st century)



His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje. *Dharamsala*, 2010

# Anniversary Poem

## by His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

like nectar flowing from a spring on a snowy mountain face,  
 from some highest of realms high above,  
 with effortless vigor and a deep, unprompted longing,  
 drop after divine drop, each pristine and pure,  
 you crossed the mountains and plains of hundreds of months and years,  
 to come cascading down, down into the land of our hopes.  
 coursing through deep aspirations you held, held through the stream of many lives,  
 from some place completely obscured to us, you gave gentle warmth and nourished us.  
 since then, the tender young sprouts of virtuous minds  
 have blossomed with leaves and fruit,  
 and land once scorched with drought burst into life turquoise-green.  
 when a snow lion roars on a white mountain peak  
 the sound at once sends the crisp flakes swirling in a flurry.  
 when you arrived in the year eleven-ten  
 the lion's roar of your majestic name blazed forth,  
 spreading its unchanging splendor and unequalled blessings.  
 day and night, for nine hundred years,  
 it has set trembling the hearts of those with faith, scared away the sleep of our ignorance  
 and stilled the waves of thought that trouble the ocean of our minds.  
 because you are here, we dare to face the angry countenance of the samsaric sea.  
 because you are here, we know that there is an end to this suffering.  
 the world, its voice raised in cries of birth and death, falls silent.  
 your deeds blend completely with a sky as deep blue as your brilliant crown.  
 your great heart, like a splendid mandala of wind,  
 keeps this world ever moved.

O Karmapa, you who act,  
 I am all that you have. and you are all that I have. ☺



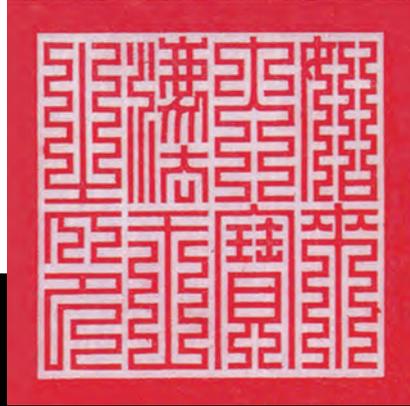
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Front cover: 16th-century statue of the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa.  
*Courtesy of A & J Speelman, London*





# Karmapa: 900 Years

Third edition, revised and expanded

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