


Introduction to and Translation of *The Garland of Light: Lives of the Masters of the Northern Treasure Tradition*

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mong the many collections of manuscripts that were re-produced from the library of Lama Sengge of Yölmo, the volume entitled *The Collected Biographies and Prophecies of the Northern Treasure Tradition* is of interest herein.¹ Published in 1983 by Sherab Gyaltsen and Lama Dawa in Gangtok, Sikkim, this collection contains twenty-six texts that will undoubtedly allow for a more accurate understanding of the relatively unknown, early history of the Jangter (*byang gter*) or Northern Treasure Tradition in Latö during the later fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries. The volume includes six works that are not presented as revealed scriptures; this subgrouping consists of a prayer of supplication directed at the tradition's founding treasure revealer, Rigdzin Gödemchen (1337-1409), a record of the his visionary dreams, and the biographies of the first nine patriarchs of the tradition. The remaining twenty texts are written using punctuation that identifies them as "treasures" (*gter*), in this case meaning scriptural translations of encoded scrolls that were discovered in the mountains of Tibet by Rigdzin Gödemchen.² Among these, one will find a wealth of literature including concealment narratives, transmission records, inventories, prophecies, and guides to secret or concealed lands including several concerning the region of Yölmo, Nepal where this collection of texts was eventually compiled.³

Although difficult to find, the second text in this collection, *The Ray of Sunlight: The Life of Rigdzin Gödemchen*, has been translated for Western audiences and has given us a good basis for understanding

¹ The research for this article, including the translation, was carried out in part with support from a generous grant from the Faculty Development Committee of Troy University in 2016.

² For a detailed discussion of treasure literature, see Doctor 2005.

³ I have worked with the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center in order to provide an easily accessible and accurate outline of this text. See <https://www.tbrc.org/#!rid=W27866>.

how the Northern Treasure Tradition was formed during the late fourteenth century by Gödemchen and his companions.⁴ Little is known, however, regarding how this newly founded tradition maintained institutional integrity after the passing of its charismatic leader in 1409. The fifth text in this collection entitled *The Garland of Light: Lives of the Masters*, consisting of 34 pages (pp. 173-206), is offered in translation following this introduction because it specifically examines the leadership of the tradition after Gödemchen's passing through the majority of the fifteenth century.⁵ This "garland" is an assemblage of the six biographies of the following patriarchs of the Northern Treasure Tradition: Namgyel Gönpo (1399-1424), Dorjé Pelba (b. late 14th c.), Jampa Shenyen (b. early 15th c.), Dorjé Gönpo (b. 14th c.), Ngakwang Drakpa (b. early 15th c.), and Sangyé Pelzang (b. 15th c.).

According to the colophon, the author of this collection of biographies is Sangyé Pelzang, whose own biography appears at the end of the assemblage.⁶ The written words that appear on the pages are presented as the prepared and reported speech of Sangyé Pelzang that was composed at the request of Gangmarwa Namkha, who was presumably one of his disciples.⁷

When read as a single, complete narrative, the rhetorical aim of *The Garland of Light* is abundantly clear; it is an explanation of how the final patriarch of the collection, Sangyé Pelzang, can be the legitimate standard-bearer of a family-based treasure tradition despite the fact that he shares neither the bones nor the flesh of his predeces-

⁴ The complete title of the biography is *sprul sku chen po'i rnam thar gsal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer*. See Nyima Zangpo 1983, pp. 53-152. Although Herweg humbly refers to his translation as a mere summary of the biography, his contribution is significant and can be found in *The Hagiography of Rig 'dzin Rgod kyi ldem 'phru can and Three Historical Questions Emerging from It*, Herweg 1994, pp. 42-152.

⁵ The complete title of the biography is *bla ma rnam ki rnam thar 'od kyi 'phreng ba*. See Sangyé Pelzang 1983, pp. 173-206.

⁶ Sangyé Pelzang 1983, p. 206.

⁷ This authorship scenario is plausible in part because it appears to have been authored while Sangyé Pelzang yet lived, for there is no record of his passing in the biography. Gangmarwa Namkha (*rgangs dmar ba nam mkha*) is most likely Samarwa Namkha Gyeltsen (*sa dmar ba nam mkha' rgyal mtshan*; 1454 – 1541/1542), who tradition maintains was Sangyé Pelzang's primary disciple. I am currently translating the biography entitled *Dispelling the Darkness that Shrouds Meaning: The Life of Namkha Gyeltsen, The Heart-Disciple* for future publication. For the original of this text, see Namkha Sönam 1983, 207-234.

sors.⁸ The primary arguments employed to buttress his authority will be discussed in more detail below.

The main events of these biographies unfolded, by and large, within the confines of the traditional province of Latö, which is to the west of Tsang. Soon after Rigdzin Gödemchen began his career as a treasure revealer in 1366, the newly-forming community established its first stronghold at Mt. Trazang (*bkra bzang*) in Ngamring in Northern Latö, which is in the general vicinity of the founder's birth. Mt. Shri (*shri ri*) in Dingri County in Southern Latö was later setup as a second hub of the tradition. It was granted to Gödemchen by his most prestigious patron, Püntsock Dé (1338-1370), the King of Mangyül Gungtang, around 1370.⁹ *The Garland of Light* is largely a narrative about the authority that is rooted in these two practice centers during the fifteenth century.

Unlike the biography of the lineage's founder, which is very preoccupied with the political drama that was unfolding in the southern kingdom of Mangyül Gungtang, *The Garland of Light* is amazingly silent regarding its own sociopolitical context.¹⁰ The only political figure mentioned by name is Könchok Lekpa (*dkon mchog legs pa*; 15th c.), a member of Jang Ngamring's ruling family who was involved with ambitious construction projects in the region, including a revered chapel at Mt. Trazang.¹¹ There were many developments in Ngamring during the fifteenth century that suggest the region experienced a flourishing of cultural development. Könchok Lekpa and his family maintained relations with the Ming court in China, for example, and strongly supported Sakyapa and Jonangpa activity in Ngamring.¹² Through the efforts of eminent figures such as Tangtong

⁸ In the Tibetan context, one inherits the clan "bones" from the father and one's "flesh" from the mother. For further information, see Stein 1972, pp. 94, 107.

⁹ For a translation of the royal edict that grants this land to Gödemchen, see Herweg 1994, pp. 127-133.

¹⁰ The southern kingdom of Mangyül Gungtang was centered in the city of Dzongka in the Kyirong region near the border with Nepal. The change in focus could reflect the waning importance and vitality of Mangyül Gungtang in the post-Sakyapa political climate. It should be acknowledged, however, that despite the fact that the polity of Mangyül Gungtang is not mentioned by name, the practice center at Mt. Shri, which was located within that kingdom, is clearly portrayed as an important seat of power for the tradition throughout *The Garland of Light*. For a more detailed discussion of the history of the kingdom of Mangyül Gungtang as it relates to treasure traditions, see Solmsdorf 2014, pp. 9-11; Herweg 1994, pp. 21-25; and Bogin 2005, pp. 65-71.

¹¹ Sangyé Pelzang 1983, pp. 179-180.

¹² Information about Könchok Lekpa was gleaned from the biography of his brother, Namgyel Drakpa Zangpo. See Stearns 2008. In fact, the final patriarch of

Gyelpo (c. 1361-1486) and his contemporaries, Ngamring was also established as a center for Tibetan Opera and Medicine.¹³ Perhaps as a result of these developments, the Northern Treasure Tradition of the early sixteenth century is more clearly focused on the sources of authority in Jang Ngamring in the north rather than Mangyül Gungtang in the south.¹⁴

Ultimately, the translation of *The Garland of Light* is useful because it offers a historical narrative of the Northern Treasure Tradition that compliments previous Western scholarship on the subject. To date, Martin Boord has produced the most significant historiography of the lineage.¹⁵ While his presentation is grounded in a wealth of primary source material, Boord consciously presents his historiography as a provisional sketch that should be supplemented by future researchers.¹⁶ Moreover, his intention is to provide a historical view of the tradition that contextualizes the Cult of Vajrakīla, the primary subject of his monograph. As such, Boord captures quite well the insider's pious interpretation of the Northern Treasure Tradition as an institution that was founded and guided by a series of reincarnations of Gödemchen.

Nevertheless, the focus on the exploits of these incarnate lamas is clearly a feature of the revisionist historiographies that were produced after the tradition was reestablished at Dorjé Drak Monastery in Central Tibet under the auspices of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama during the seventeenth century.¹⁷ While such revisionist narratives are helpful in our attempts to understand emic perspectives, they significantly limit our understanding of Tibetan religious history and

this series, Sangyé Pelzang, receives a multitude of Sakyapa and Jonangpa teachings, which further demonstrates not only the expanding prevalence of these two schools in Ngamring but also the extent of the influence of the region's ruling family during the fifteenth century.

¹³ For an explanation of the exploits of Tangtong Gyelpo, see Stearns 2007. For a discussion of the medical tradition of Jang Ngamring that flourished through this period, see Hofer 2012. In the biography that follows *The Garland of Light*, it is clear that some portion of the protagonist's, Namkha Gyeltsen, authority is derived from his connection to Tangtong Gyelpo in Ngamring. See Namkha Sönam 1983, p. 210.

¹⁴ As further evidence of the shift in focus, the kingdom of Mangyül Gungtang is only mentioned in the biography of Gödemchen; none of the other eight biographies of the early patriarchs even mention the polity by name.

¹⁵ Boord's account of the Northern Treasure Tradition was first published in 1993 (pp. 21-35). He offered an expanded narrative in 2013 (pp. 31-85).

¹⁶ Boord 1993, p. 32.

¹⁷ For examples of Tibetan historiography that emphasize this revisionist perspective, see Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso 1972 and Künzang Drodül Dorjé 2004.

all but guarantee the failure of diachronic analysis.¹⁸ As far as I know, *The Garland of Light* is the only historiographic source that illuminates the lives of the six patriarchs who constituted the second through fourth generations of leaders and carried the Northern Treasure Tradition through the fifteenth century.¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, the narrative does not include a series of reincarnated lamas.

The first three biographies of the collection focus on what is traditionally referred to as the "lineage of the son" and the "lineage of the mother." Unfortunately, despite the fact that Lady Lopön Pema (*slop dpon pad+ma*; b. 14th c.) was the wife of the founding patriarch, the mother of the second patriarch, and an effective teacher to other important figures in the tradition, her biography, if one ever existed at all, does not appear in *The Garland of Light*.²⁰ The author implies that because the mother and the son received the transmissions from Gödemchen at the same time, there is no reason to follow their lineages separately.²¹ The text thus begins with a biography of Namgyel Gönpo (1399-1424), the son of Gödemchen, who is the only patriarch in this text for whom precise dates of birth and death can be determined.²²

Namgyel Gönpo received transmission of the specific Great Perfection cycle—the Gongpa Zangtel of Samantabhadra (*kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*)—that are quintessential for the Northern Treasure Tradition at the age of six at his father's command.²³ His

¹⁸ For other examples of recent scholarship that has—at least in part—deconstructed revisionist accounts of Nyingmapa treasure traditions, see Ronis 2009, pp. 107-108 and Hirshberg 2012, pp. 66-70.

¹⁹ One notable addition would be *Guru Trashi's History* (1990), which includes brief biological sketches of the early patriarchs of the Northern Treasure Tradition within its larger discussion of the history of Dorjé Drak Monastery (pp. 668-697). These brief sketches that were authored in the late eighteenth century, however, appear to be abbreviated works based on *The Garland of Light*.

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of important women in the early Northern Treasure Tradition, see Valentine 2015.

²¹ Sangyé Pelzang 1983, pp. 176-177. Interestingly, the theme of "uniting the transmission lineages" turns up again in the seventeenth century, but from the perspective of *The Garland*, the lineages of the son and mother were united at their inception. According to Boord (2013, p. 59), for example, the three lineages continued to be carried separately until they were unified by Pema Trinlé (1641-1717), one of Gödemchen's most significant incarnations. For a translation of the first ten years of Pema Trinlé's massive autobiography, see Valentine 2013, pp. 247-305. For the entire text, see Pema Trinlé 2000.

²² Namgyel Gönpo's biography is located at pp. 174-181.

²³ Regarding the transmission lineages of the Great Perfection, it is interesting that in Gödemchen's biography, he is reported to have studied the Brahmin's Tradition (*bram ze'i lugs*), which his forefathers maintained, and to have revealed the

quick mastery of these teachings impressed those with influence within the religious community and led them to formally request that Gödemchen empower his son as his spiritual heir. His father eventually honored their request, but not before subjecting his son to further spiritual scrutiny. Although the specific date of his investiture is not known, it would have been prior to Gödemchen's death (1409), when Namgyel Gönpö was but ten years old. The biography also offers an explanation of the ultimate spiritual cause of Namgyel Gönpö's early demise and sets the stage for his reappearance in reincarnated form later in *The Garland of Light*.

The second biography in this collection is that of Dorjé Pelwa, who was the son of Gödemchen's younger sister.²⁴ While his date of birth is not recorded, there is evidence to suggest that he was considerably older than Namgyel Gönpö (b. 1399), his maternal cousin.²⁵ Dorjé Pelwa's father was of the Kagyupa Order, and thus he naturally began training in Mahāmudrā. He later took Gödemchen as his primary teacher, quickly became his attendant, and was soon counted among his seven highest disciples. As a result of their close relationship, he was present for the transmission of the teachings of the Northern Treasure Tradition time and time again. After the passing of Gödemchen, Dorjé Pelwa served the young Namgyel Gönpö both as an attendant and an adviser. Following the early demise of Namgyel Gönpö in 1424, Dorjé Pelwa assumed the role of leading patriarch of the transmission lineage.

Northern Treasure Tradition's distinctive Great Perfection cycle, but there is no mention of the Vimala Nyingtik (*b+hi ma la'i snying tig*) and the Khandro Nyingtik (*mkha' 'gro snying tig*) cycles that were systematized by Longchenpa (*klong chen pa*; 1308-1364). In this series of biographies, however, the Vimala and Khandro cycles were passed from Gödemchen to his disciples, explicitly to Dorjé Gönpö and implicitly to Namgyel Gönpö, in a manner that suggests that they had already been adopted by the forming tradition before the death of Gödemchen in 1409. For a general discussion the Great Perfection, see Germano 2005, pp. 2545-2550. For a complete discussion of the Great Perfection teachings of the Northern Treasure Tradition, see Turpeinen 2015.

²⁴ Dorjé Pelwa's biography is located at pp. 181-185. From the perspective of *The Garland of Light*, it can be said that the combined lineage of the mother and son soon became the lineage of the maternal nephew. Interestingly, Gödemchen's own maternal uncle, Ritropa Sangyé Tenpa (14th c.), played an essential role in the early development of the Northern Treasure Tradition, which suggests that it may be fruitful to trace clan lineages maternally as well as paternally. For more information on this subject, see Valentine 2015, pp. 132-134.

²⁵ In particular, while it is stated that he served Namgyel Gönpö as his teacher, it is evident in *The Garland of Light* that Namgyel Gönpö deferred to the authority of his maternal cousin, Dorjé Gönpö.

The third biography is that of Tsenden Jampa Shenyen.²⁶ Although the dates of neither his birth nor his death are mentioned, it is stated that he lived to the age of 68. He is the first of the patriarchs to not be directly related through bone or flesh to any of the founding members of the tradition. His parents' names are not revealed; all we are told is that they were wealthy nomads.²⁷ Jampa Shenyen began his religious career following the Kagyupa path, but later established strong ties with the leadership of the Northern Treasure Tradition. He first became a disciple of Lady Lopön Pema, the wife of the founder, before devoting himself to Namgyel Gönpö and then eventually Dorjé Pelwa. We learn later in the collection of biographies that this transmission lineage, which is so closely connected to Gödemchen's surviving relatives, was seated at Mt. Shri in the south rather than Mt. Trazang.²⁸

The fourth and fifth biographies examine a parallel transmission of the Northern Treasures that came directly from Gödemchen himself and was apparently not mitigated by his wife, son, or nephew who are all discussed above. I understand these patriarchs to constitute what the tradition refers to as "the lineage of the disciples" as distinct from the "lineage of the mother" or the "lineage of the son." That being said, the fourth biography summarizes the exploits of a pair of brothers named Dorjé Gönpö (b. 14th c.) and Rinchen Drakpa (b. 14th c.), who were orphaned at a young age and entered the doors of Buddhist religiosity at the feet of Gödemchen.²⁹ All that we know regarding their birth dates is that in 1366, the younger of the brothers, Dorjé Gönpö, was already mature enough to travel with and attend to Gödemchen during one of his major treasure discovery

²⁶ Tsenden Jampa Shenyen's biography is located at pp. 185-188.

²⁷ In the biography of Namkha Gyeltsen, Dorjé Pel is explicitly identified with the title of Métön (*mes ston*), which is reserved for patriarchs of a particular, hereditary lineage of the Marpa Kagyu. Jampa Shenyen is also therein said to be the nephew-heir of Dorjé Pel. When the information of the two biographies is assembled, it would suggest that someone in Dorjé Pel's extended family married into a family of wealthy nomads to form a union that produced Jampa Shenyen. While it is unclear why such information would not be included in *The Garland of Light*, it is of major significance within *The Life of Namkha Gyeltsen*, as Jampa Shenyen is the protagonist's father. See Namkha Sönam 1982, p. 208.

²⁸ In fact, Zangpo Drakpa (14th c.), the treasure revealer who sent instructive materials to Gödemchen before his discovery of the Northern Treasures, also maintained Kagyupa ties and was known to practice at Mt. Shri. It is interesting that the later patriarchs of the Northern Treasure Tradition who had Kagyupa training were also associated with Mt. Shri.

²⁹ Sangyé Pelzang 1983, pp. 188-191.

excursions; thus, it is reasonable to assume both brothers were born by at least 1355. While Rinchen Drakpa met with an early demise, Dorjé Gönpo is said to have lived to the age of 68, which could have been as late as 1423.

In counter distinction to Gödemchen's nephew (i.e., Dorjé Pel) and his dharma heir (i.e., Jampa Shenyen), neither Dorjé Gönpo, Rinchen Drakpa, nor their own successor who is discussed below are reported to have been exposed to the Kagyupa or any other traditions prior to devoting themselves to Gödemchen. Furthermore, the brothers were not mere disciples of Gödemchen, but are reported to have used their literary skills to help translate or decode the yellow treasure scrolls, thus identifying them as co-creators of the Northern Treasure Tradition. It may be because of their strong, and long-term connection to the Northern Treasure Tradition that it is their lineage, and not the lineage stemming from Gödemchen's son and nephew, that eventually takes Mt. Trazang as its seat.³⁰

The life of Ngakwang Drakpa (b. 15th c.) is discussed in the following, very brief section.³¹ Ngakwang Drakpa is the son of Rinchen Drakpa, who is reported to have implored his younger brother, Dorjé Gönpo, to treat his nephew like his own son and make him his dharma heir. Ngakwang Drakpa is known to have quickly mastered the teachings of the tradition and to have passed away while residing at Mt. Trazang. It should be noted that despite the fact that theirs is clearly a lineage of disciples, in the sense that they were not related to Gödemchen, it is still thoroughly a family tradition in a manner that is most often associated with the Nyingmapa Order.

It is in the sixth and final biography, the narrative arc of *The Garland of Light* reaches both the climax and resolution in the life of Sangyé Pelzang.³² In prose that slide back and forth between first and third person, Sangyé Pelzang essentially acknowledges the peculiarity of his status as a clan outsider in a tradition that is so tightly knit

³⁰ We also know that within a generation or two, Mt. Trazang becomes the seat of a lineage of the Sé clan. It could be the case that these brothers, known to have been born at the Sémolung Hermitage, may have also had connections with the Sé clan. If so, this would supply an interesting symmetry to the narrative, considering the fact that Gödemchen's father dies before he can receive his ancestral teachings. A pair of brothers from the Sé clan, without any clear explanation of their motivations, arrive on the scene and transmit the required instructions to the young Gödemchen. For more information on the Sé clan, see Karmay 1972, pp. 27, 58 and Ramble 1997.

³¹ Ngakwang Drakpa's biography can be found at pp. 191-193.

³² Sangyé Pelzang's biography is located at pp. 193-206.

around family bonds. The biography buttresses Sangyé Pelzang's authority using two separate strategies. First, it is asserted that while still a youth, he reported that Gödemchen and Lady Lopön Pema were his true parents. Thus, Sangyé Pelzang came to be understood as the reincarnation of their son, Namgyel Gönpö, who was supposed to be the heir of the Northern Treasure Tradition but died early into his majority. Despite the fact that he was not related through birth to either of the families with whom the tradition began, he was directly related through reincarnation.³³

The biography also establishes a strong case for understanding Sangyé Pelzang as the legitimate heir of the Northern Treasure Tradition based on merit and proper teacher-student relationships. He is reported to have first traveled to Mt. Shri to serve at the feet of Jampa Shenyen, who was, as stated above, a direct disciple of Gödemchen's wife, son, and nephew. After he learned everything that he could there, he then traveled to Mt. Trazang and served Ngakwang Drakpa, the heir of the brothers who helped form the early tradition. Sangyé Pelzang can therefore be understood as having united the authority of the tradition by collecting into himself the lineages of the mother and son from Jampa Shenyen and the lineage of the disciples from Ngakwang Drakpa.³⁴

Sangyé Pelzang continues to travel and collect transmissions after mastering the Northern Treasures, but he eventually returns to Mt. Trazang to assume his role as the leading patriarch of the tradition. *The Garland of Light* concludes without an account of Sangyé Pelzang's death, which suggests that he was still living when it was written and perhaps had a hand in its creation as stated in the colophon.

³³ It should be acknowledged that tradition does not observe an incarnation lineage that passes through Namgyel Gönpö and Sangyé Pelzang. For a more detailed discussion regarding why this and other similar cases do not constitute instances of the social institution of rule by incarnation, see Valentine 2013 and 2015 and Hirshberg 2012.

³⁴ There are significant elements of his biography, other than his biological heritage, that weaken his claim of authority. Although he was born within a family with deep Nyingmapa roots, he only comes to study the Northern Treasure Tradition after what appears to be a long career of collecting empowerments from a variety of different traditions including the Jonangpa and the Sakyapa.

Principle Personages of the Northern Treasure Tradition

<u>Name</u>	<u>Transliteration; Dates</u>	<u>TBRC Identification</u> ³⁵
Rigdzin Gödemchen	(<i>rigs 'dzin rgod ldem chen</i> ; 1337-1409)	P5254
Lady Lopön Pema	(<i>slop dpon pad+ma</i> ; b. 14 th c.)	n/a
Namgyel Gönpo	(<i>rnam rgyal mgon po</i> ; 1399-1424)	P10100
Dorjé Pelba	(<i>rdo rje dpal ba</i> ; b. late 14 th c.)	P10115
Jampa Shenyen	(<i>byams pa bshes gnyen</i> ; b. early 15 th c.)	P10116
Dorjé Gönpo	(<i>rdo rje mgon po</i> ; b. 14 th c.)	P10118
Rinchen Drakpa	(<i>rin chen grags pa</i> ; b. 14 th c.)	n/a
Ngakwang Drakpa	(<i>ngag dbang grags pa</i> ; b. early 15 th c.)	n/a
Sangyé Pelzang	(<i>sangs rgyas dpal bzang</i> ; b. 15 th c.)	P10117

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³⁵ The identification numbers are for the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC), which can be found at www.tbrc.org.

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**The Garland of Light
Lives of the Masters of the Northern Treasure Tradition³⁶**

*Namgyel Gönpö (c. 1399-1424):
The Son & Heir of Gödemchen³⁷*

Om! Ah! Hum!

In the expansive and sky-like reality that is unfettered by mental elaboration,

The enjoyment bodies (*longs sku*) gather like clouds in playful blissfulness.

And the compassion of the manifestation bodies (*sprul sku*) descends continuously like rain,

Ripening the deepest aspirations of his disciples.

I bow before this unparalleled and unequalled lama!

The supreme son, Namgyel Gönpö, is an emanation of all the victors of the three times. Regarding his accomplishments and enlightened activities, therefore, they are similar [in profundity to the deeds] of the victorious ones. [175] And thus, a person with little learning can only express the smallest part of his accomplishments. How could one measure the limitless sky? Nevertheless, I [write this account] as such an individual of little learning. The little that appears below regarding his deeds and liberation was written as to reflect what was disseminated by a few of the followers of his disciples.

He was of a sublime clan, and his paternal ancestors consisted of an unbroken sequence of realized masters that were like a garland of pearls. In particular, we have faith in his father, the Great Lineage-Holder (i.e., Rigdzin Gödemchen), whose biography appears before this text [in this collection of hagiographies].³⁸ Indeed, his mother was Lady Lopön Pema.

³⁶ I am grateful to Kinley Drukpa for his assistance in translating a few of the more difficult passages in this text during our meetings in Queens and Manhattan, NY (2014-2016).

³⁷ These headings are not in the original text; they have been added for clarity.

³⁸ Generally speaking, Gödemchen is known as "Rigdzin" (*rig 'dzin*), meaning something like "awareness-holder." In this text, he is consistently referred to as "Rigdzin" (*rigs 'dzin*), which at first I understood to be an error. However, given the importance of the family lineage (*rigs*) in this text, it is rather clear that the distinction is intentional. My working theory is that he was originally considered a "*rigs 'dzin*" at the time when this was still a family lineage and somewhere

As for the prophecy regarding these sovereigns in *The [Black]-Iron Treasury of the North*,³⁹ it reads as follows:

A woman with a pink complexion and well-shaped forehead
 That has three birthmarks on the right side of her face
 That are white, red, and blue, clearly visible.
 People will come from all directions [to see her].
 And to her, the son's body will be born.
 There will be a wrathful nature in his right eye, and [176]
 He will be adorned with birth marks shaped like vajras.
 Sharpness and wisdom will arise together in him.
 Those two will receive the empowerments for the Northern
 Treasury,
 As prophesized in *The Record of the Six Oral Transmissions*.

In fact, with respect to the "mother" [lineage] of the Great Treasure Revealer, which is known as the [lineage of] Tsenden Sangwa (*mtshan ldan gsang ba*) (i.e., the Secret-Worthy One), the two (mother and son) received it as one. Thus, in *The Record of the Six Oral Transmissions [of the Northern Treasures]*,⁴⁰ it says:

In the end times, the supreme, fortunate son,
 Will be born to a woman of noble family,
 Who has already received the empowerments [for the treasures]
 gathered from the three mountains, and
 He will perform deeds of great benefit for sentient beings.
 Because he will comprehend the signs himself,
 He will seek the seven hidden lands.

His mother was in reality an authentic *ḍākiṇī* named Vajravārāhī (*rdo rje phag mo*). [Namgyel Gönpö] was conceived while his parents were residing in that state in which wisdom and skillful means are united in a beautiful bed chamber that was blessed by its proximity to Mt. Trazang. His birth was accompanied by many positive omens.

along the way, perhaps after the establishment of his incarnation lineage, he became known as a "rig 'dzin."

³⁹ While I have not been able to locate the prophetic scripture entitled *The Black-Iron Treasury of the North* (*byang lcags mdzod nag po*), the following passage is drawn—as stated in the translation—from *The Precious Key Prophecies: the Record of the Six Oral Transmissions of the North* (*snyan rgyud drug gi tho byang lung bstan rin po che'i lde'u mig*); see Rigdzin Gödemchen 2000, pp. 81-82.

⁴⁰ Rigdzin Gödemchen 2000, p. 82.

Regarding this lineage holder's [youth], however much other children grew in a year, the precious one grew more than that in a month. And however much others grew in a month, he grew more than that in a day. Thus, while he was still young, his tendency toward the Buddha's dharma was aroused. He cleverly learned reading, writing, and the other general subjects [at this young age]. [177]

At the age of six, he was given the empowerments, guidance instructions, and quintessential directions for the Great Perfection cycle known as the Gongpa Zangtel of Samantabhadra before His Eminence the Great Lineage-Holder. Then, he passionately sought to [realize] the pure awareness of reality. Thus, he attained confidence regarding the Four Sights of the spontaneous and clear light.

About the time that it had become obvious that he understood the point of the Great Perfection, his spiritual comrades, the Lady Master (i.e., his mother), Lama Dorjé Pel (i.e., his cousin), the Lama named Gyé Lawa (*rgyas la ba*) from Gyé Kardrung (*bgye mkhar drung*) together with his three sons gathered in a group of twenty-five devotees to make requests. When it was time for the complete empowerments and guidance instructions [to begin], they went before his father, that Great Lineage-Holder, and with a single voice made the following request: "To this son of yours, Namgyel Gönpö, please give the complete empowerments, reading transmissions, and quintessential teachings for the heart-treasuries of Mt. Zangzang Lhadrak (*zang zang lha brag*), the two Nyingtik cycles of the Great Perfection, the Sangwa Gyuntrül (*gsang ba sgyu 'phrul*), the ancestral Vajrakīla cycle (*pha chos rdo rje phur pa mdo lugs*), the revealed teachings of Guru Chöwang,⁴¹ the Eight Pronouncements (*bka' brgyad*), and all the other cycles of the new and old translations." [178]

The father responded saying, "Because it has become clear that he is a worthy son, it will be permitted. And, he has grasped completely the earlier empowerments, reading transmissions, and quintessential teachings [that he was given]. [Moreover,] the faith that you all have in him demonstrates a positive connection."

To his son he said, "My son, go draw a book [at random from the library]." Namgyel Gönpö eventually selected a practice text (*bla bsgrub*) and offered it to his father. His father responded, saying: "There is [indeed] a positive connection!" Thus, after he finished giv-

⁴¹ Guru Chöwang (*'gu ru chos dbang*; 1212-1270).

ing him all of the [transmissions], he entrusted him as regent. When he was ten years of age, his father passed into the pure realm.⁴²

Then, Lama Dorjé Pel offered to serve his lotus feet to provide the required training in such things as the physical mechanics (*phyag gzhes*) and the spoken empowerments (*dbang bka'*). Thus, acting as his assistant, he stayed there. They resided at the sacred site of Mt. Trazang and practiced for some years.

When he was eighteen years of age, there was a woman from the Drak Valley (*brag lung*) named Wönmo Khandro (*dbon mo mkha' 'gro*). Namgyel Gönpö took her as his wife. At that time he enjoyed the sublime enjoyments and sovereignty. It appeared that there would be clan descendants.⁴³ [179]

Then, the inhabitants of Lakha Hermitage (*dgon pa la kha*) that maintain the Tamdrin Chapel named Chung Tazhelpu (*cung rta zhel phu*) beseechingly invited Lady Lopön Pema and Namgyel Gönpö to give the empowerment and quintessential instructions for the Great Perfection at their temple.⁴⁴ Thinking that the time had arrived [for him to teach], [Namgyel Gönpö] prepared for departure. Lama Dorjé Pel kindly advised, "This is a very sensitive and difficult teaching. Do you think that it may be too early to begin teaching since your human form is still youthful?" He did not give him permission, but [Namgyel Gönpö] decided to depart regardless.

With this [conflict on his mind], Lama Dorjé Pel went to an auspicious chapel at Mt. Trazang, which was constructed in response to the orders of the temporal sovereign Könchok Lekpa [of Jang Ngamring], and asked in prayer, "Is it appropriate for the Lineage-Holder, Namgyel Gönpö, to give these teachings?"

Then, the following occurred in a dream: Inside of a great gathering hall, there were two great thrones in the East and the West. Upon the Eastern throne, formed an image of the body of the Great Lineage-holder. And [the son] was deposited upon the Western throne. [180]

And to the [father], he prayed [while dreaming] and asked: "Should the Lineage-Holder, Namgyel Gönpö, now be permitted to give teachings for the benefit of others?" Then, [he heard the reply,]

⁴² Herweg also offers a translation of this biography, but ends here at the death of Gödemchen. See Herweg (1994), pp. 281-285.

⁴³ The union, however, does not produce any children due to Namgyel Gönpö's early demise.

⁴⁴ It appears that Lady Lopön Pema relocates to this hermitage, for it is here that she later meets one of her students, Tsenden Jampa Shenyen.

"Yes. He is my son!" Then [Lama Dorjé Pel] asked, "Well, then, how long shall Namgyel reside in this human form?" The reply was, "It is uncertain [how long] this majestic bird will soar through the sky." Then, [Lama Dorjé Pel asked], "Should those yellow treasure scrolls that were not previously deciphered be translated now or not?" The [reply] was, "Kartika!"

[Because of that dream], he decided to make an opening in the northern part of the gathering hall, and above that [new section of the temple] is where the [remains of] the Lineage-Holder, Namgyel Gönpö, would later reside. After that, sentient beings gathered in those mountains like feathers, bowing to his feet. In such a state, his [inner] deities (*rnam sad*) spoke [to him]. Then, for his suitable disciples, he revealed the [secret treasure] teachings and many were established on the path of fruition.

In the specific prophecies of *The Black-Iron Treasury of the North*, it says: "Having delighted in the power of wrathful action, a few of his suitable disciples will be liberated in the expanse of reality." In accordance with that and other prophecies, through the door of the four types of enlightened activity, many sentient beings were established on the path of liberation. [181] Lama Rinchen Pel was established as the sovereign of the oral lineages of the Great Perfection.

When he was twenty five years of age, for the benefit of his disciples he appeared as if sick as a result of breaking tantric precepts. [His passing] was accompanied by a number of wondrous omens, such as thunder, lightning, and the rainbow-colored dome in the sky. Then, he departed for the primordial domain.

In the expanse of reality or the celestial plain,
 In the land of great bliss, or the lands of pure or impure activity,
 May you, Protector, tame sentient beings,
 Where ever it is that you may appear!

*Dorjé Pelba (b. late 14th c.):
 Gödemchen's Nephew & Disciple*

The supreme and indestructible intention of the sacred mind
 of the victorious ones of the three times,
 Is to glorify all migratory beings without exception!
 To that sovereign of the vehicle of pure light, the enlightened
 master,

The supreme Dorjé [Pel] Tsenchen (*mtshan can*), I bow to your lotus feet.

As stated above, this holy lama requested the complete teachings from the mouth of the treasure revealing father and son.

His birth land was called Chuktsa (*phyug rtsa*), and his ancestors were of the Biri (*bi ri*) clan. [182] His father was called Biri Mikmar (*bi ri mig dmar*). He was a man that was modest and very humble, and he also had a pleasant personality. His mother was the younger sister of the Great Lineage-Holder. She was good-natured, wise, and very compassionate. Of the three children that were born to those two, the Precious-One was the middle child. They indeed named him Dorjé Pel. Even the Great Lineage-Holder was very fond of him. Since he was young, [he knew] the light of the teachings and often sat and practiced meditation alone. His writing and reading and so forth demonstrated that he was very smart. In a short amount of time, he proved to be knowledgeable.

By the time he reached the age of fifteen, his heart and mind were set upon the teachings. He travelled from the north to the south [before finally] arriving before the Lord of the Teachings, Kazhipa Namkha Özer (*bka' bzhi pa nam mkha' 'od zer*) of the Samten Ling temple (*bsam gtan gling*) at Mt. Shri. He was nurtured with experiential guidance for the Mahāmudrā teachings, and thus grasped this natural state. Gradually, he attained confidence in the four related yogic practices. It was there at that time that he received all that existed concerning the Kagyupa Mahāmudrā cycle of teachings. [183]

Then, because the Great Lineage-Holder was residing at Mt. Tra-zang, and [his master] was sending written advice to him, Dorjé Pel was sent as a messenger and arrived before [Gödemchen]. He initially requested the initiation and guidance instructions for the Mahā Guru Sangtsentuk (*mahA gu ru gsang mtshan thugs*) practice. Because of his kindness, [he performed the ceremony].⁴⁵ When it came time for [it],⁴⁶ [the Lineage-Holder] told him to engage the practice in his heart. Then, he performed the familiarization practices, and over time there were inner and outer signs [of accomplishment].

After that, he came to be known as one of the Great Lineage Holder's seven chief disciples. He immediately became [the master's] attendant. He was indeed always the master of ceremonies and the

⁴⁵ Bracketed text reads: *brtse ming mgul sbom du btags*.

⁴⁶ Bracketed text reads: *mi res sprus mo*.

primary ritual officiate. Many times he received the empowerment and the guidance instructions for the Great Perfection cycle known as the Gongpa Zangtel of Samantabhadra. He thoroughly analyzed the quintessential instructions. He was given the complete empowerments, reading transmissions, quintessential teachings, and seals of authority for all of the tradition's teachings starting with the oldest treasures of Mt. Lhadrak. Having taken [those teachings] in his hands and being given all of the precious gems of the nine profundities, he abided as an incomparable [master]. [184] As an attendant of the Great Lineage-Holder, he was like a vase filled to the brim with the good qualities of body, speech, and mind.

When his lama passed into the pure lands, he attended to [his master's son], Namgyel Gönpö. Again and again, he heard the empowerments and reading transmissions in their entirety. He eventually took on the hardships of pilgrimage, retreat, and charnel ground practice with earnest. Later, he nurtured many fortunate students. He particularly saw Tsenden Jampa Shenyen as a worthy vessel, and he thus entrusted him with all of the teachings. In short, this lama was an Awakened-One, an emanation in human form, and he established many beings in the primordial expanse of the pure realm.

Following his intention to teach his disciples about impermanence, he pretended to enter nirvana [when he was residing] above the Padrupla (*pha grub bla*) center in Southern Latö. For three days, there was thunder and lightning. It rained flowers, and there were many other signs that accompanied his ascendancy, such as the appearance of the rainbow-colored dome above his tomb. Indeed, he was inseparable from the Primordial Buddha, Samantabhadra.

You who were born with realization as a young prince, [185]
 Your attainment resulted from close service to the lamas,
 You established the minds of many beings in primordial [awareness],
 I bend down to your lotus feet!
 Ah!

*Jampa Shenyen (b. early 15th c.):
 Disciple of Gödemchen's Wife, Son, & Nephew*

As stated above, Tsenden Jampa Shenyen requested teachings from the previous holy lama.

Loving towards migratory beings, like they were all your children.

Spiritual friend and ultimate refuge for all sentient beings.

To you, Tsenden Lama Jampa Shenyen,

I respectfully prostrate before you, touching the three doors [of wisdom] and remembering your kindness!⁴⁷

This is the biography of that lama.

His parents were descendants of wealthy nomads with strong faith and noble hearts. He was born as a son to these two. In his long life, he became a renunciate and practiced the cycles of the New Translation schools, trained his mind with the Kagyupa teachings, [familiarized himself with] the tutelary deities, and meditated.

Once, when they were mingling with the Neringpa (*ne rings pa*) salt traders (*tswa pa*), a youthful yak ran off while they were extracting their clean salt. [One of the salt traders] struck the yak [maliciously]. Because of that experience, he decided to cut himself off from worldly affairs. [186] He intended to do nothing other than work for the benefit of others until attaining liberation in this lifetime. Having performed the ejection of consciousness rites for the other yaks that were to be salted, he soon arrived at [the Tamdrin Chapel named Chung] Tashelpu at the Lakha Hermitage.

Before Lady Lopön Pema (i.e., Namgyel Gönpö's mother), he then learned many practices that are intended to interrupt samsara, such as the Tamdrin Rolpa (*rta mgrin rol pa*), the Eight Pronouncements, and the Quintessential Great Compassionate One (*thugs rje chen po yang snying 'dus pa*). Following that, he had many experiences of visions. There, he sought out many profound teachings, such as the Gongpa Zangtel [of Samantabhadra] of the Great Perfection.

He eventually came before the Lineage-Holder, Namgyel Gönpö, and he requested the entire treasury of Lhadrak, including the empowerments, quintessential teachings, and authorizations. Then, he became the heart-son of Rinpoche Dorjé Pel, and he requested the complete empowerments, guidance instruction, quintessential teachings, and authorizations for the Great Perfection. He analyzed these teachings thoroughly.

⁴⁷ In this quatrain, the author employs various parts of his name in order to create a partial acrostic.

Then, he became a wandering mendicant. Having released his mind from [the ambitions] of this life, he cultivated only the experiential realization of the Great Perfection.

Having settled in the Northern Fortress (*byang rdzong*) of Mt. Shri, he then did nothing but practice for many years in a single chamber. [187] Thus, he mastered the experience of luminosity. During the [public] New Year celebrations that followed, he matured to fruition during the vase empowerment. While performing the inner offering, many marvelous signs of attainment arose, including the arrival of the vapor-form of a wild yak.

Then, he nurtured many fortunate students. Some of these beings had the ability to help others, but many of them dedicated their lives to religious practice. In short, his practice benefited a limitless number of sentient beings without sectarian bias. Moreover, their bodies were suitable vessels, and as it says in *The [Precious-Key] Prophecies: the Record of the Six Oral Transmissions of the North*, each of them had the good fortune of receiving the Great Perfection from him. Frankly, I have strong faith in this lama that met with the face and reality of Samantabhadra. Because he possessed achievement in measure with this state, those with faith should pray thus: "May he certainly attain happiness in this life and in all the rest!" I as well as an expanse of disciples were established by this great man on the path of liberation.

At the age of 68, he pretended to pass into nirvana. [188] In the pure sky [that represented] his pure actions, there were gatherings of the five colors of light. And within that vision, his corpse was more luminous than ever. These were a few of the wondrous events [that accompanied his passing]. Then, all of signs faded away, and like that he departed into the primordially pure light [of reality].

Oh! Tsenden Rinpoche,
 You are one of great kindness and compassion!
 I pray that you are never forgotten
 And reside within our hearts!
 And, if we pray thus, our hearts will be blessed!
 Mangdalam! Oh! Bubham!

*Dorjé Gönpo (b. 14th c.) and Rinchen Drakpa (b. 14th c.):
Disciples of Gödemchen*

I prostrate to that emanation of all the Buddhas of the three times,
Especially in these degenerate times, please be kind to sentient beings [such as myself].

Of the heart of the Vajrayana Vehicle, which is the pure light,
You are the protector and the teaching sovereign.

Here I will express a little of the life story of the holy lama named Dorjé Gönpo. He was indeed born in what is known as Sémolung (*se mo lung*) Hermitage of Chutsukpu (*chu tshugs phu*). He was one of two siblings. The elder brother's name was Rinpoche Drakpa.

Both his mother and father died while he was young. The orphaned brothers asked a knowledgeable woman who had all the signs of being a sky-goddess and knew how to make them experts in both kinds of writing [to teach them]. [189]

Because of their aspirations that were formed in previous lives, uncontrived faith was born deep in their hearts for the Great Lineage-Holder, just as was prophesized in *The Oral Traditions of the Karmically Endowed* (*snyan brgyud nas las can*).

Thus, they came before the Great Emanation Lineage-Holder at the sacred mountain of Trazang. They were very helpful in translating the entirety of the yellow scrolls of the ancient treasures of Mt. Lhadrak. The lama was very pleased in his heart. Thus, [the lama] gave them the set of empowerments, quintessential teachings, authorizations, and demonstrations of [his own] Great Perfection teachings. Other than that, he gave them the entirety of the Vimala Nyingtik and the Khandro Nyingtik teachings.

Both brothers acquired the reading transmissions and were very fortunate. Regarding [his brother], Rinchen Drak, in *The Record of the Six Oral Traditions of the North*, it says:

From a rock-formation that looks like a lion,
There will emerge the healing sounds of the conch shell, and
There will thus be a disciple that is suitable to entrust.

He, however, was not able to maintain his vows of secrecy, and thus his lifespan was interrupted.

Dorjé Gönpo, however, served before the lama for a long time. [190] He was able to analyze well the quintessential teachings. He

often focused solely on attaining experience with the tutelary deities in the various retreat centers like Mt. Trazang, Tachen Sapuk (*rtachen sa phug*), and Pungbu Lung (*phung bu lung*). He completely experienced the four visions of the Great Perfection. Having benefitted himself, he opened a treasure cache to benefit others. He made many connections to fortunate disciples through teachings, empowerments, and vows. He planted the seeds of enlightenment in every sentient being [that he taught]. When he was 68 years old, there were earthquakes and countless other miraculous signs. Then, he passed into the expanse of reality. The pearl-like relics and the five types of remains were found, and there were continual showers of flowers and inconceivable occurrences. He established all of those sentient beings on the path.

From the reading of oral transmissions, you attained the [four] sights!

You demonstrated enlightenment and extended life!

You went deep into Samantabhadra!

May you quickly attain your [goal]!

And may it all unfold auspiciously!

*Ngakwang Drakpa (b. early 15th c.):
Dorjé Gönpo's Nephew & Disciple*

[191] Tsenden Ngakwang Drakpa requested teachings at the feat of the holy lama just discussed.

He washes [away darkness] like the rays of sunlight in the expanse of the sky,

He expels the gathered clouds of ignorance in the minds of sentient beings!

To this precious lama Ngakwang Drakpa,

I faithfully pay homage to you, touching the three doors [of wisdom]!

This lama is the son of Rinchen Drakpa. Thus, he was Dorjé Gönpo's nephew. When his father was passing into the pure land, he said, "Dorjé Gönpo, this is [now] your son, and he is a suitable vessel [for the teachings]. Please, give him the empowerments, the reading transmissions, the guidance instructions, and demonstrations for

everything!" [Dorjé Gönpo] made the promise [to teach Tsenden Ngakwang Drakpa as his brother wished].

In accordance with that promise, the uncle nurtured [Tsenden Ngakwang Drakpa] with loving kindness. He was even entrusted with all of the teachings. He understood the quintessential teachings of the Great Perfection. Having realized his own nature, he went and practiced in retreat centers at Mt. Trazang, Mt. Shri, and other locations. He did naught but sit in meditation. This lama could abide by his secrets. [192] Although he was actually Samantabhadra, it was difficult to realize for some individuals that had not purified their karma. When the time came, he established many disciples on the path of maturation and liberation.

Then, for the benefit of himself and others, he pretended to pass into nirvana while abiding at the sacred mountain of Trazang. At that time, there were many wondrous signs. For example, in the azure sky above his sacred corpse, the five-colored rainbow lights formed a dome and banners and all of the houses in the region were filled with a pleasant fragrant smells. All the common folk of that area, like the nomads, witnessed these signs directly.

[Sangyé Pelzang acknowledged that,] "Although sometimes the family lineage continues within the clan, the faithful disciples prayed, and were sent before me. Indeed, the family lineage continued through me.

You, kind and glorious lama!
All your actions were appropriate and benefited sentient beings!
May I, your faithful follower, [193]
Be quickly reborn as first among your retinue!
Mangalam Bubham!

*Sangyé Pelzang (b. 15th c.): Reincarnation of Namgyel Gönpo &
Disciple of Jampa Shenyen and Ngakwang Drakpa*

Om! Swasti! Sirtam!
Purify all the accumulations of blinding ignorance!
Expand the mandala of the light of the sun, which is wisdom!
For the glory of sentient beings, migrators like myself and others!
I offer the crown of my head to your lotus feet, he who has such a
good name!

Now I will express a little about the liberation story of the Great Dor-jé Chang, Sangyé Pelzang.

This precious lama's clan is the third [of the Northern Treasure Tradition]. His paternal ancestors were Nyingmapa tantric practitioners, yogins that were very blessed. Their monastic seat was called Chingar (*spyi'i ngar*). His father was known as the Attendant, Gendün Gyeltsen (*dge 'dun rgyal mtshan*). He was accomplished at a young age and became a renunciate. Although he was an "attendant" for a long time, he was also a revered lama. He had a good disposition and strong faith in the Supreme Jewels.

His mother was a lady and was also accomplished from a young age. She also went forth as a renunciate. Her name was Wönmo Sherzang (*dbon mo sher bzang*). She was a bodhisattva of great compassion. [194] She was sorrowful and focused, and she diligently practiced the tutelary deities. She was a woman of a good family.

The two of them had six sons and two daughters. Rinpoche was the fifth child among the eight. The name that he received was Ngadar Pelzang (*lnga dar dpal bzang*). While he was still in his mother's womb, his body felt blissful within her. Feeling pleasant, she had the following dream: The eastern sun was shining and cleared away all the darkness. There were victory banners and the sound of a conch shell [in the wind]. The dream was a good omen. Understanding the meaning of the dream, she said, "The teachings will belong to you, my son!"

Indeed, when Rinpoche was born, his parents were pleased more than ever before. There was a good atmosphere and anything that anyone did was met with positive thoughts. [They knew that] a great person had been born.

When he reached the age of three, he remembered his previous lives. He uttered such statements as, "This is not my father! My father is the Lama Lineage-Holder! My mother is Sémo Pema Zangpo (*sras mo pad+ma bzang po*) (i.e., Gödemchen's wife)." It is telling that he spoke these things spontaneously.

When he reached the age of five or six, he taught the dharma to the other foolish children. [195] He built a [pretend] dharma throne and temple. They say that he then set his attention to lecturing alone. One day his mother found that [her son] had postured himself in an [out of the way] cave. His eyes were intensely focused on the sky, and he just sat there, not speaking a word. She asked, "Who are you instructing here? What is the use of sitting here? Aren't you cold or

hungry?" He replied, "I am not instructing anyone. I am sitting here doing nothing at all. Neither cold nor hunger have arisen at all."

When he reached the age of eight, the clear light of the Great Perfection began to shine. All sights passed by him like ripples in the clear light. Throughout the day and the night, halos, energies, and everything that is seen shone like the five-colored lights. At one such time, he said something like, "As for this teaching, it is karmically linked to my past life." And he said, "Once you have eaten the food from the hand of a stubborn woman, you must stop!"

[196] When he had reached the age of twelve, his father died. At that time, his maternal uncle was the Rinpoche that [held] the monastic seat (*gdan sa pa*); his name was Könchok Pelzang (*dkon mchog dpal bzang*). The uncle said to his mother, "Give this child to me. I will make him a friend of the dharma!" Then, [the child] revealed his true form to these two relatives. Then, he said to the Rinpoche, "Now that I have embarked upon the religious path, I will become an authentic practitioner."

Now that he was being guided by his uncle, he learned to read and write at the Zangden (*bzang ldan*) Monastery. He demonstrated signs of being knowledgeable in each subject. Then, at the age of fifteen, the Dharma Lord named Penden Lodro (*dpal ldan blo gro*) elevated him to the rank of kenpo (*mkhan po*) at the religious college of the glorious Zangden Monastery. He became a renunciate with the preceptor named Rinchen Gyeltsen (*rin chen rgyal mtshan*), that spiritual friend whose splendor casts a measuring shadow [on all others].

Then, in the presence of [his uncle], Rinchen Könchok Pelzang, he received many teachings, such as the Ultra-Secret Tamdrin (*rta mgrin yang bzang*), the Tseta Drakma (*tshé rta sbrags ma*), and the Nyungné (*snyung gnas*) cycle of the Eleven Faces (*zhal bcu gcig pa*). In the presence of the Jonangpa Dharma Lord named Sherzangpa (*sher bzang pa*), he received many teachings, such as the reading transmission and empowerments for the Five Formulas (*gzungs gra lnga*), the Dzetaré (*'dze ta re*) of Amitāyus, and the Savage Vajrapāni (*phyag na rdo rje gtum po*). [197]

At the glorious Sakyapa monastery, at the feet of the Great Queen of the Dharma, he received instructions for the generation stage for many cycles. Before the Dharma Lord named Künga Gyeltsen (*kun dga' rgyal mtshan*), he received the empowerments for all of the major and minor Sakyapa protectors cycles. Then, in the presence of Dorjé Chang, Künga Zangpo (*kun dga' bzang po*), he received many other

Sarmapa cycles including the empowerments for the Künrik (*kun rig*) [class of Yoga Tantras] and the *Purification of Bad Migration Tantra* (*ngan song sbyong rgyud*). He also received Nyungné and other teachings from the bodhisattva named Penjor Sherap (*dpal 'byor shes rab*). He received a cycle of teachings for the purification of obstacles in the presence of Dorjé Ananda (*rdo rje a nan+ta*). Before Langkhor Chöjé Ngakwang (*glang 'khor chos rje ngag dbang*), he received all of the outer holy tantras. In the presence of the Precious Lama Chökyong Özer (*chos skyong 'od zer*), he received all of the profound and quintessential cycles for exorcizing demons. He also received many Chöyül (*spyod yul*) teachings. From Rechen Zhepa Dorjé (*ras chen bzhad pa rdo rje*), he received an abridged version of the Rechen system of Chöyül teachings. He even received all the teaching of the Rechen system from Lama Mönlam Tsenchen (*smon lam mtshan can*). He listened with profundity to all of these teachings.

He even received all the profound teachings of Pakchen Drakpa Gyeltsen (*'phags chen grags pa rgya mtsho*). [198] In the presence of Pakchok Rinchen Zangpo (*'phags mchog rin chen bzang po*), he received the Tiklé (*thig le*) Cycle of the Great Perfection. From the mouth of Khetsün Lekchok Zangpo (*mkhas btsun legs mchog bzang po*), he received an abridged version of the *Precious Garland* that is used for the action of subduing demons, the reading transmission and empowerment for the Fierce Vajrapāṇi, and the Amitāyus teachings of Niguma (*grub rgyal ma*). From the Lineage-Holder, Sangyé Jamzang (*sangs rgyas byams bzang*), he received the cycle of teachings for the Great Compassionate One that Liberates All Sentient Beings (*thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun sgrol*).

Then, faith stirred in his heart for the Precious Lama, Tsenden Jampa Shényen, and he decided to request the Great Perfection's Gongpa Zangtel of Samantabhadra. That night he had a prophetic dream.

[Sangyé Pelzang said the following about his dream and meeting Tsenden Jampa Shényen]: "There was the mountain that appeared to be constructed out of white glass, and on the side of it there were many white stupas. I was gradually climbing up from below. [I knew that I] had gone to the top of that mountain in my previous life. Then, I awoke. The next day I came before the Northern Fortress at Mt. Shri, where Rinpoche Jampa Shenyen was residing. The significance of the prophetic dream vividly unfolded in my heart, and [I knew] it was a vision of this place and its stupas. Then, having come up to [the fortress], I entered through a small opening. [199] As soon

as I saw his face, I was very delighted. I began having spontaneous visionary experiences and overwhelming faith was born in my heart. At that moment, I requested the empowerment and guidance instructions, together with the quintessential instructions, for the Great Perfection. I went naturally into uncontrived meditation, and did nothing else for three days other than emit a radiantly shine from my body. Conventional thoughts did not arise in my mind even for a moment."

He served the lama for a long time there. He earnestly performed many services and deeds. As the lama was very please, he gave him the thorough empowerments, reading transmissions, quintessential teachings, and authorizations for the entire Nyingmapa Lhadrak Treasury, beginning with the Gongpa Zangtel.

Then, the lama said: "There is a teacher named Tsenden Ngakwang Drakpa in Latö in the North. He is the master of these quintessential teachings. You must go there for critical study of the teachings." In accordance with the received instructions, he departed for the north."

[Sangyé Pelzang said the following about his relationship with the lama]: "Then, I met Rinpoche Ngakwang Drakpa who was residing at Mt. Trazang. [200] I had the strong feeling that we had made a connection in a previous life. Our meeting was like the coming together of a father and his son, and I was elated. I requested the empowerments, the reading transmissions, guidance instructions, and the authorizations for the Assemblage of the Five Treasuries (*mdzod lnga 'dus pa*). Moreover, I also requested the complete and inconceivably profound quintessential instructions for such cycles as the Nyingtik of the Old Translations and the empowerments, guidance instructions, and authorizations for the Mañjuśrī Treasures of Pakhong Yutrama (*pha khong g.yu 'phra ma*).

"Then, I left for Padro (*spa gro*) [in Western Bhutan]. I was in the presence of the Emanation, Tuchen Gyatso (*mthu chen rgya mtsho*) when he gave a public teaching for the Khandro Nyingtik of the Great Perfection. The process took three months and there were nearly 100 dharma friends there. I was then given the secret teachings of the Vimala Nyingtik, and thus I have been given the [Great Perfection teachings] of the Three Precious Ones. I also received the Seventeen Tantras, the Supreme Vehicle of Indestructible Clear Light (*'od gsal rdo rje snying po'i theg mchog*), together with the Four Profound Tomes (*zab mo'i po ti bzhi*), which were difficult teachings. Be-

cause the lama was very pleased, he gave them to me in their entirety.

[201] "That year, I arrived at Pakri (*phag ri*) [on the return trip]. I assembled the basic clothing, the yellow flowers to be offered before the lama, and the materials for the feast-gatherings, and went again before [the lama]. While on top of Mt. Nedrak (*gnas brag*), I obtained the reading transmission of the Emanation, Rinpoche Pema (*sprul sku rin po che pad+ma*) and then performed the retreat practice for lamas. There I was given the complete authorization, examples, and empowerments for the oral teachings. In addition, I received many quintessential teachings for cycles such as the Wrathful Padma (*dbang drag pad+ma*) and the Amitāyus Yogini (*tshe dpag med grub rgyal ma*). The lama was very kind to me.

"Then, I went before Guru Chökyi Dorjé (*gu ru chos kyi rdo rje*) who was residing at Taktsang Sengé Samdrup (*stag tshang seng ge bsam 'grub*). Three times I requested the Great Perfection tantra called Longsel (*klong gsal*), and [the lama] spoke this prognostication to me: "You, child of good karma, are going to fully grasp this teaching!" Happily, I looked upon his face, and simply by seeing the lama and his Great Perfection scriptures, uncontaminated and spontaneous equanimity was born in my heart. [202] I [spontaneously] translated [my realization] into Sanskrit utterances. Because of the blissful radiance of his physical form, I was able to circumambulate him for an extended amount of time without the need for sustenance. Although at that time there were very good signs regarding [my level of realization], I kept it secret from those who could not be trusted.

"Then, I was given the complete set of empowerments, guidance instructions, quintessential instructions, and entrustments for the Pagyü Drimé Dashed (*pha rgyud dri med zla shel*), the Magyü Longsel Barma (*ma rgyud klong gsal 'bar ma*), and the Twenty One Short Non-Dual Tantras (*gnyis med kyi rgyud bu chung nyi shu rtsa gcig rnam*) within the Longsel cycle. He placed the relic-stones of the accomplished ones (*grub thob kyi phyag rdo*) on top of my head gave me all of the form and formless empowerments for the Norbu Drönsel (*nor bu sgron gsal*) funerary rites (*rgyab chos*), the concise teachings of Mahāmudrā, and the treasures of the revealer Sherap Mebar (*shes rab me 'bar*). The complete reading transmissions for many treasure collections were given."

The evening that the teachings were complete, the following vision occurred to the Precious One, "All of a sudden, I was dressed like an [Indian] yogin. I was carrying what seemed to be a bowl used

for pointing-out instructions, and I gave it as a gift. This was a very good sign, but this also was kept secret from those that could not be trusted.

[203] "Then I practiced variously at the great and sacred Mt. Trazang and the Mt. Shri, hermitages, charnel grounds, and solitary retreats. I immersed myself only in the quintessential teachings of the tutelary deities.

"Once, while visualizing myself as the deity, it occurred to me that if I were to practice in the chapel that is associated with the prophecies of the sacred Mt. Trazang, it would result in great happiness for sentient beings. This was a sign that I needed to practice on all three levels of the chapel. In brief, I was not deluded regarding the meaning of this vision for even an instant, and I entered retreat as a renunciate. I continuously practiced, and the clear light of my heart expanded without restraint. While I practiced familiarization with the deities, the sign of crossed-vajras were formed from the five-colored light that emerged from my heart and for three days they remained and glittered [before my eyes]. I saw my body directly without distinctions between inner and outer. I saw many formations of consciousness that were in the gap between life and death. In my vision I saw countless *Ḍākiṇī* assembling, and I made requests for ritual feasts and connections to the dharma.

[204] "The earth-spirits and the other non-human spirits were oath-bound, and the various protectors followed their orders. Because I was blessed with these visions that appeared outside of myself, it was like I was seeing [these beings] face to face. When I heard their voices, inconceivable events occurred like great experiential bliss, happiness, and the feeling of abiding in the strength of my own mind. In short, because I sought great attainment for my own benefit, I had the fortune of maintaining dominion over the Great Yoga of Four-fold Confidence. If I were to express [the inconceivable] comments that were made by these beings of light, [it would be something like this]:

If fortunate [disciples] arrive, you should liberate them into the great expanse.

Do this for all without discriminating!

Act on behalf of sentient being, not for your own benefit.

The power of the five poisons is weak in the face of the Great Compassionate One,

And among the prophecies of the *Tantra of Blazing Radiance* (*sgron ma 'bar ba'i rgyud*) it is proclaimed that: "In the end, these teachings will spread to Ü, Kham, Tsang, and Lhochok. In particular, may the Dharma Śākya Drakpa be glorified as Buddha Prajña."

The Precious Tsenden Lama proclaimed that, "He will open a treasury at the age of forty-two for the benefit of others without bias!"

[205] "The disciples were connected with good fortune as a result of their training in various [cycles of teachings]. To the fortunate ones that had elevated themselves, I bestowed the complete quintessential teachings, actualizing [the intention] to benefit others. To the middling students, I showed them the path to liberation. To the last among my disciples, I could be seen to at least connect with them through teaching empowerments. And for those students that were even behind them, I established a karmic connection with them and [gave them teachings regarding] the end of cyclic existence. I accomplished innumerable deeds for the benefit of migratory beings. Mixed within the fortunate, superior, and middling pupils were male and female householders from every conceivable territory. I annually gave each one of the great guidance instructions for the Great Perfection.

All formed and formless sentient beings,
 This precious lama has guided you on the path of liberation,
 Remain steadfast in you reliance on this lama!
 I pray that you are continuously nearby in these epic times,
 I pray that your lamp of wisdom is always ignited!
 I pray that the dark ignorance within all of us is expelled!
 And I pray that the victory banner of the teachings is hoisted high!

I pray that I accomplish the common and supreme siddhis in this life for the benefit of myself and others." [206]

May your deeds be covered by the ocean of blessings!
 May those of low intelligence like myself abide in what is difficult!
 By the moisture of these drops [of brief biographies],
 Fully expand the measure of faith in the followers!
 May your praise be constantly intoned by the buzzing bees!
 To this powerful sovereign that is elevated like the highest tip of a victory banner,

May even the gods bow their heads in praise!

May this accomplished practitioner realize the ultimate attainment!

May the auspiciousness of the supreme Tsenden Lama prevail!

As for these hagiographies above, the Lord Rinpoche—Sangyé Pelzang—authored them. These liberation stories came from his mouth. The one named Gangmarwa Namkha (*rgangs dmar ba nam mkha'*) prayed to be given these stories. Even if I have not arranged the above presentation well, the statements have not been altered, and the story remains pure.

