

The Life of the First Karma Thinleypa

by Karma Thinley Rinpoche

Preface

This is a short biography of the first Karma Thinleypa [1456-1540 CE]. His collected works are no longer available in their entirety, so there is no complete and detailed history from which to work. I compiled this present essay from his short biographical notice in Situ Tenpe Nyinche and Belo Lotsawa's history of the Karma Kagyu lineage and accounts elsewhere, including Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa's 'Feast for the Wise'.

I was initially prompted to compile this History because H.H. the sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa [1923-1981 CE] bestowed upon me the name of the fourth Karma Thinleypa and naturally my students have enquired about the first of this line. Secondly I wish to demonstrate the marvellous example set forth by former masters such as the first Karma Thinleypa in their spiritual training and work for sentient beings.



When you read the accounts of the lives of the great masters of the dharma-lineages, you are in receipt not only of an exemplary model but also of the transmission lineage. It is this transmission which removes obscurations and increases devotion to the guru, so that the student's own Buddha nature may ripen swiftly.

My thanks for the assistance of Maggie Fruitman in producing this biography.

Karma Thinley Rinpoche

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The first Karma Thinleypa, Cholay Namgyal, was born into the noble clan of Gyer, in the central Tibetan region of the same name, in the year of the Fire Mouse (1456 CE). Dakpo Tashi Namgyal^[i], the famous savant of the Kagyu and Sakya traditions, was his maternal uncle.

Early Training

As a youth, Cholay Namgyal studied medicine in Zurkhar under his uncle, Dharma Swami, who was famed as an incarnation of Yuthog Yonten Gonpo, the founding father of Tibetan medical science.^[ii] Dharma Swami also instructed his nephew in the ‘Six Groups of Precepts’ of the male lineage of Chod^[iii] and certain Nyingma doctrines.

When he reached the age of seventeen, Cholay Namgyal received the Sramanera^[iv] ordination from the Sthavira Lhundrup Zangpo. Sometime later, he was ordained as a bhiksu by Chennga Chokyi Drakpa. The very day following this, Cholay Namgyal actually participated in another ordination ceremony, this time acting as the Acharya, assisting Chokyi Drakpa.^[v]

During the course of his education, Cholay Namgyal studied under many of the most eminent teachers in central and western Tibet. From Shara Rabjam he received the most significant precepts of the Shangpa Kagyu school, namely the ‘Six Doctrines of Niguma’, and the ‘Six Doctrines of Sukhasiddhi’.^[vi] Also at this time, Shara Rabjam bestowed upon him the oral teachings of Nganzod Repa, one of Milarepa’s closest disciples. A little later, Cholay Namgyal studied a number of Mahayana philosophical texts with the Sthavira Lhundrup Zangpo.

Cholay Namgyal gave his first major teachings at Serche Bum to seven hundred members of the sangha of the Nyal area, south of Lhasa. The subject of the course was the Prajnaparamita. Subsequently, Cholay Namgyal, continuing his own training, obtained the textual transmission of a series of Kadam works from the Gelugpa scholar Gendun Lhundrup. At the famed monastery of Jampa Ling, he received instruction from the

erudite Sonam Namgyal, the holder of the lineage of the Indian pandita Varnaratna.^[vii] From Gangkar Dorje Denpa^[viii] he received the Sakyapa meditational cycles of the deity Vajrakilaya and the dharmapalas, Panjaranatha and Caturmukha.

Whilst pursuing his religious studies, Cholay Namgyal did not neglect the secular aspects of his scholarship. His tutor in this field was the mahapandita Debzang, who instructed him in the Sanskrit grammar entitled ‘Kalapa’^[ix], the Tibetan grammar *gSum-bCu brTags-pa*^[x] and, in addition, other arts and sciences such as medicine, astrology and poetics.

Textual Studies

Cholay Namgyal’s principal philosophical master was the famed omniscient master Sangay Phel, disciple of both Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo^[xi] and Rongtong Sheja Kunzig^[xii], two of the most illustrious names in the history of the Sakyapa school. Sangay Phel himself had founded a monastery at Tsangrong Deyul Kyetshal in 1449 and numbered many influential scholars amongst his own students, most notably the philosopher Gorampa Sonam Sengge.^[xiii]

Cholay Namgyal, accompanied by one of his uncles, the Dakpo pandita Dondrup Gyaltsen, spent some time at the monastery in Tsangrong. Initially, he received the bodhisattva ordination, derived from the lineage of Nagarjuna,^[xiv] from Sangay Phel. Subsequently, his studies with his master ranged over a very extensive field of classical Mahayana texts, including the Abhisamayalankara, Pramanavarttika, Vinaya and Abhidharma texts, the Mulamadhyamakakarika and the Madhyamakavatara. During this period, Sangay Phel also bestowed upon him the abhiseka of Guhyasamaja, derived from the lineage of Nagarjuna,^[xv] as well as a number of tantras.

Cholay Namgyal then went on to receive extensive philosophical training under Panchen Bumtak Sumpa^[xvi], a student of Sangay Phel. His studies included the ‘Five Dharmas of Maitreya’^[xvii], Vasubhandu’s Vimsika and Trimsika, two key texts of Yogacara metaphysics and Aryadeva’s Catuhsatika. Under Je Dhondrup Gyaltsen he revived his studies of the Prajnaparamita and obtained instruction on Sakya Pandita’s *sDeb-sbyor Me-tog-gi Chun-po* (‘A Floral Bouquet of Poetics’). From Phagchog Yonten Gyamtsho he received teachings on the esoteric yoga system of the Vajra-Body. A little while later, Cholay Namgyal obtained the textual transmission of the collected works of Dakpo Tashi Namgyal from his own elder brother, Chokyi Gyaltsen, as well as the abhiseka of the twelve deities of Panjaranatha.

This period of intensive textual study and research at an end, Cholay Namgyal fearlessly proclaimed his mastery of a total of twenty-seven texts. He conducted a seminary for students from the Ngal area at Zangpoche, where he demonstrated the depth of his learning through discourse and debate. Thus Cholay Namgyal won the praise and respect of all the Geshes who attended the seminary.

Drinking the Ocean of Kagyu Teachings

Cholay Namgyal received the cycle of the dharmapala Ktsetrapala from Rechen Paljor Zangpo and then performed intensive meditation on these teachings in retreat in the sacred Tsari area, south-east of Lhasa. Such was the strength of his meditation that Cholay Namgyal actually beheld Ksetrapala and gained reliable predictions from him. Following this retreat, he attained the abhiseka of the five deities of Vajravarahi and instructions in the cycle of Mahamudra known as the ‘Simultaneously Arising and Joining’ [xviii] from the Kagyu ascetic Sangay Sandrup. Through his endeavours in these quintessential Kagyu precepts, Cholay Namgyal achieved complete and unmistakable realisation of the true nature of reality.

Sometime later, Cholay Namgyal obtained the cycle of Niguma’s teaching from the Acharya Sangay Chodrak and the abhiseka of Kalachakra with the related six-limbed yoga from Kunga Phuntsok. It was at this time that Cholay Namgyal met Chokyi Drakpa, the fourth Shamarpa, second only to the Karmapa hierarch within the Karma-Kagyu school. Gradually, Chokyi Drakpa introduced him to the richness of Karma-Kagyu tantrism. Initially, Cholay Namgyal received the concise guide to the ‘Six Doctrines of Naropa’ composed by the second Shamarpa, Khachod Wangpo [1350-1405]. Then Chokyi Drakpa gave him the abhisekas of Kalachakra, Hevajra, Avalokiteshvara Jinasagara, the Black Cloaked Mahakala, and Luipa’s recension of Cakrasamvara together with the textual transmissions of the accompanying sadhanas. Alongside these major abhisekas, Chokyi Drakpa gave his student the ‘permissions’ of Mahakali and Vaisravana.

Meeting His Root Guru

Cholay Namgyal met Chodrag Gyamtsho, the seventh Karmapa [1454-1506], at the monastery Chokhor Lhunpo during the latter’s tour of Southern Tibet. Immediately upon meeting, Cholay Namgyal perceived the hierarch to be in truth a Buddha, and recognised him as his root guru. Thus inspired, Cholay Namgyal requested Karmapa for teachings on the non-duality of prana and mind, and the ‘Six Doctrines of Naropa’. Chodrag Gyamtsho replied, “If you promise to act as holder of the lineage, I will give them to you.”

Cholay Namgyal readily agreed to this. Consequently, every day for the next five months, he received detailed tuition in Mahamudra and the ‘Six Doctrines of Naropa’ from Karmapa. As he meditated on these teachings, Cholay Namgyal achieved the sequential experiences delineated in the instructions. Chodrag Gyamtsho then gave him a further series of teachings, including the complete cycles of the deities Vajrayogini and Jinasagara, instruction in the philosophical viewpoint of Madhyamaka and a text dealing with the putative harmonisation of the Rangtong and Zhentong views [xix]. Following this, Karmapa bestowed upon his student the textual transmission of the collected works of the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje [1284-1339]. Three of these works became the objects of Cholay Namgyal’s particular attention, namely the *Zab-mo Nang-gi Don* (‘Profound Inner Meaning’), *sNying-po bsTan-pa* (‘Showing the Essence’) and *sNam-*

shes Ye-shes 'byed-pa ('Discriminating Between Consciousness and Primordial Wisdom').

During this period, Cholay Namgyal also received from his guru the instruction of the *mKha-'gro sNying-thig* ('Innermost Essence of the Dakini'), an influential cycle of Nyingma precepts, as well as seven abhisekas from the lineage of Ngok Choku Dorje [1036-1102], disciple of Marpa Lotsawa [1011-1099] and the abhisekas of the five main meditational deities of the first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa [1110-1193]. Indeed, so numerous were the teachings that Cholay Namgyal received from his root guru, Karmapa Chodrag Gyamtsho, that they fell like a shower of rain.

Obtaining Various Other Teachings

Cholay Namgyal's studies extended to almost every facet of contemporary religious teaching in Tibet, including the various minor lineages still current in his day. Thus he received the Chod teaching known as *Nam-mkha' sGo-'byed* ('Opening the Door of the Sky') and the abhiseka of Jinasagara from Khyabche Jampal Gyamtsho, a master of the lineage of Machik Labdron [xx]. From the teacher Dondrup Gyaltzen, he obtained the textual transmission of the collected works of Zhang Yudrakpa Tsondu Drakpa [1123-1193], founder of the Tshal branch of the Dakpo Kagyu tradition. Subsequently, the third Situ incarnation, Tashi Pajor, gave Cholay Namgyal the abhisekas of Guhyasamaja and the siddha Naropa's recension of Cakrasamvara. A little later, Tulku Tashi Dondrup Namgyal bestowed upon him the *Na-ro Chos-drug-gi Ka-dpe* ('Introduction to the Six Doctrines of Naropa'). [xxi]

From the revered Kadam master Nyukla Panchen [xxii], Cholay Namgyal received the White Tara cycle introduced into Tibet by Atisa in the eleventh century. From the Acharya Tenpa Gyamtsho he obtained the 'Six Dharmas of Tilopa' [xxiii] and the five-stage yoga teaching of the Guhyasamaja tantra. Under Zha-lu Lotsawa Chokyong Zangpo he studied various commentaries on the Kalachakra tantra.

Receiving the 'Path and its Fruit' [xxiv] of the Sakya Tradition

At Nalendra [xxv], the great monastery founded by Rongton Sheja Kunzig, Cholay Namgyal received the 'Path and its Fruit' and the accompanying texts of the 'Cycle of the Path' from the abbot Sangay Rinchen. Then he acquired the precepts of the 'Black Text of the Path and its Fruit' from the abbot Lodro Namgyal and the eminent master Jetsun Kunga Tashi. In addition, Shakya Chogden [xxvi], one of the foremost scholars of the Sakyapa school, bestowed upon him further teachings on the 'Path and its Fruit'. Thus Cholay Namgyal achieved mastery of this principal doctrinal and meditational system of the Sakyapa tradition.

In summation, it may be said that Cholay Namgyal received a totally comprehensive education, which included almost every abhiseka, textual transmission and oral teaching available in Tibet at that time.

Miraculous Events

A number of miraculous events are noted in accounts of Cholay Namgyal's life. On one occasion, whilst performing a retreat dedicated to the meditation on White Manjusri, the special bean placed in his mouth during the recitation of the *Ma-sha mantram*[\[xxvii\]](#) sprouted to a length equal to the breadth of four fingers and radiated five-coloured lights. At another time, Cholay Namgyal beheld the second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, in a vision.

One of the most significant of the miraculous events in the life of Cholay Namgyal took place while he was composing a commentary on Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakosa*. He had encountered a number of abstruse philosophical points in the text when Vasubandhu himself appeared to him in a dream and clarified these difficulties.

Cholay Namgyal's premier student, the eighth Karmapa Mikyo Dorje [1507-1554], had a complete set of his guru's hair clippings. These were later transformed into golden evolved crystals[\[xxviii\]](#). Similarly, when Cholay Namgyal's old horse died, almost all of the body turned into evolved crystals.

Activities

Cholay Namgyal's principal benefactor was Ja Tashi Thargay, myriarch of the Ja province of southern Tibet[\[xxix\]](#). Tashi Thargays's family had extensive connections with both the Drukpa and Karma-Kagyü sects and had previously established the aforementioned monastery, Chokhor Lhunpo. There Cholay Namgyal designed a great stupa and a statue of Sakyamuni Buddha, twenty-five hand-spans in height with a decorated throne backrest, as well as a shrine and a temple.

As has already been noted, it was at Chokhor Lhunpo that Cholay Namgyal met his guru, Karmapa Chodrag Gyamtsho. When Karmapa was presented with the monastery, together with all its subjects and lands, as an offering by the myriarch Tashi Thargay, he installed Cholay Namgyal as abbot. It was at this time that Chodrag Gyamtsho bestowed upon him the name Karma Thinley.

Under the direction of Karma Thinley Cholay Namgyal, Chokhor Lhunpo became a very large and well-developed monastic establishment. During his abbacy he constructed a stupa the height of a house to enshrine the evolved crystal and bone relics of the first Gyaltshab incarnation, Paljor Dondrup, who had passed away in 1489. After some time, the Karmapa empowered Karma Thinley as a teacher of authority at Karma College and marked the appointment by giving him the ceremonial parasol and other appurtenances of high monastic status.

Karma Thinley Cholay Namgyal laboured unceasingly in a multitude of ways for the advancement of dharma. In addition to his abbacy of Chokhor Lhunpo, he established a new monastery named Thubten Chokhor in the short space of two years. There he developed a sizeable and well-ordered monastic community. In the main shrine-hall, a gold-plated statue of Sakyamuni, three stories in height was installed. One of Karma

Thinleypa's activities around this time was the commissioning of printing blocks for a number of books, most notably *Deb-ther sNgon-po* ('The Blue Annals'), the famous history of Buddhism in Tibet written by Go Lotsaswa.

In 1504 Karma Thinleypa established the Legshay Ling seminary, where he arranged for the printing of the entire collected works of the first eight Karmapas as well as several other Kagyu masters. He also ordered the manufacture of gold-plated statues of twenty-five gurus of the lineage. In 1532 Karma Thinleypa built the Chime Gyalwe Palace in Jangchub Ling as a residence for the spiritual head of the monastery. Whilst there, he established a seminary dedicated to the study of the Hevajra tantra, 'Two Examinations'.

Karma Thinleypa also carried out extensive activities at Sakya Nalendra. These also included the printing of the collected works of his uncle, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal, as well as the ordering of the construction of a life-sized gold-plated statue of him. He also commissioned a statue of Jetsun Kunga Tashi and the printing of the collected works of Sakyapa patriarchs. At Tsan monastery he constructed a stupa three stories in height.

Teachings to Karmapa Mikyo Dorje

The most illustrious of all Karma Thinleypa's students was the eighth Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje, incarnation of his own root guru. They first met in 1527, when Karma Thinleypa bestowed upon Mikyo Dorje two versions of the 'Six Doctrines of Naropa', namely the *Chos-drug gSer-zhun-ma* and the *Chos-drug Chen-mo*. Then, at the Legshay Ling Seminary, Karma Thinleypa tutored his eminent disciple in the Prajnaparamita. In 1528 Mikyo Dorje was ordained as a bhiksu by the abbot Chodrup Sengge, holder of the Vinaya lineage introduced by the Kashmiri pandita Sakyasri. On this occasion Karma Thinleypa acted as Acharya.

Subsequently, Karma Thinleypa instructed Mikyo Dorje in further Prajnaparamita teachings, Vinaya, the Abhidharmakosa and Abhidharmasamuccaya and the Madhyamakavatara. Along with these sutra-level teachings, Karma Thinleypa gave Mikyo Dorje guidance in the Hevajra tantra 'Two Examinations' and bestowed upon him the abhiseka of Hevajra from the lineage of Ngok Choku Dorje.

Not surprisingly, Mikyo Dorje proved himself an assiduous and brilliant student, taking detailed notes of all these teachings. He composed a prayer for the long life of his guru, in which he declared that Karma Thinleypa, having reached the level of spiritual development known as the 'Highest Worldly Dharma', was close to the first bodhisattva level. [xxx] He also depicted Karma Thinleypa as continually turning the wheel of dharma for those who approach him.

Following this period spent tutoring Mikyo Dorje, Karma Thinleypa travelled to *Nyuk-la*, where he appointed Sherab Namgyal as abbot. His life-style became very ascetic, thus earning him the name of *Kun-spangs-pa* ("One who has renounced all the concerns of this world"). Subsequently at Thegchen Tse Monastery, in addition to his meditation practice, his time was divided between teaching, composition and debate, the classical

threefold pattern of a dharma-master's activities. With regard to this last point, it should be noted that Karma Thinleypa composed a total of ten volumes on various topics of sutra and tantra.

Passing Away after a Long Life

Several events occurring at different times in his life indicated that Karma Thinleypa would enjoy a long life. In his thirtieth year he performed a retreat dedicated to the Amitayus longevity practice from the lineage of the dakini Drubpe Gyalmo, a teacher of the great Rechungpa [1083-1161]. During the course of this retreat, both Amitayus and Drubpe Gyalmo appeared to Karma Thinleypa, predicting that he would live to the age of seventy-two.^[xxxix]

At the age of sixty-four Karma Thinleypa fell ill, his sickness being accompanied by numerous internal and external omens indicative of severe danger to life. During this period he saw Tara herself. It was revealed to him in a dream that he would not pass away at that time. Subsequently his sickness disappeared and he returned to full health.

In 1528 Karma Thinleypa bestowed upon Karmapa Mikyo Dorje one hundred longevity abhisekas. In the course of the last abhiseka, when he threw barley grain, five of the grains adhered to the crown of the Amitayus statue, three more stuck to the ritual vase and many to various other ritual objects. Mikyo Dorje was the first to notice this remarkable event, which was seen by everyone present.

Some time later, Pawo Tsuglak Threngwa, the Kagyu historian who authored the *mKhas-pa'i dGa'-ston*, was inspired by a prophetic dream^[xxxix] to offer a longevity ceremony to Karma Thinleypa. A certain omen^[xxxix] at the time signified that Karma Thinleypa would live to the age of eighty-four.

Thus, in accord with the last prophecy, Cholay Namgyal, the first Karma Thinleypa, passed away in 1540 at the age of eighty-four.

His Students

Karma Thinleypa's students were numerous. His principal disciples were Mikyo Dorje; the high incarnation Gampo Chennga, head of the Daklha Gampo monastery, and a large number of incarnate teachers from the Karma-Kagyü dharma centres of Upper and Lower Tibet; the abbot of the Tshurphu monastery; the head teacher at Padma Kod; Ngoto Khyenrab and many other scholars possessing the *Rab-'byams-pa* and *bKa'-bcu sMra-ba* degrees.^[xxxix] Among the other notable students of Karma Thinleypa were several of his own nephews, who at one time or another held the abbatial seat of the Zimok house of Nalendra monastery; most of the teachers at *Yar-drok*; the meditators from the *Do-wo* retreat centre; Nyukla Panchen; the abbot of *Chu-shul* monastery and Zimpon Kunpanga.

During his time as holder of Tashi Namgyal's seat at Nalendra Zimok, Karma Thinleypa had many Sakyapa students, including Trangpo Choje Serdokpa, the abbot of Drakthog, and numerous Geshes. He taught the 'Path and its Fruit' within both the Ngor and Dzong subsects of the Sakyapa tradition. Amongst more than twenty texts of the 'Path and its Fruit' which he taught, there were the *gLegs-bam-ma*, *dKar-ma*, *gNyag-ma*, *dMar-ma*, *Bod-nag-ma* and *dPe-mzod-ma*. In addition, Karma Thinleypa gave various abhisekas associated with the 'Path and its Fruit'.

Thus Karma Thinleypa Cholay Namgyal's dharma-activity was extensive in both the Kagyu and Sakya traditions. Also noteworthy in this respect is the fact that he had links with the Drukpa Kagyu school, particularly through the great Mahakala siddha, Jampa Dorje, son of his niece, Gyermo Paldon. It is evident that he respected and bore great affection towards all sects of Buddhism. Thus, in a song composed for one Sonam Lhundrup, Karma Thinleypa says, "Respect all schools and abandon sectarian bias."

A Song of the First Karma Thinleypa

[lxxxv/](#)

Namo Sri Vijaya!

Lord, nirmanakaya of the Buddha in the guise of a man,
Who gained power by realisation of the true nature,
Father, ascetic Sangay Samdrup,
I supplicate you with devotion in body, speech and mind.

Formerly, I studied with numerous gurus,
I looked at countless texts of sutra and tantra,
I affirmed and negated according to scripture and logic,
And followed the path of analysis.

Now, inner misconceptions are severed.
The basis, unborn mind, is understood.
The unborn is seen as dharmakaya.
The dharmakaya is comprehended as beyond speech.

Thoughts are liberated in self-awareness.
Subject and object disappear in the space of the unborn.
Appearance and sound melt away in the vastness of dharmata.
Hope and fear dissolve in the sky of self-sameness.

Endless linguistic conventions
And the definitions of philosophy,
Are absorbed in Mahamudra at realisation.

The objective realm is empty but apparent, like a rainbow in the sky,
The kingdom of union free from bias,
The music and dance of self-sameness - a la la!

This unobstructed, naturally clear awareness,
Primordially uninterrupted realm,
Is the genuine spontaneously-arising view.
Mind free from extremes is the great entertainment.

The relaxation, undefiled by grasping at mindfulness,
Continuity of sitting practice and the subsequent stage,
Like a river unruffled by waves,
This is the wondrous unwavering meditation.

Energy arising unaffected by artifice,
Behaviour unlimited in its variety,
Action is like illusion and magic;
Unceasing self-lustre - e ma ho!

Without dispelling attachment to concepts
In the immediate natural brilliance of awareness,
The naturally liberated blissful dharmakaya is realised.
Free from hope and fear, it is marvellous.

The vajra-words of view, meditation and action and fruit
Are unobscured by division.
In the natural harmony of unborn self awareness,
I sing the song of intuitive realisation.

Through the kindness of the father, the great ascetic,
The knot of doubts is now untied.
The basis of delusion is destroyed.
The head of confusion is trampled.

The one thousand Buddhas of the fortunate aeon have appeared
And shown the way to definite inner realisation.
The authentic nature needs no analysis
And reflection on the inauthentic is destroyed.

In accepting this melody of the profound,
May the dharma-master not have the tiniest unhappiness.
When I offer this realisation to the father guru
And contend with the dharma brothers in experience,
May the dakinis not disdain me
For proclaiming the secret meaning,

But may realisation continue to increase
And may we be protected from hindering obstacles.

Thus this was uttered on the eighth day of the tenth month in the Year of the Mouse.

Translated into English in July 1984 by Lama Jampa Thaye.

Notes by Karma Thinley Rinpoche & Lama Jampa Thaye

[i] Dakpo Tashi Namgyal (*Dwags-po bKra-shis rNam-rgyal*) was a meditation master and scholar of the Sakya and Kagyu schools. He was the author of a number of books, one of which, *Phyag-rgya Chen-po bsGom-rim Zla-ba'i 'od-zer*, has recently been translated by Dezhung Rinpoche and Lobsang P. Lhalungpa and published by the Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions.

[ii] See the hagiography of Yuthog contained in Tibetan Medicine by Rechung Rinpoche, Wellcome Institute, London, 1973.

[iii] The 'Six Groups of Precepts', (*brul tsho-drug*) were originally transmitted by Dampa Sangay (died 1117), the Indian primogenitor of the Chod teaching, to the Tibetan Mara Serpo. Subsequently, Kyo Sonam Lama made them the essential precepts of his recension of Chod, later known as 'Male Chod' (*Pho gCod*). See G. Roerich, The Blue Annals, p.996 ff., Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1953, for an account of this branch of Chod.

[iv] Sramanera (*dge-tshul*) and bhiksu (*dge-slong*) are the novitiate and fully ordained grades respectively of the monastic career.

[v] Usually a bhiksu must have been ordained for a minimum of ten years and have fully maintained his vows before he is entitled to act as an Acharya in an ordination ceremony.

[vi] Niguma and Sukhasiddhi were Indian female tantric teachers during the medieval period who both transmitted recensions of the Six Doctrines, viz 'heat', 'illusory body', 'dream', 'luminosity', 'transference' and 'intermediate state' to the Tibetan master Khyungpo Naljor [990-1140]. Niguma was either the sister or ex-wife of the siddha Naropa, and Sukhasiddhi was the disciple of the siddha Virupa. Their hagiographies are contained in the *Shangs-pa bKa'-brgyud gSer-'phreng*, vols. 2 and 3 respectively.

[vii] Varnaratna [1383-1468] was one of the last Indian Buddhist panditas to teach in Tibet, which he reached in 1426. He was famed as a master of the Kalachakra tantra. For an account of his career see The Blue Annals, p.797 ff.

[viii]Gangkar Dorje Denpa, (*Gangs-dKar rDorje gDan-pa*) a.k.a. Kunga Namgyal, was one of the two foremost Sakya masters of tantra. He established the monastery of Gangkar Dorjeden in the Ü province in 1464 and is thus the first master in the Gangkar Dorjeden branch of the Sakya tradition.

[ix]Kalapa is contained in *bsTan-'gyur, sgra* section no. 4282.

[x]*gSum-bCu brTags-pa* is the basic textbook of Tibetan grammar composed by Thonmi Sambhota in the seventh century CE.

[xi]Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (*Ngor-chen Kun-dga' bZang-po*, [1382-1457]), holder of all the most important teachings transmitted in the Sakya traditions, founded the great monastery of *Ngor E-wam Chos-Idan* in the Tsang province in 1429. He was thus the founder of the Ngor subset of the Sakya school.

[xii]Rongtong Sheja Kunzig (*Rong-ston Shes-bya Kun-gzigs*, [1367-1449]) was a very eminent Sakyapa master. His commentaries on the Prajnaparamita were particularly influential. Rongtonpa founded the monastery of Nalendra in the Phenyul area.

[xiii]Gorampa Sonam Sengge (*Go-rams-pa bSod-nams Seng-ge*, [1428-1490]) was a student of both Rongtonpa and Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo. In addition to his establishment of the Tanag Thubten Namgyal Ling monastery, he is particularly famed as one of the greatest philosophers ever to appear within the Sakyapa tradition.

[xiv]For an extensive account of the bodhisattva ordination derived from Nagarjuna, see H.V. Guenther's translation of Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, pp.118-129, Rider & Co., London, 1970.

[xv]On the Guhyasamaja lineage derived from Nagarjuna, see Alex Wayman's *Arcane Lore of the Guhyasamaja*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1975.

[xvi]Panchen Bumtak Sumpa (*Pan-chen 'bum-phrag gSum-pa*) was a student of Sangay Phel. He was especially renowned for his memory, being able to memorise twelve volumes of the Prajnaparamita in just one month. He founded the Sakya monastery of Nyanyod Jago Shong.

[xvii]The 'Five Dharmas of Maitreya' (*Byams-chos lDe-lnga*) comprise the Mahayanasutralankara, the Uttaratantra, the Abhisamayalankara, the Dharma-dharmatavibhanga and the Madhyantavibhanga. They were composed by the 3rd/4th century master Asanga under the inspiration of Maitreya.

[xviii]The 'Simultaneously Arising and Joining' Mahamudra (*phyag-rgya chen-po lhan-gcig skyes-'byor*) is the pre-eminent system of Mahamudra meditation transmitted within the Karma-Kagyü school. See Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje's three works *Nges-don rGya-mtsho*, *Ma-rig Mun-bsal* and *Chos-sku mDzub-tshug* for a detailed explanation of this system.

[xix]Rangtong and Zhentong are the two differing interpretations of the doctrine of emptiness (Skt. *sunyata*; Tib. *stong-pa nyid*) developed primarily in Tibet but having their roots in earlier contributions to this topic in India. For a Karma-Kagyü treatment of this subject, see Karmapa Mikyö Dorje's *dbU-ma 'i gZhan-stong sMra-ba 'i Legs-par dbye-ba 'i sGron-me* ("Correct Analysis of the Madhyamaka 'Empty-of-Other' System").

[xx]Machik Labdron (*Ma-gcigs Labs-sgron*, [1055-1149]) was the student of Dampa Sangay and the originator of the female Chöd lineage, which had its primary monastery at Zangri Kharmar in the Tsang province. See the biographical notes in The Blue Annals, pp.983-984.

[xxi]*Na-ro Chos-drug-gi Ka-dpe*: translated as 'An Epitome of an Introduction to the Six Yogas of Naropa' in G.C. Chang's Teaching of Tibetan Yoga, Citadel Press, New York, 1974.

[xxii]Nyukla Panchen (*sMyug-la Pan-chen*) held the lineage of Kadam Teachings. It is recorded about him that each year during his teaching of various Kadam texts, flowers would fall from the sky.

[xxiii]The 'Six Dharmas of Tilopa' are: "Do not imagine, think, deliberate, meditate nor act, but be at rest." They are mentioned briefly in the siddha's *Do-ha mDzod* and have been commented upon by later masters of the Kagyü tradition in Tibet. On this view see H.V. Guenther's Life and Teaching of Naropa, p.95, note 1, Oxford University Press, 1963.

[xxiv]The 'Path and its Fruit' (*lam-'bras*) is the principal meditational system of the Sakya school. Elaborated originally by the ninth century Indian siddha Virupa, it represents a unified system of sutra and tantra teachings, largely based upon the Hevajra tantra.

[xxv]Nalendra subsequently became the main seat of the Tshar-pa sub-sect of the Sakya school, founded by Tsharchen Losal Gyamtsho [1494-1560]. The two principal masters of Nalendra, and thus of the Tshar sub-sect, have been the successive incarnations of Chogyay Trichen and Zimok Tulku. At the present time, the eighteenth Chogyay Trichen and the fifth Zimok Tulku are in exile at Lumbini, just inside Nepal (the site of Lord Buddha's birth), where Chogyay Trichen has established a new monastic seat. On Nalendra and other Sakya topics, see Chogyay Trichen's history of the Sakya tradition entitled *dPal-ldan Sa-skyapa 'i Chos-'byung mDor-bsdus sKal-bzang Yid-kyi dGa'ston*.

[xxvi]Along with Gorampa Sonam Sengge (see above n.13), Shakya Chogden (*Shakya mChog-ldan*) was regarded as one of the two greatest masters of sutra and tantra in the Sakya tradition. He composed over twenty-five volumes of philosophy, which have recently been republished in India. He is noted as the only Sakya philosopher to have upheld the Zhentong view.

[xxvii] The Ma-sha mantram is a special White Manjusri mantram practised during an eclipse of the moon. During this practice a special bean is placed upon the tongue.

[xxviii] 'Evolved crystals' (*ring-bsrel*) are bound beads the size of sesame seeds, usually white in colour, which remain after the cremation of the body of an advanced spiritual practitioner.

[xxix] For a brief notice on the Ja (*Bya*) family, to which Ja Tashi Thargay belonged, and their role in religion and politics in the period under discussion, see The Blue Annals p.1087.

[xxx] "Supreme Worldly Dharma" (*jig-rten chos-mchog*) is the fourth and final phase in the Path of Application (*sbyor-lam*), the second of the five paths of spiritual realisation. See Gampopa's Jewel Ornament of Liberation p.233. On the first bhumi see *op. cit.* p.239-256.

[xxxi] The *mKhas-pa'i dGa'-ston* explains that at this time Karma Thinleypa dreamed of an image of Amitayus (*Tshe-dpag-med*) emitting many lights. A voice in the dream told Karma Thinleypa that there were seventy-two lights in all. The lights themselves radiated seventy-two times in succession. In this dream he also saw Machik Drubpe Gyalmo in the guise of a very old woman wearing silken clothing. She was holding a ritual vase and shaking an image from which tiny forms of Amitayus, each the size of a grain of barley, showered down. Machik then ordered him to count these, upon which he discovered that there were seventy-two.

[xxxii] The *mKhas-pa'i dGa'-ston* describes a dream of Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa, the author of the text, which occurred in the course of an intensive meditation retreat in Marpa's home village of Drowolung. He dreamed of a flock of geese flying from south to north, the largest of which descended. It immediately transformed into Karma Thinleypa, wearing religious robes and riding a red lion with a red mane. He dismounted and approached Pawo Rinpoche. Several people had brought red-saddled horses to his side, explaining that they had brought them with the intention of inviting Karma Thinleypa to accompany them. Then Pawo Rinpoche asked for a blessing, to which Karma Thinleypa responded by placing both hands upon his head. Pawo Rinpoche then requested him to remain for one hundred years. Karma Thinleypa accepted and signalled for the others to go, whereupon they departed.

[xxxiii] Following the dream, Pawo Rinpoche, realising its significance, decided to perform a ceremony of long life for Karma Thinleypa. He sent a letter to him in Nyukla informing him of this intention. That very day Karma Thinleypa had begun a preparation for a long life retreat. He was very happy upon receiving the gift and letter, declaring that it was an auspicious omen signifying pure samaya. He then ordered a count of all the vajra-cushions, which had been offered to him as symbols of long life. There were eighty-four, indicating that this was the age at which he would pass away.

[xxxiv]Rabjampa (*rab-'byam-pa*) is a scholarly degree within the Sakya tradition, indicating mastery of the entire curriculum of the monastic college. Kachu mrawa (*bKa'-bcu sMra-ba*) is a lesser degree, indicating mastery of ten of the treatises taught as part of the scholarly curriculum.

[xxxv]Karma 'phrin-la-pa, Songs of Esoteric Practice and Replies to Doctrinal Questions, pub. Ngawang Topgay, New Delhi, 1975, pp 7-8.

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