



Milarepa Tames Rechungpa

His Second Major Disciple

KHENCHEN THRANGU RINPOCHE

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Based on:

*The Life of Rechungpa: A Mirror that Clearly Reveals the Path to
Wisdom and Liberation*

KHENCHEN THRANGU RINPOCHE

Translated by Peter Alan Roberts

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Note

We capitalize Buddhist practices so that tranquility is calmness of mind while Tranquility is Shamatha meditation or that insight is an understanding of the mind, while Insight is Vipashyana meditation. The Tibetan words in this text are given as they are pronounced, not spelled in Tibetan. Their actual spelling can be found in the Glossary of Tibetan Terms. We use BCE (before current era) for “BC” and CE (current era) for “AD.” CE is implied for dates without any designation.

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Preface by the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

At this time, as the precious teachings of the incomparable Buddha spread throughout the whole world, the numbers of the faithful grow daily. These various people want to know of the great learned and accomplished holy beings who arose impartially in the past — the chronicles of their legacy of good activity for the doctrine, their deeds, their songs, and so forth. With those needs and aspirations in mind, Namo Buddha Publications and Sherab Choling have collaborated to translate and publish this essential summary of the activities of Jetsun Rechung Dorje Drakpa. I rejoice in their efforts in this virtuous activity for which they have the highest altruistic intentions. Through this well-conceived work, you will become thoroughly acquainted with the activities, sayings, and thoughts of this mighty adept, Rechung Dorje Drakpa. The positive impression

Preface by the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa

it leaves may create a connection in your future lives with the precious teachings of the essential definitive meaning of the practice lineage, and you will gain undivided faith in them. May you then realize the clear light, the primordial ground of liberation.

With this prayer, the Glorious Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, wrote this at Sangchen Gyuto Ramoche monastery in Dharamsala in Northern India on December 10, 2000.



Thrangu Rinpoche on a visit with students to a Milarepa cave in Nepal
above Bhaktapur.

Foreword

Milarepa, was Tibet's greatest male saint and he had had two major disciples — Gampopa and Rechungpa. Gampopa was a monk who wrote the important work *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* and built the first Kagyu lineage monasteries thus establishing the monastic tradition of the Kagyu lineage. Rechungpa (1084-1161 CE), on the other hand, was a yogi who undertook three dangerous journeys to India and brought back many teachings which his teacher Milarepa did not have. Rechungpa was also the only the holder of all of Milarepa's teachings and spent many years after Milarepa's death living in caves surrounded by students and giving these teaching to them which have been passed on through several Tibetan lineages.

Surprisingly, there is practically no information of Rechungpa's life or teachings available outside of certain Tibetan texts. In fact, this book by Thrangu Rinpoche is the only biography of Rechungpa in English. Because Rechungpa, like Milarepa, taught with spiritual songs (often called *dohas*), Thrangu Rinpoche included in this book

23 of Rechungpa's songs describing how to practice these were transmitted to ordinary practitioners and great practitioners in the 11th century in Tibet.

Most Tibetan spiritual biographies usually present a very glorified version of the lama's almost flawless behavior. But in this biography Rechungpa was clearly not such a person. At times Rechungpa defied his root guru, Milarepa. At other times he collected non-Buddhist teachings on black magic against his guru's wishes, and at other times he lived a lavish life of a wealthy person, and he was even married a princess. But despite all of this, this biography shows how Milarepa carefully guided him towards the correct Dharma path through advanced practices, magic demonstrations, and careful instruction that changed his behavior so that towards his later life he had many students and when he passed away, he achieved the highest attainment, rainbow body with his body completely vanishing into the dharmakaya.

Rechungpa's biography is unique in that it shows us what happens when a meditator has difficulties following his teacher's advice. Rechungpa had two main obstacles to devotion: doubting the wisdom of his guru and having excessive pride. For example, when crossing a barren plain in Tibet, Milarepa asked Rechungpa to pick up a yak's horn. Rechungpa immediately misinterpreted this to mean that Milarepa was attached to some old relic. Actually, Milarepa was

going to use this horn to give Rechungpa a lesson on apparent and ultimate reality by placing himself inside the hollow horn during an upcoming hailstorm. We may think that placing oneself in a hollow horn was simply an exaggerated story because that happened 800 years ago. But those with familiarity with Tibetan Buddhism will know that “miracles” such as the phenomena of “rainbow body” continue to occur even today without any scientific explanation as to how this is possible. For example, Thrangu Rinpoche as he was dying in 2023, he practiced Tukden. He stopped breathing and his heart stopped, body remained life-like except that his body slowly shrank in perfect proportion — bones and all — to half his size. His body was seen by thousands at his cremation and three days later there were a large number of five-colored ringsels with his ashes.

Besides not following the spiritual advice of his guru, Rechungpa also had a second obstacle to his devotion — excessive pride. Pride results in believing that when one has a high level of attainment so that one is actually equal to or even more developed than one’s guru. In the West where Hinduism and Buddhism are less than a hundred years old, it is not uncommon to find persons claiming that they or that their teachers are fully enlightened. This comes from a lack of understanding of what “fully enlightened” means. There are a great number of texts explaining in detail the qualities of enlightenment so one can tell if someone is enlightened or not. Thrangu Rinpoche and many of the other Tibetan lamas encourage

their students to study the *Supreme Continuum (Uttaratantra)*, for example, which lays out the qualities and signs of enlightenment. Thrangu Rinpoche has also done an extensive commentary on the *Ornament of Clear Realization* and *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes* which also contain a great deal of information by the Maitreya Buddha on the stages and characteristics of the Buddhist path.

It is difficult to understand how Rechungpa could defy the instructions of Milarepa. We now consider Milarepa to be Tibet's greatest saint, but in Rechungpa's time Milarepa was merely a penniless old man who shunned people and loved to meditate in caves. Rechungpa could not have imagined that Milarepa's biography would become one of the most famous stories in Tibetan Buddhism and that Milarepa's teachings would become the foundation for a lineage which 800 years later would have Dharma centers all over the world.

Due to Rechungpa's great efforts in bring back texts and practices which has long been lost in India, we have the Red Chenrezig Practice, which is central to the Karmapas, the protector Vajrapani's teachings, the complete Formless Dakini teachings of Tilopa, the Amitayus practice for long life and health, and the complete Chakrasamvara practice. Besides Mahamudra, Chakrasamvara, Hevajra and Vajrayogini, are the three main meditational practices of the Kagyu lineage.

Because Rechungpa held all of Milarepa's teachings Stephen Batchelor says that *The Life of Milarepa*, is probably the second most popular Tibetan book known in the West, was dictated by Milarepa to Rechungpa. It was Rechungpa's student Tsang Nyon who wrote it down for Rechungpa. Without Rechungpa bringing back important practices from India, it is difficult to imagine that Milarepa would be so famous, and that the Kagyu path would be complete.

Rechungpa's lack of prominence and lack of having a definite lineage of his own was due to the fact that he, like Milarepa lived in caves in his latter life and taught using spiritual songs for his teachings, rather than texts. However Rechungpa's teachings were not lost because they were absorbed into a number of different lineages. Dusum Khyenpa, the first Karmapa, brought many of Rechungpa's teachings into the Karma Kagyu lineage and the first Drukchen Rinpoche brought Rechungpa's teachings into the Drukpa Kagyu lineage. The first Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche and the First Surmang Tulku also incorporated Rechungpa's teachings in their lineages. Rechungpa also had a number of female disciples, one who of them founded the Togdenma tradition that the modern Tenzin Palmo made popular in her book *Cave in the Snow*.

In Tibetan there are many different biographies of Rechungpa Peter Roberts has reviewed these in his *Biographies of Rechungpa: The Evo-*

lution of a Tibetan Hagiography. Thrangu Rinpoche chose one¹ that he thought was fairly accurate and that contained many Dharma teachings and spiritual songs² in it. We are extremely pleased that Thrangu Rinpoche who read and summarized the Tibetan text and Peter Roberts who translated this oral teaching thus making this book the only in English on Rechungpa's complete life.

Thrangu Rinpoche gave the first teachings on Rechungpa in February of 1989 to the Namo Buddha Winter Seminar in Nepal with Peter Roberts translating. Peter Roberts has since written an extensive text examining all the different biographies of Rechungpa. Thrangu Rinpoche later gave a brief teaching on Rechungpa at Karma Dzong in Boulder, Colorado with John Rockwell translating. We have combined these two teachings into one to give a broader biography of the life and practice of Rechungpa.

Finally, these teachings were given orally by Thrangu Rinpoche. The translator gave a verbal translation of the spiritual songs (Skt. *dohas*) that Rinpoche used, and we were unable to give a more thorough

1. Rechungpa's sacred biography, the basis for this teaching is entitled *The Life of Lord Rechungpa: A Mirror that Clearly Reveals the Path to Wisdom and Liberation*. The author, Gotsangpa Natsok Rangdröl also called Gotsang Repa was born in 1470 and died before 1543 CE. — *Peter Roberts*

2. Spiritual songs differ from regular songs because they are all about the Dharma and they are spontaneously sung to a tune without the singer making any changes. They are often called "dohas" but spiritual songs have rhyming couplets and Tibetan spiritual songs called "gurs" do not rhyme and are a standard set of Tibetan syllables for each line, often 7 or 9 syllables.

Foreword

translation of them. We have rendered the longer ones into verse but had to leave some in prose.³

— Clark Johnson, Ph. D.

3. Rechungpa's sacred biography, the basis for this teaching is entitled *The Life of Lord Rechungpa: A Mirror that Clearly Reveals the Path to Wisdom and Liberation*. The author Gotsangpa Natsok Rangdröl, also called Gotsang Repa, was born in 1470 and died before 1543 CE. — *Peter Roberts*

Rechungpa Meets Milarepa

Milarepa, one of Tibet's greatest Buddhist saints, received a prophecy from his own guru and also from his meditational deity (Tib. *yidam*) that he would have two great disciples: one who would be like the sun and the other who would be like the moon. The disciple who was like the sun was Gampopa and the disciple who was like the moon was Rechungpa.

This biography of Rechungpa shows that he was very intelligent and also had a great deal of faith and devotion to the path to enlightenment. However, he didn't always possess this faith. This sacred biography tells us that sometimes he was filled with faith for his guru Milarepa and at other times his faith wavered. In the end Rechungpa's faith became strong and he was able to achieve the full fruition of his practice. He achieved Buddhahood as evidenced by the fact that at the time of his death he transformed his elemental body and left nothing behind.⁴

4. This is a special spiritual practice called rainbow body (Tib. *jal lu*) which can only be

Sacred biographies (Tib. *namtar*) are part of the tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism. They are essentially biographies concerned with how a realized individual first entered the Buddhist path, then how that individual practiced on the path, and finally how he or she attained Buddhahood. This biography of Rechungpa is inspirational because it shows what one can accomplish when one is very intelligent, and it points out how one progresses along the path when engaging in strong exertion as well as what happens when one doesn't have much exertion.

The sacred biography of Rechungpa is quite long and is composed of three main sections. The first section is brief and deals with Rechungpa's past incarnations. The second section is composed of ten chapters which are concerned with Rechungpa's actual life. The third section is very brief and concerns his future lives. Here we will concern ourselves with the second section on his lifetime in Tibet when he helped establish the Kagyu lineage.

Rechungpa Meets Milarepa

In 1084 CE Rechungpa was born in Rala in the region of Gunghang and was named Dorje Drak. When he was quite young, his father died, and his mother then married his uncle as was the custom in

done by highly accomplished meditators. Traditionally, they ask to be sealed up in a tent at their time of death and are left alone for about a week. When the tent is opened up, only the clothes, nails, and hair remain. This is still practiced today. For example, Achoe Rinpoche of Tibet achieved rainbow body in the 1990s.

Tibet. This was very hard on the family economically. Rechungpa was quite skilled in reading and would go around reciting texts for people and receiving offerings from them. He would then give these offerings to his mother and uncle to supplement the family income.

One day when Rechungpa was eleven years old, he noticed many people gathered at a cave in the valley. Rechungpa went up to this cave and heard Milarepa inside singing a spiritual song. Just hearing this song caused such a transformation in him that he spontaneously felt great faith. Rechungpa entered the cave and Milarepa was very delighted to see him and began teaching him the Dharma right away. Milarepa also made the prophecy that in the future Rechungpa would become a great meditator. Hearing this, people said to him, “Oh, how good it would be if you could stay with Milarepa.”

Rechungpa then began telling Milarepa about all the hardships he was undergoing and Milarepa replied, “Actually, it seems like you have just a little suffering. I experienced much greater suffering than that, but I was finally able to meet the great teacher Marpa and receive the oral instructions from him. I then performed great austerities in my practice and finally was able to free myself from all suffering. You too could receive these teachings and practice them and through practicing them be able to attain complete fruition.”

Rechungpa did not return to his mother and uncle but stayed with Milarepa receiving the *upasaka* (lay vows), the bodhisattva vow, and

the Vajrayogini empowerment. He then began practicing and very positive experiences arose in him.

Rechungpa's uncle and mother became extremely angry because he had stayed with Milarepa instead of returning to them. So they went and kidnapped Rechungpa by tying him up and taking him away. They told him, "If you are not going to work reciting for people, then you must work in the fields." So Rechungpa worked in the fields doing very hard labor and through this work he contracted leprosy, a disease of the nagas⁵ At that point, Rechungpa's other maternal uncle took great pity on him and said, "Previously, you were like the son of a king and now you have this great affliction. I will take care of you and supply you with food and clothing." His mother and stepfather, however, said to him, "You shouldn't stay here at all. In fact, why don't you just leave the country and go somewhere else."

So Rechungpa went to stay with Milarepa who was living in a cave. While he was there some Indian yogins came to visit. They saw Rechungpa and his leprosy and said, "We see you are very sick. We were planning to go to the Five Peaked Mountain in China. But instead, we will return to India and help you find a very special guru who will cure you of this illness."

5. The Tibetans believe that if one angers a naga spirit, one will develop a skin disease such as leprosy. The cure which is performed even in modern times in India and Nepal involves a lama doing a ceremony to appease the naga.

When Rechungpa went to see Milarepa to request permission to go to India, Milarepa was preparing for a strict retreat. Milarepa gave Rechungpa permission to go and before leaving Rechungpa helped Milarepa build a wall across the opening of his retreat cave.

Rechungpa's First Trip to India

On the way to India Rechungpa became very, very ill. However, he made it to India where he met an excellent teacher named Varacandra⁶ from whom he received the oral instructions of the deity practice of Vajrapani.⁷ In just one day of practicing, Rechungpa was completely cured of leprosy which made him extremely happy. He jumped up and started dancing around saying, "I must tell the guru Varacandra that I'm cured." However, this was in the middle of the night so he realized, "Well, he is sleeping now and if I wake him up, he will probably be very angry at me." He decided not to wake up the guru but to immediately return to Nepal and then to Tibet. This meant leaving without taking the time to request further teachings from Varacandra.

6. The first teacher of Rechungpa was Walatsendra in the kingdom of Tirhut which was transcribed in the Tibetan Tengyur as Balacandra. This was also the Buddha's dialect as demonstrated by the Ashokan inscriptions at Lumbini. His teacher's name was actually Varacandra. — *Peter Roberts*

7. Vajrapani is one of the three main Dharma protectors. He is especially associated with curing illnesses caused by nagas. Vajrapani became a main yidam for Rechungpa.

Rechungpa Returns to Tibet

When Rechungpa returned to Tibet, he started asking around, “Where is Milarepa?” No one seemed to know where he was. Rechungpa then went to the cave where he had left Milarepa and saw that the wall he had helped build was still in place. Seeing this he thought, “My guru died!” and immediately broke it down and went inside. There he found Milarepa meditating and Rechungpa asked him, “How have you been?” Milarepa sang him a spiritual song saying everything had been going well. His practice had been going well: his meditation was fine; everything was very good. Then he asked, “How did things go with you?”

Rechungpa replied, “I met the guru Varacandra and received the practice of Vajrapani which cured my leprosy. So, I am also doing very well.”

Rechungpa then received the empowerments and instructions on the Six Yogas of Naropa from Milarepa and practiced them. Afterwards he went with Milarepa to Mount Kailash and there through his miraculous powers Milarepa subdued the Bon master called Naro Bönchung.⁸ On witnessing this, Rechungpa said that Milarepa was truly a buddha, and he felt he must practice the instructions

8. See Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Life and Spiritual Songs of Milarepa* for a description of this contest in which each side produced miracles until Milarepa finally did a miracle that the Bon master could not perform and thus Mount Kailash became a Buddhist area (although Bonpos are welcome there).

that he had received from him. He composed a spiritual song about practicing Milarepa's instructions. Milarepa, however, said that Rechungpa had to be very careful because there was a great danger of his falling back into samsara and into the disturbing emotions (Skt. *kleshas*). Milarepa therefore advised him to go and meditate in solitary places. But Rechungpa replied that he had met a great teacher and had received these great instructions: "I am like a garuda flying in the sky and so there is no danger of my falling to the ground. I'm like a fish in the water so there is no danger of being smashed by waves. So, with these instructions you gave me there is no danger of any obstacles hindering me."

Milarepa replied, "Oh, you are so proud and speak with such great self-confidence that it will be difficult for you to achieve Buddhahood. But I've received a prophecy from Vajrayogini that you will do things that are bound to turn out well."

Rechungpa decided, "I must stay with Milarepa until I have attained complete realization. Until that occurs, I must stay and serve him and receive all the empowerments and oral instructions." However, when word spread that Rechungpa had been cured of leprosy, his mother and uncle came to Milarepa's cave and demanded that Rechungpa return and continue working for them. Milarepa intervened and told them, "If you come any closer, I'm going to cast a spell

on you.” Rechungpa’s uncle and mother became so frightened that they left and never bothered Rechungpa again.⁹

Rechungpa then told Milarepa that his guru in India, Varacandra, had been so kind to him and helped him so much that he wanted to repay his kindness by giving him some gold. He asked Milarepa his opinion and Milarepa said that he should do exactly that. So Rechungpa went around begging and requesting alms. He also received his share of the fields from his mother and his uncle and sold them for gold.

Rechungpa’s Second Trip to India

Rechungpa made his second journey to India with a lama called Ra Lotsawa and another Tibetan teacher called Kytön. Kytön actually means “dog teacher” and he was called this because he had been a hunter previously. One day while Kytön was out hunting, his dog attacked a deer and tore out its entrails. Even though the deer was wounded with its intestines falling out, the deer kept running away. When Kytön saw this, he couldn’t continue being a hunter and instead offered his dog to the monastery and took ordination as a monk.

These three Tibetans left Tibet and went to Nepal which was on the way to India. When they arrived in Nepal, they were requested to

9. Because of Milarepa’s realization of bodhichitta, he knew the consequences of using sorcery. However, ordinary Tibetans of that time would never have taken the chance.

give teachings. A large throne was set up. Kytön first gave teachings on Dzogchen teaching that there are no deities, no demons, and so on, which are teachings from the ultimate view of reality. These learned Nepalese teachers said, “Oh, Tibetans are not good at teaching Dharma. What do they know? How can one visualize a deity in *ngöndro* practice and then practice this. Teaching the Dzogchen view of the Vajrayana with no deities? These Tibetans obviously don’t know what they are saying.”

While Rechungpa was in Nepal acclimating himself to the Indian climate, he met a Nepalese siddha named Mondröl Chungpa. Rechungpa asked him, “What is your *yidam* deity?”¹⁰ The Nepalese siddha replied, “You’re not my guru, so why should I tell you who my *yidam* is?” That left Rechungpa wondering what his *yidam* was and so he crept into the siddha’s room to see if he could find out. He discovered a lot of thangkas of many different deities but couldn’t figure out which one was Mondröl Chungpa’s personal *yidam*.

So then he bribed one of the siddha’s attendants and the attendant told him that Mondröl Chungpa’s *yidam* was Vajrayogini. Rechungpa also asked the attendant who his master’s teacher was, and the attendant told him it was the siddha Tipupa.

10. A meditational deity (Tib. *yidam*) is a deity such as Vajrasattva, Chenrezig, or Chakrasamvara with whom the practitioner feels a special connection. When practice is not going well, the practitioner can pray to this deity and ask for blessings. The *yidams*, like all other deities, have an outer form, as well as being a manifestation of an inner experience.

After his body had adjusted to the warm, lower climate in Nepal, Rechungpa went on to India. When he found Varacandra, he prostrated to him and gave him an offering of gold to thank him for his kindness. Now Varacandra had a lot of power as illustrated in the following story. One time a woman fainted and remained in a coma and Rechungpa was asked to help her. Rechungpa asked Varacandra to come saying, “Will you be able to revive her?” Varacandra replied, “Yes, I’ll be able to bring her back to consciousness.” Rechungpa thought, “Well, if he can do that, then I must go with him and see this.” So, he went along with Varacandra and when they got there Varacandra did a fire sadhana. He then picked up the unconscious woman and threw her into the fire. When the woman gained consciousness, as an expression of his great devotion, Rechungpa even drank the dirty water in which Varacandra had washed his hands.

In India Rechungpa received meditation instructions on the white, the black, and the multicolored garuda. He also received meditation instruction on the Five Garudas: the garuda’s body, speech, mind, qualities, and activity. After teaching this complex practice, Varacandra made a prophecy about Rechungpa saying that there was a sacred place in the south of Tibet which would be a very good place for him to go to practice because it seemed that Rechungpa practiced the way of a yogi. Varacandra asked him who his teacher was and Rechungpa said that his teacher was Milarepa who was a disciple of Marpa and Marpa was a disciple of Naropa. Varacandra replied

that it would be very good for Rechungpa to receive teachings from another disciple of Naropa, Tipupa. Rechungpa had already given all his gold to Varacandra, so he had none left to offer Tipupa. But Varacandra gave Rechungpa a roll of cotton and said, “If you meet Tipupa offer him this.” After giving Tipupa the cotton, Rechungpa asked the Tibetan translator who Tipupa’s teacher was, and the translator told him the story of Tipupa.

The Story of Tipupa

Tipupa’s father was called “laughing vajra” in Tibetan and his mother was called Samantabhadri. They had three sons. Tipupa was the oldest and when he was thirteen years old, he died. This caused his parents great suffering and unhappiness. They brought him to the cemetery and when he was laid down, a pigeon flew down to where bent its head down three times and died. As soon as the pigeon died, Tipupa came back to life. The people who worked carrying dead bodies to the cemetery became very frightened and said, “This body has been invaded by a rolong spirit.”¹¹ Actually the mind that had entered the body was that of Darmadode, Marpa’s son.¹²

11. There are still many stories about zombies called “rolongs” among Tibetans. It is said that if a *rolong* touches you, you turn into a rolong. Rolongs cannot bend down so many Tibetan and Nepalese houses have a low door which makes bending necessary to enter the house.

12. This story is also told in *The Life of Marpa*.

Being the son of Marpa, Darmadode had learned some of the language of that part of India and he said, “Don’t be frightened. I’m not a zombie. I’m just a body that has come back to life. It’s safe for you to take me home.” His parents were overjoyed and took him back home and everyone was very amazed. They said, “He died and now he’s come back again.” Some people thought that he had been protected by prayers for the continuation of his life. His parents were very happy to have him living with them again, but after some had passed, they noticed that their son was much calmer than before, that he had more respect for his parents and was more interested in the Dharma. They gradually realized that this was not actually their son, so they asked him, “Well, who are you?” Tipupa explained that he had received the practice of Phowa Tronjug from his father Marpa. This phowa practice allows one to transfer one’s consciousness out of one’s body into the body of a corpse.

Now, Marpa had seven sons, but only Darmadode was a good Dharma practitioner. Darmadode’s ability to help others made him very special to Marpa. Much earlier Naropa had predicted that there would be an obstacle for Darmadode, and he would have to do an intensive retreat and accumulate mantras to overcome the obstacle. While Darmadode was in retreat, there was a great celebration taking place in the neighborhood. Darmadode thought, “I have a well-known father and mother. I am also young and if old people can go to this fair, I should also be able to go.” Marpa told him to

stay in retreat, but Darmadode insisted. So Marpa consented saying, “If you go to the fair, you must obey these three commands, ‘First, do not sit in the front row. Second, do not teach the Dharma at the fair and third, do not drink any alcohol.’”

When Darmadode went to the fair, he began by sitting in the back row. Once he sat down everyone else saw him and said, “Oh, there is Marpa’s son. By all means you must sit up front. You can’t sit in the back so please come and sit up front. Then everyone asked him to teach the Dharma and kept insisting until Darmadode was forced to teach the Dharma. After he had taught, everyone said, “This is a great celebration, you must have something to drink.” Darmadode could not refuse and so he had something to drink and became a little drunk. When he was riding home on his horse, he fell off and broke his head open on a rock. Darmadode knew he would not recover, but he had mastered the practice of the ejection and transference of consciousness. He would have to find another body, but his disciples couldn’t find another body.¹³ All they could find was a dead pigeon. So, they brought the dead pigeon and Marpa, acting as his guru, told his son in a command prophecy, “You should eject and transfer your consciousness into this pigeon. You should then fly to India to the Cool Grove charnel ground where you will find a corpse of a young boy. Transfer your consciousness into that body so that you will be able to benefit many sentient beings with

13. Tibetans often cut up the corpse into pieces and feed them to vultures.

your teachings.” Darmadode then flew from Tibet to India where he found Tipupa’s body and transferred his consciousness into it. The Indian word for a pigeon is *tipu* and this is how he became known as Tipupa.

When Tipupa met Naropa, Naropa performed a miracle by rising into space and dancing there. In the rainbow light of this manifestation Tilopa appeared and said to him, “You are the son of Marpa, you are Tipupa, and so you have the blessing of Naropa.” He then said, “Your name in India is Tipupa, but because you have had many tantric teachings, you should be called “the tree of mantras” or Sang Dongpo in Tibetan.

Rechungpa went off to find Tipupa and eventually found him, telling him, “I’ve gone through many difficulties to get here: I’ve traveled through extremely cold places, through areas infested by illness, and through sweltering hot places. Ignoring all these dangers, I came to you to receive Dharma teachings. So, with your great compassion please give me all the Dharma teachings you possess.”

Tipupa felt very pleased with him and said, “Oh, he has obviously meditated a lot and is very intelligent.” But Tipupa had a Tibetan translator with him who said, “No, he’s just giving you an expected introduction.” Tipupa then decided that he had better check to see whether Rechungpa was being genuine or not. So he asked him, “What’s your lineage? What kind of instructions do you need?”

Rechungpa then sang a spiritual song explaining that his lineage came from Tilopa through Naropa and Milarepa and that he had come to India to seek five of the nine dakini teachings. When he said that, Tipupa became very happy and thought, “This is a genuine person. He’s not trying to deceive me.” He then replied, “I will give you all the instructions I have one by one.” Rechungpa thought that he needed to practice the same yidam as Tipupa, so he asked, “Do you have a yidam?” and Tipupa said, “Yes, of course.” Rechungpa asked who the yidam was and Tipupa replied, “I have a vow to keep it secret, so I can’t tell you.” Rechungpa began thinking about how he was going to find out what Tipupa’s yidam was. This guru and Rechungpa had separate bedrooms. At some point in the night, the guru got up and started reciting mantras. Rechungpa listened very carefully trying to make them out but couldn’t make out anything more than a couple of HUMs so he decided to get closer. He got out of his bedclothes and with nothing on crept much closer. But now he was feeling frightened and couldn’t hear the mantra over his own heavy breathing. When the guru finished reciting his mantra, he could see Rechungpa was there and said, “Oh, Tibetan, what’s the matter with you? Have you gone insane? Why are you wandering about at night with nothing on?” Rechungpa replied, “Well, actually I’ve been trying to work out what your yidam is, so I was creeping up here to try to make out what the mantra was.”

The guru said, “You’re a very clever Tibetan and very intelligent,” and they both had a good laugh.

During his stay, Tipupa went through the teachings, but Rechungpa wasn’t able to translate them himself. There were other translators there who translated the teachings for him and so in this way Rechungpa obtained all of the teachings of the formless dakinis and began practicing them.¹⁴

On Rechungpa’s return to Tibet he met an Indian teacher Mirti who had the “fast-feet instruction” which is a meditation practice on how to walk very quickly. Rechungpa received these instructions and mastered them and was thus able to walk from India to Tibet in only six days.¹⁵ Along the way he also met many other teachers and received the Dzogchen instructions as well as the instructions on two other yidam deities.

14. Tilopa was the first to obtain the formless dakini teachings. Having traveled to Uddiyana, he received them directly in a spiritual song from the Formless Wisdom Dakini. Basically, this song was comprised of these nine instructions: (1) Loosen the seal knot of mind as ripening and freeing, (2) Looking at the mirror of mind as samaya, (3) Slashing water with a sword as activity, (4) Sunning yourself in realization as samaya substance, (5) Looking at the torch of wisdom as insight, (6) Turning the wheel of the web of nadi and prana, (7) Looking at the outer mirror as equal taste, (8) Meditating on self-liberated Mahamudra, and (9) Holding the jewel of the great bliss teachings.

15. This practice of swift feet (Tib. *kang gyok*) is described by Alexandra David-Neel in *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*. The meditator takes a phurba and points it in the chosen direction and begins walking, almost running, without stopping or diverting from the path for days at a time.

Questions

Can you say more about Rechungpa's pride?

I believe the problem of pride is probably the same in the West as in the East. For example, Rechungpa was a very special disciple with a good practice, but sometimes his pride rose as an obstacle. So it's something that one has to eliminate. The way of eliminating the pride is to understand selflessness, the absence of self. If one can realize that, then pride will naturally be eliminated. Also being aware of and understanding one's own faults and shortcomings will eliminate pride.

In the visualization practices during the creation phase, one has to have the qualities such as clarity, mindfulness and pride. There has to be unshakable pride called vajra pride which means that one thinks of oneself as the deity. So that whatever deity one is practicing — Chenrezig or Vajrasattva or Padmasambhava — one thinks, “I am the deity.” One really has to think this and so this is called unshakable pride. Also, in terms of Dharma practice one thinks, “I can practice the Dharma, I'm able to do it.” This kind of pride called vajra pride which is good and necessary.

Could you explain the phowa practice further.

When someone dies the mind leaves the body and there are many exits from which it can leave. At the time of death, one has the

experience of being inside a ruined house and thinks, “I have to get out of this place!” There are many exits and the exit that the mind takes will determine what kind of rebirth the person will have. For example, leaving through the nose will result in a rebirth as a human being and leaving through the anus causes one to be reborn in the hell realm. So phowa practice is designed so that the consciousness will exit from the body through this opening at the top of the head leading to a good rebirth.

There are two kinds of phowa. The first is practiced at the time of death and through the power of one’s practice, one actually sends the consciousness out a particular opening. Second is when a teacher accomplished in meditation does a visualization to help someone who dies through their love and compassion helping the dying person’s consciousness to leave through the crown of the head. Often a special lama is invited to come and do the phowa for them. But in this case the old lady had never done any phowa practice, so it was Milarepa doing phowa through his great compassion.

But phowa practice can’t change our karma. The old woman’s karma didn’t just stop. But under certain conditions it is possible to change our karma. For example, we might have bad karma and then we meet a great teacher and through this positive condition, we can eliminate our bad karma. Or we can have negative conditions and also bad karma, so begin to accumulate more negative karma. Per-

Rechungpa Meets Milarepa

haps this old woman had good and bad karma and having Milarepa do phowa practice for her, her good karma would bring a good rebirth. Through that rebirth that positive karma she would be able to practice the Dharma and purify her negative karma.

Rechungpa's Third Journey to India

In Rechunpa's third journey to India after receiving the oral instructions from Tipupa, Rechungpa arrived in Tibet. When he met Milarepa and told him of all of the teachings he had received, Milarepa was very delighted. Milarepa then gave Rechungpa the instructions on the Six Yogas of Naropa and the instructions on Mahamudra practice. Rechungpa practiced these teachings very diligently and special realization arose in him.

Milarepa's Encounter with the Logicians

Rechungpa was staying with Milarepa who by this time had become very famous. One day there were two very learned monks who started slandering Milarepa by saying, "This Milarepa does not know anything at all about the Dharma and so he shouldn't be teaching it. We should debate Milarepa and show what a fraud he is and have him expelled from the country." These two monks, Dallo and Loden, came to Milarepa and said, "All these people have

great faith in you and therefore you must have some very great qualities and be very learned. We therefore should like to discuss the Dharma with you.”

They began by asking Milarepa, “What kind of Dharma do you know and who is your guru?” So Milarepa sang to them a spiritual song about his lineage and what practices he was doing and so forth. The monks said, “Well, you might fool the ordinary people by singing spiritual songs. However, we are very educated individuals, so don’t sing your songs to us. Instead, we will engage in a serious discussion about the Dharma.” Milarepa said, “I practice on the subtle winds and subtle channels (Skt. *prana* and *nadi*).” They said, “Oh, this is not very important at all. Fish in the water can do without air, and even animals that hibernate underground can do that without breathing, so this is not rare or special.”

They then asked Milarepa to explain his understanding of the ten perfections (Skt. *paramitas*). So Milarepa sang a spiritual song about his understanding of these perfections. The two educated monks had to admit, “Well, it looks like you understand that. However, the perfections are not the most important aspect of Dharma. Most important is being well trained in logical reasoning. So, in terms of logic, it is very important that you show us the conditions things are in contradiction to each other, the way things are connected to each other, and the way things are inseparable from each other.”

Milarepa said, “Oh, of course! An example of a contradiction is that your mind and the Dharma is a contradiction. An example of inseparability is that your mind and the disturbing emotions are inseparably connected.”

The monks then said, “Well, it doesn’t help to banter with disrespectful words. What you need to do is to establish definitions.” So Milarepa replied, “According to your understanding, is space something that is obstructing or is it something non-obstructing?” The second logician said, “That is no problem. The Buddha has clearly said that space is not obstructing and besides there is no one who has ever said that space obstructs.” Then through the miraculous power of his meditative concentration Milarepa made the space around the monks such that they could no longer move. “Space is obstructing, isn’t it?” he said. “Is this rock obstructing or is it non-obstructing?” Again, through the power of his meditative concentration, he ran in and out of the rock saying, “It’s non-obstructing, isn’t it?”¹⁶

At this point the monks were speechless. However, they finally said, “Unless we engage in some kind of Dharma discussion, this is totally pointless.” One monk had absolutely no faith in Milarepa

16. In other teachings Rinpoche has explained that once one reaches the meditative state that truly realizes emptiness, then one can pass through solid objects because they are insubstantial or empty. Modern physics tells us this is entirely possible because solid matter is actually over 99.99% space with the atoms being enormous distances between each other on an atomic level.

and the other thought, “This Milarepa is very strange.” They then returned home, but when the one who was doubtful entered his home, he found his thangka painting of the Buddha had fallen so that the Buddha was upside down which is a very bad omen. He later returned to Milarepa's cave and as soon as he came in Milarepa said, “It's one thing if your mind doesn't follow the Dharma properly, but please don't be disrespectful to the Buddha.” After hearing this the monk went back to his friend and said, “This Milarepa is very strange and hasn't studied much Dharma. Nevertheless, we have studied a lot of Dharma, and it hasn't tamed our mind very much, while this Milarepa has tamed his mind.” The monk lacking faith continued, “That is not true at all. It is complete nonsense.”

Rechungpa's Third Trip to India

Rechungpa was observing this whole debate between Milarepa and the scholars and thought, “My guru displayed some wonderful miracles, but he didn't do very well in the debate. These are very poor Dharma practitioners so I should go back and study logic and debate so I can defeat them in debate. Milarepa knows black magic, but he won't teach it to me.” Rechungpa then asked Milarepa if he could go to India for a third time.

Milarepa said to Rechungpa, “Don't go to India to study logic and sorcery. This is just worldly thinking and even if you learn sorcery and logic, it will not lead to Buddhahood. The best thing for you to

do is just to stay here and practice and meditate.” But Rechungpa said he really had to go to India and there was no way he would stay. So Milarepa said, “If you really have to go to India then don’t go there to study logic and sorcery but go to receive meditation instructions and practice.” Milarepa said that he had received teachings from Marpa that had come from Tilopa and Naropa who received them from the dakinis. There were nine Dharma teachings that had been given by the dakinis.¹⁷ Milarepa had received only four of these teachings because Marpa had been able to bring only four back from India. Marpa had told Milarepa, “I’ve taught you four dakini teachings and there are still five more in India. So, if you can go to India, even though you are not able to meet Naropa, you can meet someone in his lineage who has received these teachings. If these other five dakini teachings come to Tibet, it will be very auspicious.” Milarepa could have obtained these teachings, but he felt very satisfied with practicing Mahamudra and the Six Yogas of Naropa. He really enjoyed doing meditation and couldn’t bear to leave his meditation and go off to India. Having spent so much time in meditation, he was now too old to take the dangerous trip to India. Milarepa said to Rechungpa, “But you’re young and intelligent and diligent, so if you go to India, it will be very good if you

17. There are human dakinis are realized female practitioners and the non-human dakinis who are wisdom beings that help the practitioners. Two realized dakinis helped in Rechungpa's life: the dakini who corrected his translations Drupai Gyalmo who literally saved Rechungpa's life and gave him the Amitayus and Red Chenrezig sadhanas which are still practiced today.

can receive the remaining five dakini teachings and bring them to Tibet.” Then Milarepa and Rechungpa exchanged what they had for gold and Milarepa said to Rechungpa one last time, “If you go to India and study logic and sorcery, it will just defile your mind and create more disturbing emotions which will cause you to move backward on the path. Instead seek out and receive these teachings of the formless dakinis.”

Rechungpa traveled to India this third time and was able to meet Tipupa again and from Tipupa he received all the nine teachings on the formless dakini lineage.

Rechungpa Receives the Long-life Practice of Amitayus

One day Tipupa told Rechungpa that he should go into town and take a look around. So Rechungpa went off to see what this town was like. On the way he passed a tall, thin yogi who took a good look at Rechungpa and said, “What a sweet handsome young Tibetan you are, but it is a shame you’ve only got seven days to live.” This gave Rechungpa a fright and he thought, “I only have only seven days left. What am I going to do?” He went running straight back to Tipupa and told him, “I’ve just met a yogi in the street who told me I have only a week to live! What shall I do?” Tipupa asked Rechungpa, “Are you afraid of dying?” and Rechungpa replied, “Well, no. I’m actually not very frightened of dying, but I’ve gone through

a tremendous amount of trouble to come to India and receive these teachings of the formless dakinis. If I die here, my work will all become completely meaningless. I have must take these teachings back to Tibet and give them to Milarepa.”

Tipupa then said, “Actually, I knew you didn’t have very long to live, so I told you to go into town. I knew you would meet the person who told you that you didn’t have long to live. But there’s no need to be afraid of dying because there is a woman called Machik Drupai Gyalmo (which means “one mother, queen of accomplishment”) living in a cave. Drupai Gyalmo is five hundred years old and had achieved the practice of long life, but she looks like a sixteen-year-old girl.” He told Rechungpa to go see her and so Rechungpa went to her cave, met her, gave offerings, and prostrated to her.

She said, “Well, what do you want?” He said, “I’ve been to town, and I met a yogi who told me I only have a week to live. So please give me the meditation practice of long life.” Then Drupai Gyalmo asked Rechungpa, “Can you do without sleep for a week?” and he replied, “Yes, I can.” She then gave him a long-life practice and he did it continuously night and day for seven days. At the end of seven days, he had a vision of Amitayus buddha¹⁸ who taught him the long-life sadhana in a long form, a medium form, and a short form.

18. See Glossary for more on Amitayus.

After this Drupai Gyalmo asked him how long he wanted to live and Rechungpa replied, "I want to live until I don't want to live anymore." She asked how old he was now, and he said he was 42. She said, "You wicked Tibetan with such a great desire to live so long. Your teacher Milarepa is now 83 and is going to live until his 84th year so you can do the same." Then Rechungpa received from Drupai Gyalmo the empowerment and transmission and instructions for the Red Chenrezig practice.¹⁹ One night after receiving this empowerment he had many dreams and one of these dreams was of a pandita dancing in the sky. Then in the dream it began to rain flowers and in the midst of this rain of flowers were dakinis who said that he had received a very good empowerment and had practiced it well. They then sang a song to him. Rechungpa thought the song sounded very beautiful, so he paid very close attention to the wonderful melody. When he woke up, he realized that he didn't know the words of the song. All he could remember was just one line, and this line was written over Tipupa's doorway.

Rechungpa received many other instructions from Tipupa and Drupai Gyalmo and these teachings were translated into Tibetan. Tipupa said that the translation was not perfect, and he didn't really know

19. Chenrezig, the deity of compassion, has a number of human emanations including the Dalai Lamas and the Karmapas. Naropa foretold that a special Tantra would be brought to Tibet by a student of Marpa. These teachings were given by Khandro Karpa Sangpo and she passed them to Tipupa who then passed them on to Rechungpa. Rechungpa taught these to the first Karmapa who practiced the Red Chenrezig extensively. This particular practice is with Red Chenrezig in union with a his female buddha.

how to translate it completely correctly. He made the prophecy that it didn't matter because in the future other people would go through and remove the mistakes in the translation.

After receiving the oral instructions on Amitayus, Rechungpa returned to Varacandra. Varacandra then asked Rechungpa, "Did you meet Tipupa? Did you receive good teachings? Did you develop great faith in him?" Rechungpa replied, "Yes, I met a teacher, and he is very great and special teacher. I have great faith in him and received teachings and instructions from him."

But after having received the nine dakini teachings along with the Amitayus long-life practice, Rechungpa went and studied black magic and logic. The result of his going against his guru's wishes was that he became more arrogant and prouder.

Rechungpa's Return Tibet

Before returning to Tibet from his third journey to India, Rechungpa first went to Nepal and met a Nepalese siddha who asked him, "What happened to you? Did everything go well? Were you able to travel to India without any problem? What teachers did you meet and what instructions did you get?" Rechungpa replied, "I met the teachers Tipupa and Machik Drupai Gyalmo and had no problems traveling through India and I received many instructions." He then showed this Nepalese siddha his texts. When the Nepalese examined

them, he said, “Well, they haven’t been translated correctly, but I’ll go through them and correct errors in the translation.” So in this way the Nepalese siddha fulfilled Tipupa’s prophecy that someone would remove the errors in Rechungpa’s translations. Rechungpa also received many special teachings and instructions from this siddha.

On the way back to Tibet Rechungpa met a woman who was an emanation of a dakini, and she removed the rest of the mistakes from his translation.

Rechungpa Returns to Tibet

Milarepa Teaches Rechungpa a Lesson on Pride When Rechungpa returned from his third journey to India, Milarepa was in retreat in a cave in an area called Drakmar Chonglung which means the “red cliffs of the Chonglung valley.” Milarepa was meditating in this valley and thought, “My disciple Rechungpa has gone to India. I wonder when he’s coming back and how he is.” So he rested in samadhi and had a vision of Rechungpa returning from India in the form of a crystal stupa shining with light indicating that he had received these teachings. This shining light was coming closer and closer to the Tibetan border. But then, when Rechungpa met a non-Buddhist who practiced sorcery, Milarepa saw the stupa of light being transformed into a wild dust-blowing tempest of wind as he approached Tibet. Milarepa thought, “This is not good. An obstacle to his practice has occurred.” So he decided to break his retreat. Milarepa flew from where he was to Lachi mountain in

Tibet. The footprints of where Milarepa landed can still be seen there in the rock.

While Rechungpa was returning, he went through an area of Tibet called Gungtang and reached the area called the Palmo Palthang which was a great empty plain. Milarepa came to meet him there and as they approached each other on this plain, they could see each other. Rechungpa thought, “I’ve been to India three times, and I’ve met with great teachers such as Tipupa. This time I’ve received very special meditation instructions so I’m not the same as I was before I went to India.” Rechungpa was feeling proud and remembering that Milarepa had told him that the instructions of the formless dakinis were very special and important. He thought, “I’ve been to India, and I possess these instructions.” He began wondering how Milarepa was going to greet him when they met thinking, “Yes, he’ll probably come straight to me.”

Milarepa saw Rechungpa coming and thought, “Oh, he has become very proud, this isn’t good!” So, he went and sat on a boulder and when Rechungpa arrived, Milarepa said, “So you’ve come back from India. I see this has not been such a big thing. All the siddhas and all the dakinis of India come to me for teachings. So, you should prostrate to me and treat me with respect.” Rechungpa had brought a sandalwood staff from India which Tipupa had given him to take to Tibet and he offered it respectfully to Milarepa and prostrated to

him. While doing this he thought, “I prostrated to him first. Then he’s probably going to prostrate to me.” But Milarepa just sat there and didn’t prostrate to him. Rechungpa got upset about this and thought, “He’s not treating me very well!” Then he asked Milarepa, “How have you been while I was in India? How are all the other yogis? Have you been in good health? Where have you visited?”

Milarepa thought to himself, “Oh, he’s very proud now that he’s received the instructions on sorcery. That’s what has caused this pride.” So Milarepa started laughing and sang a spiritual song to Rechungpa. In his song Milarepa said that he had eliminated the sickness of the five disturbing emotions. Now he is in good health and free of the ripening of that karma, thus he was completely free. He has this perfect health due to the kindness of Marpa. He has realized that samsara and nirvana are just the mind and therefore he has no problems or difficulties at all. All the other of Rechungpa’s yogis were also well and meditating in solitude.

Then Milarepa asked Rechungpa, “How was your journey to India? Did you receive good instructions?” Rechungpa replied, “Yes, I have received excellent instructions.” Milarepa then asked, “Have you returned from India with these instructions without any pride?” Rechungpa said, “Well, I’ve received the instructions of the formless dakinis to which you attach such great importance. So, for other students to respect these teachings and realize that they are

important, you also have to treat these teachings with great respect and treat them as being very valuable.” He then gave Milarepa the texts that he had brought back from India.

To break Rechungpa’s pride, Milarepa took these texts and Tipupa’s sandalwood staff and began to run away at very great speed. Rechungpa had to run behind him and was having such a hard time keeping up that he sang a spiritual song to Milarepa describing what a difficult time he was having keeping up with him.

So Milarepa stopped, sat down, and sang a spiritual song in response. They then walked on together. But as they were going along Rechungpa thought, “If this were any other lama, I would have had a very great welcome and been treated grandly upon my return from India with all these instructions. But my lama has nothing except his body which is in very poor condition, and only his clothes on his back which are also in very poor condition. So what kind of a welcome can I expect from someone like that?” Then Rechungpa thought, “Having received these instructions from India I can’t just practice these in a situation of poverty and hardship. I have to do my meditation practice with great wealth, prosperity, and pleasant circumstances.” However, Milarepa knew that Rechungpa was thinking these negative thoughts. Then as they were walking along on this great plain, they came upon a yak horn lying on the ground. Milarepa told Rechungpa to pick it up and bring it with him. Re-

chungpa thought, “My lama is always saying we mustn’t have any possessions or wealth and then he becomes really attached to this little yak horn which is of no use to anyone.” He told Milarepa, “This yak horn is not going to be of any use, so let’s just leave it behind.”

But Milarepa said, “The yak horn is good. We don’t have to develop any attachment to it, and it might come in handy sometime.” So Rechungpa picked up the horn and they walked along the Palmo Paltang plain which was a huge, completely flat, deserted plain with nothing there, no shelter, or anything.

Then clouds began to gather in the sky and a hailstorm arose accompanied by a fierce wind. Rechungpa became very cold and had no time to look around and see what was happening to Milarepa. He just lay down, covered himself with his cotton robe, and felt very cold. When the hail began, he looked around and there was no sign of Milarepa anywhere. Then he thought he heard a voice coming from the yak horn. He looked up and down and all around but there was still no sign of Milarepa. So, he thought, “I’d better take this yak horn along because Milarepa wants it.” But when he tried to pick it up, he couldn’t because it was too heavy. He looked inside the yak horn and saw Milarepa sitting inside.

Milarepa was sitting in there very comfortable with plenty of space around him. He hadn’t become any smaller and the yak horn hadn’t gotten any bigger, but he was quite comfortable sitting in the yak

horn. He said to Rechungpa, “If your powers are any good, you can come in here as well. It’s so nice in here without any hail or wind!” Rechungpa thought, “Well why not?” But he couldn’t even get his hand into the yak horn. This didn’t cause him to develop faith in Milarepa and Rechungpa just thought, “Well, I don’t know the kinds of sorcery Milarepa can do, but what I know for sure is he’s very good at creating hailstorms.” The sun began to shine and Rechungpa’s cotton robes were soaking wet. So, he laid them out to dry. Milarepa said to him, “You didn’t need to have gone all the way to India to learn sorcery because I know this sorcery and you could have learned it from me. I’m just satisfied with the Six Yogas of Naropa and Mahamudra, so I didn’t have any desire to go to India. However, you going to India and receiving instructions on the formless dakinis was very good.”

Rechungpa said, “But I’m hungry and cold. Let’s go begging for alms.” Milarepa replied, “Now is not the time to go begging for food. It’s time to meditate.” So Rechungpa said to him, “The time to go begging for food is when you are hungry and I’m hungry now, so I will go begging for food now.”

There were some nomadic families living on the plain. It was very cold, and Rechungpa said to Milarepa, “We must beg from a small family in a small tent.” But Milarepa said, “No, they won’t give us any alms. But if that is where you intend to go begging then you

go and beg there.” So Rechungpa went to a little tent to beg, and an old woman came out and began shouting at him, “You yogis come in the morning, and you then come in the evening always begging for food. You don’t do any work and all you think about is getting food to eat. I’ve already given away what I had this morning so there’s nothing left for you. Just go away!” And so Milarepa said to Rechungpa, “I think we’d better not have anything to eat this evening. I think it’s better if we go and get some sleep.” So, they went a little distance away and lay down to sleep. In the middle of the night, they heard sounds and shouting from the camp. In the morning when they woke up, all the nomadic families had left except for the one yak-skin tent that belonged to the old woman.

When they went to the tent, they found that the old woman had died and in her tent was a lot of *tsampa* (barley), cheese, and yogurt. So Milarepa said, “Last night she wouldn’t give us any of her food and today all this food is ours to eat. This is impermanence.” They divided up the food and Rechungpa said that they should eat some now and carry some with them. When they finished Rechungpa said, “So, let’s go!” but Milarepa said, “No, we’ve eaten the food of the dead lady and now we have to do something for her. So carry the dead body over there.” Rechungpa protested, “Oh! This is a really disgusting body and it’s so dirty!” But he had no choice and

with great disgust he carried the body to where Milarepa pointed. Milarepa then did the phowa transference of consciousness for her.²⁰

Milarepa Continues to Tame Rechungpa

Milarepa then said, “Now we should go somewhere that is very solitary, like Mt. Kailash or Lachi mountain, so we can meditate.” Rechungpa disagreed, “No! I’m very tired and weak. We need to go someplace where people are living so I can rest. I can’t go to some uninhabited place in the condition I’m in.” So, they did as Rechungpa wished and went to an inhabited area and there Rechungpa said, “Now we need to find a sponsor, someone to look after us.” Milarepa replied, “No, let’s go to the first tent we see, someone we don’t know at all.” They did this and Milarepa then said, “Now I need some water. Go fetch me some water and I’ll light a fire. There’s some water nearby and there’s also some a long way off, but the water nearby doesn’t suit me because it’s bad for my health. So go get me the water that’s a long way off.” Rechungpa went to get the water that was in a narrow valley, but then everything began to change with the narrow valley appearing to become a plain. Then a kyang (a wild ass of Tibet) approached and gave birth to another kyang and the newborn then gave birth to another with this going

20. After someone dies, their mind feels that it is trapped in the body and tries to find a way out. Phowa practice is performed to make sure the mind leaves through the aperture in the crown of the head because the mind leaving other orifices in the body can lead to being sent to an undesirable realm.

on until there were a hundred of these young kyangs were running about and playing. Rechungpa became very distracted watching this whole scene and thinking, “This is quite amazing! Kyangs usually live out on the plains, not in narrow canyons with cliffs and forests, and they don’t usually give birth so quickly!” He watched them in fascination until a wolf appeared and the kyangs ran away. Then Rechungpa thought, “Oh, I’ve spent a long time observing this and I haven’t fetched the water. I must get back quickly, otherwise Milarepa will be yelling at me!” Meanwhile, Milarepa was sitting in meditation and praying to the dakinis. Milarepa then invoked the dakinis in front of him. He took Rechungpa’s container of texts and requested that the dakinis take all the teachings having the formless dakini teachings with them and to throw to the ground all the teachings on logic and black magic. As he said this the dakini teachings arose with the dakinis and everything else fell to earth. Milarepa then took these teachings on logic and sorcery and threw them into the fire.

As Rechungpa was returning, he could smell burning paper and thought, “Well, that’s very strange. Why do I smell burning paper?” When he had returned, he went to the container his texts had been in and found it empty. Then he thought, “My lama has become jealous of me! I visited India and developed all these great qualities and learned all these profound instructions and now he’s envious of me and burned all my texts!” He confronted Milarepa asking,

“Where are my texts?” Milarepa replied, “You have been gone for so long that I didn’t think you were ever coming back and that you were probably dead. I’m just a meditator, so for me the texts would have just been a distraction and caused an obstacle to my practice, so I used them for making the fire.”

Rechungpa was very upset and thought, “I’ll return to Tipupa, or I’ll go traveling around to other places in Tibet. I’m definitely not going to stay here with Milarepa!” Rechungpa lost all his faith in Milarepa and said to him, “Everything that I’ve done is completely worthless; all the gold I spent, all the hardships that I encountered going to India to get all these instructions are all for nothing. Therefore, I’m not going to stay here. I’m going off to travel around Tibet.”

Milarepa replied, “You don’t need to lose faith in me. I know you’ve been enjoying watching those kyangs, but they are just animals; they’re really nothing much worth looking at. Instead, I’ll give you something worth looking at.” Then on top of Milarepa’s head appeared a throne on which Marpa was seated. Beside his right ear appeared the sun and by his left ear appeared the moon. Then from his nostrils shone light rays of the five colors and on his tongue appeared an eight-petaled lotus with all the Sanskrit letters on it and finally from his heart appeared the knot of eternity.

Milarepa then sang Rechungpa a spiritual song, “Above my head is Marpa. He is inseparable from Vajradhara, and was a very profound,

superior practitioner from an exceptional lineage. By my right and left ears are the sun and the moon. This is a sign of the inseparability of skillful means and wisdom. From my nostrils radiate light rays of five different colors which is a result of having complete control of my subtle winds²¹ of my body which have all entered into the central channel. And at my heart is the knot of eternity showing that I have attained the complete wisdom of the Buddha's mind. So, kyangs are just animals and not worth looking at. This, however, is something worth looking at and has real meaning."

Even though Milarepa sang this song to Rechungpa, his faith in Milarepa did not return. Rechungpa said, "Well, if you are such a great lama and perform such great miracles, bring back my texts. If you don't, I will continue to be very disappointed with you!" Feeling unhappy, Rechungpa just sat down and put his elbow on his knee and rested his head against his hand and began whistling to himself, acting very displeased and unhappy. Consequently, Milarepa created another miracle by making himself transparent so that one could see Chakrasamvara in his heart, Hevajra in his navel, Mahamaya in his throat, and Guhyasamaja at the crown of his head. Milarepa said, "Now look! This is a miracle that is really

21. Subtle channels are not anatomical but are more like the meridians in acupuncture which make up the vajra body of a person. Energy (*prana* in Sanskrit, *qi* in Chinese medicine) flows through these channels. In Tibetan, this subtle energy is called *lung*, which literally means "winds." We use the term "subtle winds" so they are not confused with ordinary wind.

worth looking at!” And Rechungpa said, “This is a good miracle, but I’m still unhappy about my texts.”

Nearby there was a large rock and Milarepa climbed on top of it and started riding it like a horse. As he rode around back and forth seated on this great large rock and rose into the sky with fire and water coming out of his body. He sang a song saying, “This fire blazing out of my body is a sign that I have attained the ‘*samadhi*’ of great exhaustion,’ which is the exhaustion of negativity.” Rechungpa replied, “Now your miracles are becoming like a child’s play and are just irritating me more. What I want are my books! Give me back my books!”

Then Milarepa started flying up into the sky gliding like a vulture. Sometimes he would come swooping down very fast and then flying up high very fast. He sang a song to Rechungpa saying, “There are not many people who can fly like this! This flying is due to the power of the Dharma.” But Rechungpa wouldn’t even look at him, so Milarepa began flying higher and higher into the sky until he became invisible. Eventually Rechungpa looked up and saw that Milarepa was gone without any trace. He thought, “Oh no, my lama has obviously flown away to the pure realms! What can I do without a lama? I lost faith in him, and I’ve been disrespectful to him and he’s such a very special lama! Now he’s gone to the pure

realms, and I can't follow him. I must be crazy; I've made a very big mistake!"

Rechungpa was full of remorse and thought, "I'm going to kill myself!" So he ran to the edge of a cliff and jumped off, but he found himself falling very slowly and he could feel and smell Milarepa. He looked up and he could not only see Milarepa, but he could see three Milarepas standing there on the cliff. He asked Milarepa to forgive him saying, "I confess, I've been wrong. Please forgive me and give me Dharma teachings!"

The three Milarepas replied at the same time, "But to which Milarepa are you going to confess? Which one are you going to have faith in? Which one are you going to receive Dharma instructions from?" And Rechungpa replied, "I'm going to confess to the middle Milarepa and trust him and request teachings from him."

So Rechungpa returned to the cave with Milarepa who told him, "I sent you to India to get these very special instructions, but you also received instructions in sorcery. The instructions in sorcery are not any more powerful than the teachings I have given you. I know because by using sorcery myself I accumulated very bad karma and experienced a lot of difficulty in purifying myself.²² So I decided to ignore the sorcery and just receive and practice instructions that

22. This was the famous story where Milarepa sought revenge on the relatives who treated him and his sister very poorly, so he produced a hailstorm that killed over a dozen of his relatives.

will bring about the attainment of Buddhahood. It is my hope that you will achieve Buddhahood within this lifetime so I was worried that with these texts on sorcery you would become a sorcerer or someone who just teaches from texts without doing any practice. For that reason, I burned the texts on sorcery and logic, but I haven't burned the texts on the instructions of the formless dakinis."

Then Milarepa recited a prayer and the pages with the instructions of the formless dakinis fell out from the rocks. When Rechungpa saw that, he thought, "My lama really is a buddha. So, I must stay with him and practice his teachings. For the next twelve years I will be his attendant, where I will receive his teachings, and for twelve years I will practice with him." He made that very firm and very complete commitment. This is how Milarepa was able to eliminate the obstacle of pride that had arisen in Rechungpa.²³

23. I believe the problem of pride is probably the same in the West as in the East. For example, Rechungpa was a very special disciple with a good practice, but sometimes his pride rose as an obstacle. So it's something that one has to eliminate. The way of eliminating the pride is to understand selflessness, the absence of self. If one can realize that, then pride will naturally be eliminated. Also being aware of and understanding one's own faults and shortcomings will eliminate pride.

In the visualization practices during the creation phase, one has to have the qualities such as clarity, mindfulness, and pride. This pride has to be unshakable pride which called "vajra pride" where we believe that we are actually the deity. So that whatever deity we are practicing — Chenrezig or Vajrasattva or Padmasambhava — we think, "I am the deity." In terms of Dharma practice, we also must think, "I can practice the Dharma; I am able to do so." This is also vajra pride and is good and necessary. — *Thrangu Rinpoche*

One of the excellent instructions in these stories of Rechungpa is that we have to be free of the mind's busyness and be free of pride. If we have pride, we can't develop faith and devotion for the lama and the Dharma. Without this we won't be able to practice fully. We have to be able to eliminate the disturbing emotions in order to develop faith and devotion so that we will be able to practice well.



Vajradhara is the Sambhogakaya form of the Buddha. He is holding a Vajra in one hand and a bell in the other hand crossed at his heart represents the union of Wisdom and Skillful Means. He is considered the origin or the first member in the Kagyu Lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.

Milarepa Prepares Rechungpa for the Lineage

Rechungpa had gone to India where he received special instructions and teachings but also developed an obstacle of pride. To eliminate that pride, Milarepa burned Rechungpa's texts on logic and sorcery and tried to impress him with all sorts of miracles. Pride is a very powerful obstacle, but it doesn't arise when one has difficulties and suffering. Pride arises when things are going very well. But when we are having difficulties and suffering, the disturbing emotions such as anger and ignorance that arise. It was when everything seemed to be going well that Rechungpa developed excessive pride.

Rechungpa and the Nyamas

There was a group of disciples called nyamas in Tibetan. Nyamas are Dharma students who engage in their daily activities but on the new-moon and full-moon days they visit their teacher and receive

teachings and practice. The full moon day is called nyakang and this is the source of their name. They assembled and said, “Rechungpa you went to India to receive special instructions in sorcery and in logical debate.” They asked Rechungpa how things had gone. Rechungpa sang a song in reply:

I have met my teacher Milarepa who is a buddha and I have received special instructions of the oral lineage.

I am very fortunate because I have also received the instructions of the formless dakinis.

Additionally, I practiced the contemplation of the view, meditation, and conduct.

My teacher Milarepa told me that the ultimate view is the view of the union of emptiness and wisdom.

But warned that we should not develop the view purely on an intellectual level expressing this view only in words.

This is the conceptual view, that does not understand the true meaning.

We need to become convinced of the meaning of the view by directly experiencing the mind itself.

Thus, liberating ourselves from the disturbing emotions.

From that experience we gain complete conviction of the meaning of the view.

In meditation we need to experience luminosity clarity²⁴ and have the absence of fixation or clinging.

In meditation we just rest in the mind's stability and peace of mind.

But be warned that our meditation could get lost in this feeling of calmness

Mental stability alone will not give us liberation, so we need to create luminosity for the five wisdoms to arise in meditation.

If our mind is dull or agitated, these five wisdoms will not be able to develop.

Therefore, we have to remove our dullness and agitation from our meditation.

When we are meditating, we need to have mindfulness and awareness to free us from attachment and clinging.

But be warned that there is the danger of falling into undisciplined behavior.

So our conduct should support the view of meditation.

Therefore, we need to have mindfulness, awareness, and self-control at all times.

Our conduct should be free of any attachment, and this will result in stainless, unsurpassable conduct.

24. Luminous clarity (Tib. *sa/wa*) is also called luminosity. In the second turning it is said that everything is void or empty. In the third turning the mind is empty but it also has that awareness and knowing which is called the mind's luminous clarity.

But be warned that when we attain and recognize signs of achievement, we will be pleased and become attached to thinking, “Now things are going very well.”

This attachment to these signs prevents us from attainment of our goal of enlightenment.

So to attain enlightenment, we must overcome and eliminate the disturbing emotions.

Milarepa, who was listening to this, told Rechungpa that his going to India to receive the profound instructions and bringing them back was very good and was very beneficial for many beings in the future. He then asked Rechungpa for the instructions of the formless dakinis that he had brought back. Rechungpa said that in addition to these, he had received the long-life practice from Drupai Gyalmo and asked Milarepa if he wanted this as well. Milarepa said, “Giving us these teachings would be very good! I do not need to have this long-life practice for myself because I am an old man. But you’re young, so if you give me the long-life practice of Drupai Gyalmo for the lineage to practice that would be excellent.” Rechungpa then gave Milarepa the instructions of the formless dakinis and the long-life practice which Milarepa later taught to Gampopa.

In this way these practices were passed on and have continued to spread even to the present times. After this transmission Rechungpa stayed on as Milarepa’s attendant and was inseparable from him.

Gampopa also Becomes Milarepa's Student

One day Milarepa sang a spiritual song prophesizing that Gampopa was going to come to see him and that Gampopa would also benefit many beings in the future. When Gampopa arrived, Milarepa gave him meditation instructions. Then one day Milarepa told Gampopa and Rechungpa and the yogi Repa Shiwao to examine their dreams that night to see what the future held in store for them. They should come and tell Milarepa their dreams and he would tell them whether the dream was a good or bad omen.

Early the next morning the first person to arrive was Repa Shiwao who was very happy. "I had a very good dream last night. I dreamt that the sun rose in the East and it merged into my heart." Later Rechungpa came and said, "I had a dream, but I don't know what it meant. I dreamt I went to three valleys and in each one I shouted very loudly three times."²⁵ Then Gampopa came and was very depressed saying, "I had a terrible dream!" But Milarepa said, "Tell me the dream and I'll tell you whether it's a good or bad one." So Gampopa said, "I dreamt that I killed all kinds of people, and I was going around cutting off their heads and other horrible things. This is very, very bad. So please give me a method to purify myself." At that, Milarepa took hold of his hand and said, "This is

25. Rechungpa's dream of shouting three times in three different valleys was a sign that he had disobeyed his teacher three times and that he would be reborn three times as a great scholar. He disobeyed his teacher but did not break his Vajrayana vows. — *Thrangu Rinpoche*

an incredibly good dream! I had very great hopes for you, and it seems that things will go as I'd hoped. You will greatly benefit the Dharma in the future; you will have many students, and you will be my principal disciple."

Then he said that Shiwao's dream was not a very good dream, because it showed that he had very limited motivation and not much bodhichitta. He had more of a shravaka motivation but that the dream of seeing the sunrise merging into his heart showed that his practice would go very well, but he wouldn't benefit anyone else. "Right now, you're not of much benefit to anyone else and you won't benefit many beings in the future. But when you die, you are going to a pure realm." Milarepa said that Rechungpa's dream of going to three valleys and shouting three times was a sign of his disobeying his guru three times. "I told you not to go to India and you went. Then I told you not to study sorcery and logic, but you went ahead and studied sorcery and logic. It looks like you are going to disobey me one more time. In a future lifetime you will become a very great spiritual friend to people."

Milarepa had also received a prophecy from Vajrayogini saying that the instructions of the oral lineage were like a jewel and this jewel was located in the center of Milarepa's heart. In this prophecy Vajrayogini said that if he took this jewel out of his heart and placed it on the head of Rechungpa, it would create a large positive effect.

Therefore, Milarepa transmitted the instructions to his disciple Gampopa who was like the sun, and to his disciple who was like the moon, Rechungpa, and gradually they passed on these instructions to all of his disciples who were like the stars.

Milarepa gave what is called the *Three Cycles of Oral Lineage* of Chakrasamvara to three different disciples. The longest and most detailed Chakrasamvara practice was the Dagpo Nyengyu and which was given to Gampopa. The middle-length practice of Chakrasamvara called the Rechungpa Nyengyu was given to Rechungpa. And the shortest teaching, the Nagamdzung Nyengyu, was given to Minzongrepa.

Rechungpa and the Eight Worldly Dharmas

Rechungpa was regarded as very special by other Dharma students because he had been to India three times and had received many special instructions. He was treated with great respect, but Milarepa told Rechungpa that he was becoming too involved with the eight worldly dharmas because of this fame.²⁶ When we are respected by others, we should take that respect in an appropriate way which means we do not develop pride. If we always get very elegant food,

26. The eight worldly dharmas are (1) being pleased if one acquires something and being displeased one can't get it, (3) being pleased if one is being praised, (4) and displeased if not praised, (5) being pleased if one is happy and (6) displeased if one is unhappy, (7) being pleased if one is famous and (8) displeased if one is not famous.

we can enjoy it, but we have to be very careful not to become attached to this food and develop one of the eight worldly dharmas.

Milarepa said, “If external sensory pleasures benefit our practice, then they are good. But if they increase our worldly attachments, they are bad.” Milarepa continued, “Marpa instructed me to avoid the eight worldly dharmas and to practice without external sensory pleasures. So, I have practiced without any external pleasures and thus have been able to develop some good qualities.” Then Milarepa told Rechungpa that if he could practice without being involved with the eight worldly dharmas, his practice would also go well.

One night, Rechungpa had a dream in which Tipupa was dancing dressed in bone jewelry and giving him meditation instructions. When he woke up, he thought, “I really must go back to India and see Tipupa again.” And so, he went to Milarepa and told him about his dream asking, “I really must go to India again. Please give me permission to go.” But Milarepa replied, “There is no reason for you to go to India. It is much better if you stayed here in Tibet. Tibet has been blessed by many great scholars and siddhas so you should just stay here and practice. Realizing Dharma is something that you have to practice, and you must turn inward in your practice. If you just keep running around and learning teachings on a verbal level, your mind will go wild. You will begin thinking that you are very learned and great siddha. Your mind could then become uncontrol-

lable. It's much better for you to stay here and actually practice.” So Rechungpa obeyed Milarepa and stayed in Tibet and kept on practicing instead of going back to India.

Rechungpa Wants to Leave Milarepa

The disciples and nyamas treated Rechungpa more importantly than Milarepa because he had been to India three times. Milarepa and Rechungpa had separate caves and one day a lot of people came to Rechungpa's cave and offered him a lot of very good food. Rechungpa thought, “Well, they've given me all this food so they must have given even more to Milarepa. I wonder how much he's received?” So, he went to see Milarepa and said, “The sponsors and patrons have come, and they've given all this food so maybe we should hold a sacred feast celebration for everyone.” Milarepa said, “Yes, that would be a good idea.”

Milarepa kept his food in a stone box and told Rechungpa, “My food is in there.” When Rechungpa went to look and saw that it was all really bad food. Seeing this, he felt very unhappy and thought, “People are treating me better than Milarepa, but I don't have any of the qualities he has. So, the best thing I can do is go away because I can't stay here as his attendant and be treated better than him. It's better if I go off to central Tibet somewhere that is far away.” He then told Milarepa, “Please give me permission to go to central Tibet” In return Milarepa sang him a song:

Sometimes I meditate while I am sleep because I have the meditation instructions for transforming a state of stupor into clear light.

*No one else has these instructions,
So, it would be good for you to practice them.*

Sometimes I meditate as I eat because I have the meditation instructions of seeing all food and drink as being a sacred feast.

*No one else has these instructions,
So, it would be very good for you to also practice them.*

Sometimes I meditate that I'm going somewhere and so I have meditation instructions to see all traveling as sacred circumambulating.

*No one else has these instructions,
So, it would be good for you to practice them also.*

I also have the meditation instructions I use when I am working so that all my behavior becomes the true nature of phenomena.

*No one else has these instructions,
So, it would be good for you to stay here and receive them from me and then practice them.*

But Rechungpa said, “No, I really must go to central Tibet because I want to circumambulate Lhasa city and see Samye monastery. I also want to go see Lhodrak where Marpa lived.” Then Milarepa asked:

Milarepa Prepares Rechungpa for the Lineage

When you are meditating that your guru is the Buddha, what do you gain by circumambulating Lhasa?

If you want to see something, you can just look in your own mind.

If you can see your own mind, what good is it to go and see Samye temple?

In meditation you need to cut through your doubts.

If you cannot do that, then there is nothing gained by going to see where Marpa lived.

So it's much better for you stay here and meditate.

You won't derive any benefit from going off to some far-off place.

But Rechungpa insisted that he really must go to central Tibet. Finally, Milarepa said, “If you are going to go, then first you really must receive instructions from me and do a retreat for forty days.” Milarepa then gave him instructions and the empowerments for Vajrayogini practice. When Rechungpa received this empowerment, he experienced Chakrasamvara actually appearing before him holding a vase and giving him the empowerment. Rechungpa was given the empowerments for the Vajrayogini practice with fifteen deities, the practice with seven deities, the practice with five deities, and the practice with a single deity. He received all these empowerments and practiced them. After that he went to central Tibet.

Milarepa's Prophecy

Milarepa said to Rechungpa, “You have received these teachings, and you should keep and maintain them. Ideally, you should not go to central Tibet now because the time has not yet come for you to go. It's better that you stay, but if you are going to insist on going, before you go you should circumambulate your cave where you practiced and do one hundred prostrations and mandala offerings.” But Rechungpa was so overjoyed to receive permission to go that he forgot to do the circumambulations, the prostrations, and make mandala offerings.

Milarepa warned Rechungpa, “When you go to central Tibet, you will be bitten on the leg by a female dog.” Milarepa also told him that there was a Nepalese master called Asu who possessed the Eight Mahamudra Instructions, and he should get permission from him to receive those instructions from Asu. Milarepa said, “It would be beneficial for you to go and receive these instructions from him. They should be the same ones I received, and you should receive and practice them.”

Finally, Milarepa went to see Rechungpa off. He sat on a rock and thought Rechungpa would look back at him. But Rechungpa did not and just kept on walking straight ahead without looking back at Milarepa. So Milarepa thought, “He doesn't have much faith since he hasn't turned around to look back at me.” Consequently,

Milarepa created seven robbers where at a place Rechungpa hadn't yet arrived. When Rechungpa got there, these robbers appeared and said, "We're going to beat you, rob you, and kill you!" Seeing these seven robbers, Rechungpa suddenly remembered that Milarepa had told him to circumambulate his cave and do a hundred prostrations and mandala offerings and that he had forgotten to do them. He thought, "So now this obstacle is occurring!" and closed his eyes and meditated on Milarepa being on top of his head and prayed to him. Then it became very quiet and when he opened his eyes, instead of seven robbers he saw seven yogis. These yogis said to him, "Who are you? Where do you come from? Who is your teacher? What do you practice?" Rechungpa thought, "These are no ordinary yogis. They must be emanations of my teacher." Then he replied that his teacher was Milarepa, and he was going to central Tibet to practice the instructions on the subtle winds and channels. At that point Milarepa appeared directly in front of him and said that he was a good disciple with perfect samaya and had unchanging faith in the teacher. He wished him farewell on his journey and gave him further instructions.

This is the end of the eighth chapter describing how Rechungpa received many meditation instructions from Milarepa and then left for central Tibet.



Tilopa

Tilopa is credited with founding the Kagyu lineage. He was born in India a little over 1,000 years ago and was an emanation of Chakrasamvara. He was a simple cowherd who later became a king. Yet he grew weary of royalty and took up meditation and living as a wandering yogi. Tilopa's most famous student was Naropa who learned the Vajrayana path from him and later transmitted these teachings to Marpa.

Even though the Kagu Lineage is almost all males, Tilopa who founded the lineage received most of his teachings from women deities and practitioners. The story goes that his guru was Matangi (which is a female name

Tilopa

in Sanskrit) told Tilopa that he had mastered all the important practices, but he still had a lot of pride. She then sent him to who was probably a friend of hers who owned a brothel and told her to treat him like a slave. During the day Tilopa did the menial task of grinding sesame seeds to extract their oil for cooking and at night he ferried the customers in and out the brothel. It was this spiritual practice which allowed him to reduce his pride and achieve enlightenment.

Rechungpa Gathers Students

A Spiritual Song for an Old Couple

An old lady asked Rechungpa about the Dharma. So Rechungpa sang a song to her about the nature of the mind:

*The nature of the mind is emptiness, like space,
But space cannot be used as an example because space has no
awareness.*

*Space is just empty, but the mind also possesses awareness.
So mind is not just empty; it is luminous clarity.*

*To explain luminous clarity of the mind, we can use the example
of the sun and the moon.*

*Actually, this is not a good example because the sun and moon are
solid objects, whereas the mind is not.*

*Also the sun and the moon change all the time whereas the mind 's
nature is completely stable and unchanging.*

We could say that the mind is stable and unchanging like a mountain.

But the mind is not like a mountain because a mountain is just rocks and earth, whereas the mind has no matter.

So the mind is empty and clear and stable and unchanging.

Then Rechungpa said it would be good if she could meditate and practice on these facts. Feeling faith in Rechungpa, she asked him to come to her home. In her home was her husband who also felt faith in Rechungpa, and they asked him to create a Dharma connection.²⁷

Rechungpa sang a song to the husband in which he explained that he lived in caves, that his food and clothing were very poor, and he had just whatever he could get hold of while he was traveling on pilgrimages and practicing the different instructions he had received from his teacher. The husband and wife told Rechungpa they had no son, but they were very wealthy and asked if he could stay with them as their son and teacher. They offered him a very large and special turquoise. But Rechungpa said there was no point in his staying with them for a long time because they wouldn't see any of his inner qualities and only become aware of his external faults. So Rechungpa prepared to leave. The word then got around that a great lama was there, and a large number of people gathered

27. This is a Tibetan practice of accumulating auspicious connections. We ask a lama who isn't our teacher to give a teaching so that there will be a karmic bond made. Then in a later lifetime we have a better chance of meeting that teacher.

together and requested him to give them Dharma teachings. Rechungpa then sang a spiritual song about the Dharma which was very easy for ordinary people to understand.

In the god realm,²⁸ when the harvest is planted, it ripens immediately so beings have no difficulty finding food.

This isn't because the gods are skilled farmers, but because in their previous lives,

They accumulated positive karma by giving to others.

Therefore, it is very important for us to apply ourselves to the accumulation of merit.

In the hell realm, if one is stabbed by a sword and killed, one immediately comes alive again.

This isn't because there are skilled physicians in the hell.

It is because of the negative karma that they have accumulated.

Therefore, it is important to meditate on patience and to avoid anger and negative actions.

As soon as beings in the hungry ghost realm eat food, they become hungry again.

This isn't because they have small stomachs,

It is because they have accumulated negative karma in past lives based on their greed and stinginess.

28. There are six realms of samsara: those of gods, jealous gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and beings in the hell realms. Rinpoche says these are real, actual realms and in the early days bodhisattvas went to these realms and came back and describe them.

As a result, their hunger can't be satisfied.

Now we have the opportunity to listen to Dharma teachings and to practice them.

This is the result of our having come in contact with the Dharma in previous lifetimes.

So in this lifetime, we should use this opportunity to practice the Dharma.

A Spiritual Song for a Lama's Life

Having given teachings and advice, Rechungpa left and went to Turlung near Tsurpu Monastery.²⁹ which is near Lhasa. When he arrived, he found a lama building a house. Rechungpa went to stay nearby and meditated there. The lama's wife saw him and went up to him. Rechungpa asked for a noon meal. She thought, "Oh well, if I'm going to give him food, then he must do something for it." So, she gave him some sewing to do and waited. Rechungpa didn't do any of the sewing. He just sat and meditated. She came back later and asked, "Well, have you done the sewing?" He replied, "No, I haven't done any sewing." She became angry and said, "You are asking for food and you haven't done any work, and therefore you are not worthy of being given food." So Rechungpa sang her a song:

The snow lion is sometimes busy and sometimes not.

29. Tsurpu in Tibet is about 20 miles north of Lhasa and is where the Karmapas resided, including the present 17th Karmapa until he escaped from Tibet in January of 2000.

*He's busy because he's wandering around the snow mountains.
He is not busy because he doesn't have any work to do.
When he's climbing around the snow mountains, he has to be very
wary and careful of blizzards.*

*The tiger in the jungle is sometimes busy and sometimes not.
He is busy because he is leaping around in the jungle.
He is not busy because he doesn't have work to do.
But he has to be very careful and wary of hunters.*

*I, Rechung Dorje Drak, am sometimes busy and sometimes not.
I'm busy wandering from place to place and I'm not busy because
I don't have any work to do.
Still I have to be very careful and wary of the Lord of Death.*

*You are like a miserly person,
But you don't have to waste your precious human existence.
Life is not very long, and so you should use that time well.
Giving me some food would be very beneficial for you.*

After he sang this song, she felt faith in him and burst into tears and asked him to come into her home saying, "I must repent and confess for scolding you." He told her that she should meditate on death and impermanence. She asked him to give her his blessing so that she wouldn't waste her human life and stay aware of death and impermanence and continue to practice the Dharma. Rechungpa then went to her house to have lunch. The people working there

said, “Well, we are all working, and this man doesn’t help us at all; he’s just sitting there with his back turned to us all the time. But as soon as it’s lunchtime, he’s here straight away.”

The woman replied, “You must not talk like that. This is a very special lama, a great siddha, and we should respect him and receive Dharma teachings from him.” So Rechungpa gave them teachings and they all felt great trust in him. Having received these teachings, they began to practice the Dharma.

They then asked him to go live in the upper end of a valley where there was a cave that Padmasambhava had stayed in and therefore it had many blessings. Rechungpa replied that he wouldn’t live there, but in order to form a connection with the blessing of Padmasambhava, he stayed there for one week.

Rechungpa Receives a Gift for Milarepa

Next Rechungpa traveled north to where he thought the Nepalese guru Asu would be, but the guru had already gone to Lhasa. However, there was a very ill woman there who asked for his blessing. By examining his own breath and his own subtle wind, Rechungpa realized that he would be able to cure this woman. He gave her a blessing and she was cured. Her family wanted to give him many gifts for what he had done, but he wouldn’t take anything except some dried meat. He took the dried meat, ground it up by beating it

with a rock and put it in a cotton bag. They asked him what he was doing, and he replied, “My guru Milarepa always eats just vegetables and if I put some of this meat in his food, it would be good for his health.” When they heard that, one person thought, “Well, I must give him a lot more dried meat” and said, “I will make this offering to your teacher.” So Rechungpa was given much more dried yak meat that was ground up and put into cotton bags.

At this time Milarepa was in meditation in a cave at Lachi mountain. Because of his vast awareness, he knew what was happening outside the cave and said, “Today, Rechungpa has a very big present for me, and he will arrive here in three day’s time.” After three days, Rechungpa arrived with the ground meat, and they held a sacred feast offering. Milarepa was very happy and Rechungpa stayed with him for a while. All the other disciples and nyamas said that Rechungpa should stay full time with Milarepa. But Rechungpa said, “When I’m not with my teacher, the desire to be with him always arises in my mind. But if I stay with him for a long time, an obstacle for Milarepa’s disciples and the nyamas will arise because they will worship me instead of him. So, I have to go. This time Milarepa did not ask Rechungpa to stay, and after a while, Rechungpa left for central Tibet.

Rechungpa said he was going to leave and travel around the country in different places. Milarepa escorted him part of the way and

told Rechungpa that he could study under teachers, receive their teachings, and if they gave profound instructions, he should practice them. But if they were not profound, Rechungpa should then just forget them. Milarepa also told him that he should go to the Yarlung valley where there was a very beautiful mountain that looks like rice leaves. If he were to stay and live there, it would be beneficial to many beings. However, he warned Rechungpa of being bitten by a worldly female dog. If that happened, he should pray to Milarepa.

Rechungpa Meets a Monk

Rechungpa then traveled north and met a gathering of people accompanied by a very fine, well-dressed monk. When he met Rechungpa, the monk said, “You are a very good yogi, but it’s a shame that you go around these tattered clothing. It would be better if you became a monk.” In reply Rechungpa sang him a song in which he said that the monk was very kind to express his compassion towards him, but he was a yogi and student of Milarepa and therefore spent his time just meditating. If he were to become a monk, it would only be a superficial image. Thus, it was much better that he stayed just as he was, dressing in whatever he had, and doing his meditation.

This monk told Rechungpa that he himself had good conduct and had received many teachings and contemplated them. He said that had studied all the words of the teachings, but the meeting with

Rechungpa was such a great experience, he wanted Rechungpa to give him instructions. Rechungpa then explained that to practice the Dharma, we first need to find a good teacher. When we have found a good teacher, the next thing to do is to receive all of the teachings from that lama. After receiving these teachings, we should then practice them properly. If we can do all of this, we can achieve Buddhahood in one lifetime. By following these instructions, this monk became a very good Dharma practitioner, a great meditator, and a siddha.

Rechungpa Meets his Main Disciple

One day Rechungpa arrived at a guest house and seeing that everyone inside was involved with their own problems and work, he felt great compassion for these people. However, there was one young man who approached Rechungpa and told him that he had come from a place with a cave that had been blessed by Padma-sambhava. This blessing made it a very good place to meditate and that he actually wanted to go and meet the famous Milarepa and his disciple Rechungpa. Looking at Rechungpa he said, “You look like a disciple of Milarepa so you must know Milarepa well.” Rechungpa replied, “Milarepa and his disciples are at presently at Lachi mountain, and Milarepa was in good health.” He then sang a spiritual song to all the people in this guesthouse saying that if they didn’t use their precious human birth, it would be a great loss. He

told them the mind is like a jewel, and if the mind is allowed to fall into samsara, it would be a great waste. The teachings of the guru are like healing nectar (Skt. *amrita*) and if we are lazy and don't practice, then that also is a great waste. Furthermore, our body is like an image of the Buddha, and if we just waste it, then that also is a great loss. So, what we need to do is to use our life to practice the Dharma rather than waste it.

A little while after he finished the song, a disciple of Milarepa arrived at the guesthouse. Seeing Rechungpa, he prostrated to him, saying, "I am very fortunate today to have met Rechungpa." The young man who had been talking to him earlier heard this and realizing he had actually been talking to Rechungpa burst into tears saying, "Do you have no compassion for me? I was talking to you, and you didn't tell me that you were Rechungpa. From now on I am going to follow you wherever you go. I'll be right behind you." Rechungpa said, "It's not that I had no compassion for you. I didn't say I was Rechungpa because I'm going to be wandering around from place to place. So, there's no point in following me. You should go and meet Milarepa because he lives in one place and gives teachings to many disciples. Better go there and receive his teachings."

But this young man insisted on following Rechungpa, and he became Rechungpa's main disciple, Rinchen Drak. So Rechungpa and Rinchen Drak traveled together after that. They went to Lhasa and

met the Nepalese guru Lama Pakpo and asked for teachings from him. He taught them the spiritual dohas of Saraha and the Mahamudra instructions. Then in accordance with Milarepa's prophecy, they went to the Yarlung Valley.

Before they left Lhasa, Lama Pakpo told them, "These Mahamudra instructions are very special and very important. You should practice them well. Tibetans are always receiving teachings from very high teachers, but no one else has these Mahamudra instructions except me. So, you should take them and practice them carefully."



Naropa

Naropa was a famous scholar at Nalanda University in India when an ugly dakini visited him. She asked him if he understood the words or the meaning of the Buddhist teachings. When Naropa said he understood the words, she jumped with joy, but when he added that he also understood the meaning, she wept. She told him he did not understand the meaning so he must go study under “her brother” Tilopa. So Naropa set out on a long journey to find Tilopa and became his disciple. Naropa later became the second lineage holder of the Kagyu lineage.

Rechungpa and Lhachik

Rechungpa Visits the Yarlung Valley

When Rechungpa and his student Rinchen Drak arrived Yarlung valley, they went to the local ruler's house and began banging on the door. His daughter, Lhachik, was furious at the yogis knocking on the door because her father was ill. She came to the door saying, "You yogis come around begging in the summer, you come around begging in the winter, you come around begging all the time." But when she opened the door and saw Rechungpa who was so handsome, her anger vanished. She said, "Oh, who are you and where did you come from?" He said, "My name is Rechung Dorje Drak and I'm a disciple of Milarepa" and told her all about himself. She then invited them in and went to tell her father about their arrival.

She said, "Someone called Rechung Dorje Drak has arrived, and he is very special. I think if you see him, it would be good for your

illness.” Her father replied, “Yes, this is very good because I had this auspicious dream and I’m sure that if he comes in that he’ll be able to help me.” So Rechungpa entered and blessed the father who got better. The father said to Rechungpa, “In Yarlung there are two very famous teachers, Milarepa and Rechungpa. Which of them are you a disciple of?” Rechungpa replied, “Well, I am a disciple of Milarepa, and my name is Rechungpa.” The father was very surprised and told Rechungpa how fortunate he felt to receive his blessing.

Soon after Rechungpa’s blessing had cured the local ruler of Yarlung, he offered Rechungpa his palace and his high-spirited daughter Lhachik. Previously, Milarepa had prophesied that if Rechungpa established a spiritual center on the side of the Yarlung Valley, great benefit would arise for beings in the future. He also predicted that his leg would be bitten by a female dog.³⁰ Both of these prophecies were about to be fulfilled.

Rechungpa lived at the king’s palace in the Yarlung Valley,³¹ took Lhachik as his consort and wife, and stayed at the king’s palace and

30. Milarepa sent him to central Tibet saying it would be beneficial but there would be a danger of being bitten by a female dog. He arrived in central Tibet alone. Then he took Princess Lhachik as his consort, and this eventually became an obstacle to his practice. Milarepa had emanated as a beggar and Rechungpa had given him the turquoise. So, through his having given the turquoise to the emanation of Milarepa he became free of these adverse circumstances. — *Thrangu Rinpoche*

31. Rechungpa’s monastery, Rechung Puk, is very close to Yomo Lhakang which is the oldest building in Tibet located in the Yarlung Valley. I went there when I was very little, but I don’t remember it very clearly or they were in relation to each other. First Rechungpa

became very famous. Everyone said, “This is a very impressive lama!” Many people came to see him and gave him many offerings. Then with his disciple Rinchen Drak he went to see the Nepalese master Asu to receive Mahamudra teachings. Asu gave Rechungpa and Rinchen Drak very detailed teachings called the “white instructions,” the “red instructions,” and the “black instructions” of Mahamudra. He gave instructions from sunrise to sunset and on through the night. The explanations and commentaries were long and detailed. Rechungpa found it very difficult to actually put these instructions into practice. He also found the actual meditation quite awkward and difficult. After receiving these instructions, Rechungpa sang a song to master Asu:

In the beginning, I was able to develop the correct view.

Then I was able to practice meditation perfectly.

Then I was able to develop correct conduct and confidence in my true nature.

All of this was due to the kindness of Milarepa.

But now my view has become faulty, with dullness and agitation have arisen in my meditation.

The eight worldly dharmas have merged into my conduct.

went to live in the Yarlung Valley, and he had Rechung Puk built. After that he crossed the Tsangpo River and headed straight for Nyanang where Milarepa was. When he went to Yarlung, he visited Lhasa and Samye Temple and Phenpo which is a valley near Lhasa which is called Tsumtrong in the text. This is where he went to see the Nepalese master Asu. — *Thrangu Rinpoche*

But you, the Nepalese master Asu, have the key for opening the door to the treasury of the instructions of Saraha and Maitripa. So please open this door and give me their Mahamudra instructions.

Upon hearing this the master Asu was very unhappy and said he was going to enter retreat for fifteen days and that Rechungpa should also stay in retreat for that length of time. Rechungpa's attendants asked him, "Who is this Master Asu you are studying under?" Rechungpa replied that in the past there was a great scholar with many disciples in Nepal. He also had a son, an ordinary person, and this was Asu. When his father died, Asu was not a Dharma practitioner but was a businessman traveling between India and Nepal.

In the process of doing business, Asu learned Tibetan and came to know some translators. He then went to India and received teachings including the Mahamudra teachings of Saraha and others. He asked his own guru when he should begin teaching. His guru told him to wait fifteen years before teaching in Tibet because his Tibetan was not good enough. However, Asu did not follow his guru's direction and began teaching after twelve years.

When the master Asu came out of his retreat, he again gave the Mahamudra teachings on the view, the essence, and so on. But Rechungpa found that he hadn't really developed any realization that

was greater than he had gained from Milarepa's teachings. So he and Rinchen Drak made a mandala offering to Asu and left for Lhasa.

Rechungpa Teaches the Right View in Lhasa

In Lhasa so many people came to receive teachings from Rechungpa that the monks living in Lhasa became very jealous of him. They said, "He doesn't keep any monastic vows like we do, so there really isn't any point in people receiving teachings from him. He shouldn't be teaching them!" Rechungpa replied to them, "This is how people without vows go walking" and he began walking on the water, just like he was walking on land. Then he said, "I just sleep in a state of complete stupor, and this is how I go in and out of the house." He simply walked through the walls of the house. After Rechungpa performed these miracles, the monks developed great faith in him. They listened to his teachings, did retreats, and were able to develop realization.

Rechungpa then went to practice in sacred places that had the power of blessings. A few yogis also came to join him and said that they liked the unrestricted yogi's life they had where they could eat what they liked and do what they pleased. Rechungpa then said, "Yes, a yogi's life is a happy one, but the yogi also has to practice the Dharma. If one becomes distracted from practice, then being a yogi is pointless. So, yogis have to practice very carefully to keep one's

vows. If they are taken too lightly, one will discover that a yogi's life is not really an easy life in the end." He then sang them a song:

Contemplating death and impermanence is good.

But it isn't enough because we also need to practice the Dharma.

We might think that avoiding the ten negative actions and being aware of the faults of samsara is enough.

But it isn't enough because we have to follow the very finest details of karma, its actions, and its results.

We might think that meeting a great teacher and receiving instructions is enough.

But it isn't enough because we have to practice the teachings until we have gained their realization and experience.

We might think gaining stability of mind in meditation is enough.

But it isn't enough because we need to attain something that is more difficult than that — realization of the nature of mind.

Rechungpa Teaches Marpa's Students

Then Rechungpa went to southern Tibet to visit the cave where Marpa had stayed and practiced. There he met Ngok Shedang Dorje who was the son of Ngok Chöku Dorje, one of Marpa's main disciples. Shedang Dorje was a good practitioner and when he found out that Rechungpa was there, he came to ask him for teachings. When they met, Rechungpa told him he'd been to India and had

met Tipupa. He described how wonderful Tipupa was and praised his qualities. Rechungpa praised Tipupa a lot and Shedang Dorje thought, “Actually he owes a lot more to Milarepa than he does to Tipupa. He hasn’t said a thing about Milarepa and just goes on about Tipupa. He can’t be really very good” and decided not to receive any teachings from Rechungpa.

Next Rechungpa went to see one of the four main disciples of Marpa, Tsurton Wangye Dorje, because he thought Tsurton Wangye had the very profound teachings of Guhyasamaja. When they met, Tsurton Wangye asked him who he was and was pleased to hear that he was a disciple of Milarepa. Tsurton Wangye then said, “My teacher was Marpa who went three times to India where he received teachings from Naropa and Maitripa. In particular, Marpa passed the teachings of the father tantra Guhyasamaja on to me. With these instructions one is able to grasp the subtle winds (Tib. *lung*) in one’s hand and I can give you these instructions.”

Rechungpa thought, “Well, this teaching is very profound so I must receive it.” Then Tsurton Wangye taught him the five stages of the Guhyasamaja. When Rechungpa had finally received them all, he thought they were not really all that profound. Tsurton Wangye said, “I taught all the teachings on the grasping of the subtle winds and how to hold onto the subtle winds.” But Rechungpa replied, “Is that it?” Tsurton Wangye replied, “I’m old now, but I will practice for a

few days and then show you some more things.” After a few more days Tsurton Wangye showed Rechungpa various techniques for controlling the subtle winds, but Rechungpa was not impressed. He thought, “These teachings are not very profound. I have learned much more from Milarepa.” So he told Tsurton Wangye he had received much better teachings than these from his own teacher, Milarepa.

Tsurton Wangye then asked, “What kind of experience have you had then?” In reply Rechungpa sat in the vajra (full lotus) posture and with the help of his subtle winds rose six feet into the air and sang a song saying, “I’m Rechungpa and I’ve had a great deal of experience! I’m a student of Milarepa. I’ve been able to understand the nature of the ordinary mind consciousness.”

Then Rechungpa held the subtle winds of earth, and he sank down into the earth up to his waist and in that position and sang another song.

I am a disciple of Milarepa and his teachings on control of the subtle winds is much greater than this.

He can fly in the sky, he can walk on water, and he can pass through the earth.

He can ride on a rock as if it were a horse!

So Milarepa is not just skilled in talking.

But has the actual powers developed through his practice.

Tsurtön Wangye was very surprised by this and thought, “This is so good!” He then said, “In my teachings the actual explanation is very important. As a result, I can give very good explanations, but in terms of practice I don’t have the power for miraculous abilities or the control of the subtle winds. Whereas you, Rechungpa, being a disciple of Milarepa, teaching the Dharma is not the main point for you because practice is the most important thing. Now you have been able to gain this level of achievement.”

So Rechungpa stayed with Tsurtön Wangye and his monks and taught them the Subtle Heat *tummo*) instructions on producing heat in the depths of winter. They would sit and practice in the cold of winter wearing just cotton robes.

Rechungpa Sings a Song to Combat Pride

Then Rechungpa returned to Yarlung and stayed with Lhachik at the king’s palace there. The king said, “I’ve met a very special teacher who gave me instructions and I’m practicing them. I’m wealthy and have everything that I need. There’s no one happier than I.” So Rechungpa thought, “The king is becoming very proud, and this is not good for him!” He therefore sang him a song about the chakravartin, the universal ruler, who has seven precious possessions, but these seven possessions are not permanent.

Instead of the precious wheel, we need the precious wheel of faith.

If we have this faith, then we will be able to be diligent and apply ourselves to the practice of doing good actions.

Instead of a precious jewel, we need the precious jewel of wisdom.

If we have that, we will be able to achieve whatever we or others need.

Instead of the precious queen, we need the precious queen of conduct.

Instead of the precious minister we need the precious minister of conscience because with conscience we will avoid doing wrong actions.

Instead of the precious elephant, we need the precious elephant of meditative stability because with this we will be able to gather the accumulations of merit and wisdom.

Instead of the precious horse, we need the precious horse of diligence because diligence will be able to carry us to a place where there are no more mind poisons.

Instead of the precious general, we need the precious general of hearing the authentic teachings because if we have received these authentic teachings, we will eliminate all our incorrect views.

So, these are the kind of royal possessions that we need.

After Rechungpa's song the King's was able to diminish his pride.

Rechungpa and the Turquoise

Then the king of Yarlung said, “If you are going to stay, I am going to build you a monastery.” So a monastery was built called Rechung Puk³² which was the residence for Rechungpa and the many students who came there to receive teachings. In particular, there was one destitute person who used to come often. He’d come in the morning, and no one knew where he came from and in the evening, he would leave, and no one would know where he went. He kept coming and requesting Rechungpa’s help saying, “Please help me. Please help me.” Eventually, Rechungpa said to him, “Well, what do you want?” and he replied, “What I want is for you to give me wealth and possessions, so I won’t be poor anymore.”

Rechungpa replied, “You can always stay here with me and if you think of something you need, just tell me and I will give it to you.” In the valley there was also an old couple. One day the old man talked to his wife about a very special turquoise stone they had saying, “We are quite wealthy and if we just keep this turquoise hidden it is not going to be of any use to anyone. If it’s displayed,

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people will quarrel and fight over it and it won't do any good either. However, we have a very special teacher, Rechungpa, so wouldn't it be good to give it to him?" The wife said, "Well, that is what I've been thinking all along but I didn't want to say it." So, they agreed to give this turquoise to Rechungpa and invited Rechungpa and many other people over for a nice meal. They gave Rechungpa many offerings and then very secretly so no one would see, they gave him the lump of turquoise. But the king's daughter Lhachik got a glimpse of this turquoise while it was being given.

Then along came the beggar who kept asking for help. When no one was looking, Rechungpa gave him the turquoise and said to him, "I think you had better leave now. I don't think you should stay around here because if anybody or any of my disciples see you with it, it will be taken from you. Hurry go away!" Without anyone knowing the beggar left with the turquoise.

But Lhachik was convinced that Rechungpa was going to give the turquoise to her and kept waiting for this to happen. But, of course, Rechungpa didn't give it to her. When Lhachik didn't get the turquoise from him, she thought, "Well, Rechungpa isn't wearing this turquoise, so I must be the one who gets it." She tried all sorts of methods to get the turquoise, but none of them seemed to work. One day when Rechungpa was away she thought, "Well, I must go in and have a look and see what this turquoise is really like." She

entered his room and started looking for the turquoise but, of course, it wasn't there. But there was another turquoise that someone else had given him a long time before. When she saw this turquoise, she was very pleased with it and stayed in the room trying it on, putting it around her neck, in her hair and on her ears to see how it looked in the mirror. After a while she thought, "I must not let him find out that I've been here looking at this turquoise." So she put it back exactly where she had found it and left the room pretending that she didn't know anything about the turquoise.

At a later time Rechungpa was out one day and some deformed beggars asked him, "Please give us something very valuable that is very easy to hide so we won't have it stolen from us; something very light so we can carry it easily; something that will give us a large amount when we sell it." Rechungpa felt compassion for these beggars and thought, "What can I give them? Oh! I have that second piece of turquoise. I'll give them that." So he said to them, "Go around to the back of the king's palace with me" and then he went to his room, got the turquoise, mixed some *tsampa* (barley dough) and put the turquoise in the middle of it. Then he threw it out the back window to the beggars saying, "Here! Take this *tsampa* but don't eat it here. Take it far away and eat it there." Some of the beggars thought, "We've come here asking this great lama for something valuable and all he's given us is a lump of *tsampa*. Not only that but he's asked us to go off somewhere else and eat it! We

might just as well eat it here right now.” But one of the beggars said, “No. Rechungpa is a really great lama so he must have some special reason for asking us to eat it somewhere else.” The beggars nevertheless started dividing the dough up among themselves and found the turquoise making them all very happy. The beggars went to the north and sold the turquoise for a lot of money and settled there. This place became known as Trangde in Tibetan which means “poor man’s place.” Although they had become wealthy from selling this turquoise, by the time they arrived at this place, they were quite destitute again. So that is how Trangde become known as “poor man’s village.”

A temple near Yarlung was completed and it was going to be consecrated so everyone was going to the consecration dressed in their best jewelry and finery. Princess Lhachik thought, “Tomorrow I will go to the consecration dressed in my best clothes and riding my finest horse. I’ll bring all my servants, and I’ll have Rechungpa come with me because he is so handsome. Also, I’ll have those two turquoise stones because I know he has the one the old couple gave him and the other one I found in his room.” She said to Rechungpa, “Well, tomorrow we’ll go to the consecration, and I thought we’d go on very beautiful horses. And I know you have two pieces of turquoise. Perhaps you can lend them to me so I can wear them as my jewelry.” Rechungpa replied that he’d given them both away to beggars. At this she became very angry, her face darkened, and she

walked out of the room. Rechungpa thought, “This is very samsaric. Her mind has become so involved with these pieces of turquoise. It is a good thing that I gave them away to the beggars because no good would have come to her being so attached to them!” Meanwhile the princess was thinking, “He’s given those two turquoise pieces away to the beggars after we have given him all these nice clothes, fine food, a house, everything. When it comes to beggars, he’s the beggar!”

Usually, the princess gave Rechungpa very fine food, but after this she sent a servant with some very ordinary food. But Rechungpa was busy meditating and therefore didn’t bother to eat. When she found out he hadn’t eaten, she brought him some really awful food on an ugly plate, the sort of food one would give a beggar. Giving it to him she said, “If you can’t eat the other food, then being a beggar, you can eat this kind of food.”

When Lhachik gave him this food, Rechungpa thought, “Oh, this is very auspicious” and continued on meditating. When she came back and saw he hadn’t eaten, she got a stick and began hitting him. Rechungpa thought, “Oh, this is very good.” Rechungpa then took off all the fine clothes that he had been wearing and put on his cotton clothes, got his walking stick, and began to leave.

When Lhachik saw that he was going, she thought, “Oh no! I have made a mistake and caused him to walk out on me. He’s very attached

to his books so I'll hide them and then he won't leave." So, she did this, but Rechungpa said, "I don't care if you hide my books. I'm going." As he began to leave, Lhachik took hold of his clothes and begged him not to go. Rechungpa said, "I've made a big mistake. I left the mountains and came to live in a town. I left my lama and went to live with a king. I took off my cotton clothes and started wearing the clothes of a wealthy person. I left my Dharma brothers and sisters and went to live with ministers and important officials. I'm not going to continue making this mistake."

Using his miraculous abilities, Rechungpa held his subtle winds and moved off at great speed down the Yarlung Valley to where the Yarlung River meets the Tsangpo, the main river running through Tibet that becomes the Brahmaputra. When he arrived there, he found boats and ferrymen. "Take me across the river," he commanded, and the ferryman replied, "You're a strange one! When does a person get his own boat to cross a river? You will have to wait here until other passengers come." Rechungpa thought that he couldn't wait so he took off his cotton robe and laid it down on the water, and using his stick as an oar, rowed across to the other side of the river. On seeing this, the ferryman felt great faith in Rechungpa and rowed to him and said, "Please forgive me for not taking you across in the boat. Please give me meditation instructions." So Rechungpa gave him meditation instructions and the ferryman later became a yogi.

Rechungpa then headed west through Tibet. Someone offered him some dried meat. He took it, ground it up to powder and put it in a cotton bag to take to Milarepa. At that time Milarepa was in a cave giving Dharma teachings to his disciples and said, “Oh, Rechungpa is coming, and he is bringing a present and the whole valley will not be big enough for it. He’ll be here in two days.” When Rechungpa arrived, the other disciples said, “Milarepa said you were coming with a present and the valley wouldn’t be big enough for it. What have you brought? Rechungpa replied, “I have brought this bag of powdered meat.” They made a soup out of it and Milarepa ate it and said, “Ah, the valley of my stomach isn’t big enough to contain this present!” Then Milarepa added, “Tomorrow I am going to give the empowerment of Chakrasamvara of 62 deities. So, everyone has to give a mandala offering except Rechungpa who doesn’t have to give anything.” Rechungpa wondered why he wasn’t required to give an offering, but the next day when he came to the empowerment, he saw that in the mandala was the big turquoise that he had given the beggar.

When Rechungpa saw this turquoise, his skin began to tingle and he said, “What is that turquoise doing there?” Then he suddenly realized, “Samsara has no essence and there is no greater teacher than my teacher!”



Marpa

Marpa was the first person of the Kagyu lineage to be born in Tibet. He learned many languages and took three very dangerous trips to India to bring the Buddhist teachings back. He lived on a farm with a wife and eight children (including Tipupa). Marpa's main disciple was Milarepa and the trials that Milarepa underwent to reach enlightenment is one of the most famous stories in Tibet. He is reported to have had a temper and so he is usually depicted as very angry.

Milarepa's Final Teachings to Rechungpa

Rechungpa Confesses to Milarepa

In the previous chapter Rechungpa experienced an obstacle but it was removed due to the compassion and blessing of Milarepa. Rechungpa came to see Milarepa and Milarepa gave him the Chakrasamvara empowerment of the 62 deities. After that Rechungpa had very stable love and compassion and faith. But if it were not for Milarepa's own compassion and blessing, he would experience obstacles.

Then Milarepa sang a song to Rechungpa in which he explained how his miraculous powers and manifestations had been able to help Rechungpa. Rechungpa's great compassion and his ability to give without attachment allowed Milarepa to remove his obstacles. Milarepa told him that he had manifested as a beggar and had gone to see Rechungpa. Because of Rechungpa's compassion, Milarepa had

taken the turquoise piece as an offering for the future Chakrasamvara empowerment. He said that our happiness depends on other beings because when we help others, it creates the causal conditions for our own happiness. However, if we harm others, this just creates negative karma. Therefore, we should approach the mandala of the 62 deities of Chakrasamvara and confess whatever negative actions we have done and make a commitment not to repeat them again in the future.

At first Rechungpa was not able to say anything because he was so amazed. But eventually he felt the confidence to say something. So, he first confessed his negative actions of body: that his great desire for physical comforts and that he had thus been very distracted by material possessions. In terms of speech, he confessed that he had said many things that may not have been true. He confessed also that he had a great attachment to good food, and meat, and alcohol. He said, "I make this confession to my guru's speech." As for his mind, he said he desired to be happy all the time. This desire to always be happy, gave rise to the disturbing emotions. He also confessed that he wanted to be famous and because of this desire, he had engaged in a great deal of incorrect conduct. Wanting to be an important person caused him to perform many negative actions. All these things he confessed to his teacher.

Milarepa was very pleased with Rechungpa's confession, but the yogi Shiwao said, "Rechungpa has complete control of the subtle winds in his body and has had great compassion for other beings and has done much to benefited them. Why does he have to make a confession?" Milarepa replied that in terms of sensory pleasures there is a certain degree of pleasant sensations that one can enjoy, but if we succumb to them, we become too involved in sensory pleasures, so we have to be very careful. It's all a question of degree.

Then Milarepa gave Rechungpa instructions and also sang a spiritual song describing how his own realizations and experiences developed. Milarepa also sang about how to eliminate obstacles and hindrances to one's practice and give advice that was of great benefit to Rechungpa and to the others there.

Milarepa Interprets Rechungpa's Dreams

Rechungpa saw many signs and omens in his dreams and asked Milarepa about them. In one dream there was a dog that was carrying a load of sheep wool on its back. It was also writing as it was going along and barking very loudly. Eighty-four people came to meet this dog. He asked Milarepa what the dream meant. Milarepa said, "The dog is like a friend and represents one's Dharma companions and because wool is very soft, it shows a very soft and loving mind. The writing indicates having a skill in words and terms shouting barking loudly is the sign of being able to sing spiritual songs. The

eighty-four people coming to meet this dog signify that you will live to be 84 years old.”

In another dream Rechungpa took off his clothes and washed his body. Then he changed into a bird and flew to the top of a tree and on top of this tree was a mirror that he looked into. When he asked Milarepa what that meant, Milarepa said that taking off his clothes signified shedding his worldly life and washing his body was making himself stainless following the meditation instructions. The bird's body was love and compassion. Of its two wings, one was the wing of the accumulation of merit and the other was the accumulation of wisdom. The bird was flying to the top of the tree of bodhichitta, enlightened mind. The mirror was a sign given by the dakinis to show him what had happened.

Another dream was that he was riding a donkey but was sitting on it backwards facing the tail. He was dressed in a *rewa*, (a rough, black cloth made of yak hair). Because he was riding backwards and wearing such a rough cloth, Rechungpa thought this a very bad dream. But Milarepa said the donkey was a symbol of going on the path of the Mahayana and his being backwards on the donkey showed that he was turning his back on samsara and going towards nirvana. Rewa in Tibetan also means “hope” so Rechungpa's wearing this cloth meant that he would be a focus for the hopes of other beings.

Milarepa's Prophecies

Milarepa told Rechungpa that he had given him all of the meditation instructions needed so there was no reason for him to stay any longer and it would be of very great benefit to beings if he traveled from place to place. On hearing this, Rechungpa said, "Have I really received all of the instructions? Are you sure that there are not any more left to be given?" Milarepa said, "The most profound instruction which I still have not given to you, I will give you when you leave. But everything that I have received from Marpa I have given to you." Rechungpa was very happy to hear this and asked Milarepa, "Who is going to hold the lineage of your instructions and how long are you going to live? And what token is there of my having served you for so many years?"

Milarepa said that Marpa had many disciples, but only he had been given the complete set of instructions. To make sure these meditation instructions would not be wasted, Milarepa was spending the rest of his life practicing them. He also had many disciples; some who had achieved Buddhahood, some who had achieved the level of a bodhisattva, and some who had only created a connection with the Dharma. From these, Gampopa would hold the lineage of the transmission of the special instructions of Milarepa. It was prophesied by the dakinis that Rechungpa would also be a principal disciple of Milarepa and have many disciples who would go directly to the

buddha realms without leaving a physical body behind. Because Rechungpa himself was such a great practitioner, an emanation of Tilopa would come to be his disciple and Rechungpa should then give him these orally transmitted instructions. But these transmitted instructions should not be given to anyone who didn't appreciate or didn't have faith in the Dharma.

Then Milarepa said to Rechungpa, "It would be very good if you went to very special and powerful places and practiced there. If you do that, it will be of very great benefit to many beings in the future. You don't need to worry about me because I have complete power over the elements and when the time me to die, there will be no need to instruct you on what to do. Also, the sacred relics (Tib. *ringsels*)³³ that will be left with my body will be taken by the dakinis to the pure realms. You don't need to worry about them either."

Rechungpa thought, "There isn't really any point in my going off to these places. So, I should stay here with my teacher." He then said to Milarepa, "I don't really want to go away. I want to stay here with you!" Milarepa replied, "When I tell you not to go, you go away. When I tell you to go, you want to stay! You should not stay with me. You should go away because if you go to these other

33. Small spherical stones coming in five colors the size of grains of rice that usually appear in the ashes after the cremation of a realized being. They do not exist naturally anywhere on the earth except as the result of sacred activity.

places, it will be very beneficial for many beings. So, you should visit these places.”

Then Milarepa said that now he had given these meditation instructions to Rechungpa, should maintain them, practice them, and never forget them. And he added, “My emanations will come and spy on you sometimes so it’s better that you go now. I’ve given you all these instructions but there is a remaining one that I won’t give you here but give it when we’ve gone some distance.” So they walked for a little while and Rechungpa was wondering what this instruction was. When they reached the appointed place Milarepa said, “Either you are going to die or death is going to come to you, so you must be very diligent.” He lifted up his robe to show Rechungpa his bottom. Because Milarepa had practiced so much sitting on the earth, all of the skin on his bottom had become very thick and hardened. And he said, “This is how you should practice. You need this kind of diligence.” Then Milarepa said:

You should practice inner heat to develop realization.

You should also wear only cotton clothing.

For food you should eat only of meditation.

If you can do this, you will be free of many obstacles and be able to benefit many beings.

You should not stay in one place for too long.

Keep moving from one place to another and forget all about the eight worldly phenomena.

You should impart the instructions of the oral lineage to those with faith and not to anyone who do not have faith in the Dharma.

I am going to pass away on the full moon day of the first month of the Rabbit year³⁴ so you should come back to see me. Until that year you don't need to come back to see me again. You should go from place to place and then you'll be able to benefit others.

Then Rechungpa left, and as he was going, he was able to see Milarepa in the distance. He recited supplications to him. Finally, he looked back from very far away and he could still see Milarepa and the others there in the distance and thought, "Oh no! I can't possibly leave! I have to go back!" Then he thought, "Well, it is my guru's command that I'll help many beings, so I suppose I must do it." With a lot of diligence, he forced himself to go on.

Rechungpa and his Disciples

Now we will discuss the section on how Rechungpa traversed the bodhisattva levels, how special realizations were born in his mind, and, in particular, how he tamed his various disciples using special empowerments and oral instructions. In this way, Rechungpa showed

34. This would be the 15th day of the first Tibetan month in 1123.

students the five paths and ten bodhisattva levels and where they should go to spread the teachings.

Milarepa had made a prophecy to Rechungpa saying, “At this point, you have perfected all the practices and have attained a supreme understanding, so now is the time for you to go to central Tibet. In the future we should have one more meeting, which will be in the year of the hare. At that time, you should come back and meet with me. But, before that time, you should stay in central Tibet.

Along the path going to central Tibet, Rechungpa met many disciples. In particular, he came upon several Vajrayana practitioners performing a fire sadhana. One of the practitioners turned to Rechungpa and said, “This is how we do our fire puja. How do you yogins do it?” Rechungpa then sang a spiritual song to them:

For practice you have to tame the disturbing emotions. Your fire offering is only the taming of external obstacles and demons. For practice what you must do is to burn the inner disturbing emotions. Only by burning these will result in true benefit. For practice you must have the inner wisdom blazing. So just burning these outer substances in the puja will not bring about much benefit. We yogins conduct our fire offering by resting in The uncontrived natural mind. Within this we burn the fire of nondual wisdom. What we burn up is our own discursive thoughts which is the wood of our inner clinging. With this our fire offering brings about the path to

liberation. Hearing this song, one of the Vajrayana practitioners felt very great faith in Rechungpa and asked to be Rechungpa's student and subsequently received many oral instructions from him. After practicing all these teachings from Rechungpa, this disciple passed on the teachings to five hundred disciples. In this way, there was an unbroken Dharma lineage beginning from this disciple. As Rechungpa continued to travel along the road, he came upon a scholar debating with several practitioners. Rechungpa said to them, "You don't need to debate among yourselves. I will resolve any doubts for you." He then sang a song for them:

I am a very happy yogi.

*Having realized that samsaric confusion has no substance,
I developed great renunciation and sadness, and applied myself to
the practice of samadhi.*

*Having practiced samadhi, I obtained the ultimate fruition,
therefore, I am very happy indeed.*

*Because I constantly remember to supplicate my guru, I have
received his blessings.*

*Therefore, no matter what I am practicing, there are no obstacles
arising and my own mind and my guru's mind have become
inseparable.*

*True meditative experience and realization have arisen in my
mind.*

Therefore, I have no need for being bias against other Dharma traditions.

Instead, I have the confidence that arises from understanding my own mind.

Having heard this song, the debaters felt great faith, stopped debating, and said, “What you said was wonderful, so, please give us some advice about the best method for practice?” Rechungpa then sang to them:

It is very wonderful you have attained the precious human body endowed with the freedoms and resources.

However, it is also extremely important to have a mind filled with faith.

It is very good to clearly understand the oral instructions on death and impermanence.

However, even more important is to attend to your teacher and to have great devotion for him or her.

Receiving and understanding oral instructions is very good.

However, it is even better to liberate your mind from the disturbing emotions.

Therefore, whatever practice you perform, do not let your wander, but rest in an uncontrived, unfabricated state.

Always regard your physical body as the body of a deity.

*Always regard your speech as the mantra of the deity.
Always regard your mind as inseparable bliss-emptiness.*

*In the same way, do not let your mind wander from the essential
quality of samsara and nirvana.
This is extremely important.*

Having heard Rechungpa's teachings, many students were able to perfect their understanding.

Previously, Milarepa had given a prophecy that if Rechungpa went to Penul (which is north of Lhasa), he would be able to bring about great benefit to many sentient beings. Many Kadampa teachers lived in Penul. So Rechungpa went to the particular monastery headed by a Kadampa spiritual teacher named Nezurwa. When Rechungpa arrived, Nezurwa was rather condescending and said some negative things about him. Rechungpa responded by singing a spiritual song to him:

*All of you very learned so please listen carefully to my song.
With my meditation inner realization has arisen in my mind;
therefore, I have no fear of your criticisms.
It seems to me that exactly what you need to do is to practice.
In my meditation, my body is engaged in inner heat practice.
Therefore, I have no fear of cold and do not need any kind of
beautiful body.
So, again it seems to me that what you need is to practice.*

You learned ones rely on the reading transmissions of the texts and studying the Buddhist Canon,

Whereas we yogins practice on developing our own inner experience.

It seems to me who you need is to practice.

This song gave the teacher Nezurwa who was listening to the teaching to have great faith. He said, “Previously I had heard of the many great qualities of Milarepa and Rechungpa and now I am extremely pleased to finally meet you. Please teach me the Dharma, so that we can have a dharmic connection.” In return Rechungpa then sang him:

What is my view?

My view is to meditate and to realize directly on the true nature of reality.

I don't particularly care much for the study of words and terms.

Then how should I meditate?

I should meditate directly on the true nature of mind, free from any concept or imagination.

I don't particularly care for developing all kinds of concepts and thoughts.

What is my action?

My action is based upon the signs of samadhi that have arisen within me.

I do not care for doing good actions that are hypocritical.

Again, Nezurwa felt very great faith in Rechungpa and received teachings on Mahamudra and the practice of Vajrapani. Then Rechungpa met another teacher named Chenngawa. Chenngawa displayed several miracles to Rechungpa, but Rechungpa responded with even greater miracles causing Chenngawa to develop great faith in him.

Later Rechungpa went to a monastery that was headed by a teacher named Urtöpa. He walked right in and sat right down among the monks who were sitting in a row. The teacher said, “Uh! This will not do — to have a goat come and sit in the midst of sheep.” He then proceeded to throw Rechungpa out of the monastery. Rechungpa in response with a song:

I offer a song to all of you Kadampa monks and please listen carefully.

One must understand that our own body is the mandala of the deity.

If we do not know this, then wearing yellow robes will not be of much benefit.

It seems that wearing the robes of a monk develops pride so that you can't actually realize that your own body is extraordinary.

We must also understand the true nature of speech.

*If we do not understand this, then we will not become enlightened
by simply chanting.*

When we look at our speech, we feel great pride.

*However, we have not really understood that the true nature of
speech is due to the subtle winds and channels.*

*We must also understand that the mind is of the nature of
Dharmakaya, enlightenment.*

*If we don't understand this, we will not become enlightened
through words.*

*Based on our study of the Dharma, we have developed pride to
this extent our mind has simply become very ordinary.*

Hearing this song by Rechungpa, the Kadampa teacher realized he was wrong, so he sent two monks outside to invite Rechungpa back inside. Rechungpa saw these two monks coming and thought, "Oh no, since I've criticized them by saying they don't have any realization, they're coming out to beat me. If they beat me, I'd better display some miracle in order to tame them and create benefit in the situation."

However, one of the khenpos (senior monks) came out and said, "That was a wonderful spiritual song that you sang. Why don't you sing it again?" Rechungpa replied, "Well, I can't remember exactly what I sang. But I would be glad to sing you a new one."

Rechungpa then sang another spiritual song in which he said that he wasn't very happy about seeing the state of certain Dharma practitioners who were engaged in the eight worldly Dharmas and therefore had not entered into the true path of Dharma. So they should abandon these outward activities and rest their minds in an uncontrived state. Unless they abandon the disturbing emotions, they will obtain neither relative nor absolute fruition. To abandon these disturbing emotions and the suffering they create, they must meditate.

Having heard this second song, the teachers and all the disciples felt great faith, and were then able to practice the correct path.

Rechungpa Visits Five Sacred Places

Milarepa had prophesied that if Rechungpa went to central Tibet, he would benefit many beings and have many practicing disciples. Following his Milarepa's instructions Rechungpa had gone to central Tibet traveling from cave-to-cave practicing, meeting students, giving empowerments, and meditation instructions. He did this through spiritual songs and gave Dharma teachings to many people throughout central and northern Tibet.

1. Visiting Yerwa

In the seventh century when Padmasambhava came to Tibet at the invitation of King Trisong Detsen, Samye Monastery was established.³⁵ This monastery became a center for Dharma teachings and for translating Sanskrit texts into Tibetan. The main practice place for Padmasambhava's students was a cave called Yerwa, "moon

35. Samye Monastery is the first Buddhist Monastery in Tibet and was built under the direction of Padmasambhava in 740-760 CE.

cave,” meaning a very special spiritual place. Eighty famous siddhas gained realization by practicing in retreat in this cave. It therefore had such a powerful blessing, so Rechungpa went there to meditate.

While Rechungpa was in Yerwa, many disciples arrived to receive the Hevajra empowerment from him. When Rechungpa gave this empowerment, disciples often had unusual experiences. Some had a vision of the Hevajra mandala and saw a rain of flowers. Others actually saw Rechungpa appearing in the Hevajra mandala. Still others heard celestial music accompanied by a rain of flowers. Everyone had a special experience at the Hevajra empowerment.

One day, Tsurton Wangye Dorje, one of Marpa’s disciples came to see Rechungpa. He told Rechungpa that he had received the teachings on the tantras and held transmissions and had passed them on to others, yet he felt his mind had become distracted. He thought that he might face great difficulties in the bardo when he died if he didn’t get special meditation instructions from Rechungpa. So Rechungpa gave Tsurton Wangye Dorje the instructions on Mahamudra and Phowa. He received great benefit from these teachings and then Rechungpa gave him the bardo teachings which are the instructions for the transition from this life to the next. These bardo instructions are very important because with these instructions we are able to close our entrance to the six realms of samsara and thus attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. Rechungpa also explained that

in between his stomach and back are the subtle channels³⁶ that carry the subtle winds. With instructions on using the subtle winds and channels Wangye Dorje received great blessings.

Rechungpa had many other special disciples, such as Drogomrepa and Takshorepa, who also received the instructions for these practices. These disciples practiced his instructions and then passed them on to others, thus establishing Rechungpa's lineage. During this Rechungpa was asked to sing a spiritual song of rejoicing for their success and a sang of joy:

How pleasant and happy it is to practice the Dharma.

*But when I see other people involved in non-dharmic activities,
Because this is occurring, I feel it is creating mistakes in the ways
of people.*

So I make sure that I am practicing the Dharma.

Then, once again, I feel very happy.

Presently you are very happy practicing the Dharma.

*Should you begin to lose interest in the Dharma and become lost
in worldly activities,*

*You will later feel regret thinking, "I haven't been practicing the
Dharma.*

So I must be careful to avoid that happening again!"

36. Glossary for an explanation of the subtle channels.

Rechungpa Visits Five Sacred Places

I have seen many Dharma practitioners, but I can also see that many have not entered onto the correct path.

I, myself, received teachings from very special teachers and was able to follow the correct path and so I am very happy.

We must be very careful that our Dharma practice is correct and not just talk.

The Dharma has to be practiced if it is going to be the true path.

I saw a great number of meditators who did not have good meditation teachers.

When I saw that and knew that I myself had such great meditation teachers as Milarepa,

I felt very happy and very fortunate.

It is important to develop devotion.

But for this devotion to increase, be careful that it isn't temporary or it will decline.

There are many teachers making many false claims such as

“Through this practice you will achieve Buddhahood.”

When you investigate, you will find it is false because there isn't any significant Dharma practice involved.

But when I think of myself, I do not make false claims or fall into false external pretexts.

This makes me feel very happy. In the future we should avoid making exaggerated claims or present false teachings.

2. Visiting Chimpu

After singing this song of advice, Rechungpa traveled with about fifteen of his disciples to Samye Monastery. When they arrived, they met Takdor Yeshe who was in charge of Samye Monastery. He said, “You yogis! You don’t have any real Dharma practice because it’s all superficial. You’re really nothing at all! If you yogis are such great meditators, I don’t need to open the door for you. Through your miraculous abilities you can open the door and get in by yourselves, meet the deities, and do your prayers.”

To correct this erroneous treatment, Rechungpa performed a miracle. Using his cotton robe as wings he, flew around Samye Monastery three times and finally landed on top of the temple. When he did that, all of the doors opened by themselves so that everyone could go in and see the sacred statues and thangkas there. When these doors opened, the sound of music could be heard with Rechungpa sometimes appearing in space before them, sometimes he became ten Rechungpas going in different directions, singing songs, and sitting in the cross-legged posture. At one point he merged into space, completely disappearing, and rainbows appeared and formed a tent over Samye Monastery. Then the rainbows gathered together and went in the direction of Chimpu. Everyone was filled with faith in Rechungpa, and they all which went towards the direction of

the rainbows which was some distance away. When they arrived at Chimpu, they found Rechungpa there meditating under a tree.

Upon arriving at Chimpu people wanted to confess their negative deeds and their false criticism of Rechungpa. They then asked him for Dharma teachings. They then listened to the Dharma teachings and the person who had criticized Rechungpa the most became one of his greatest disciples, Tagom Yeshe Dorje. These practitioners then requested that Rechungpa live there permanently or at least to stay there for a few years. Rechungpa, however, could see that there weren't many disciples in that area and that there would be many more students in better suited places, so he stayed there for just 21 days. During that time, he gave Dharma teachings and gained disciples.

3. Visiting Zamgri

Rechungpa then travelled to Zamgri which was the seat of the great female saint Machik Labdron, who founded the chod lineage. He had a disciple who had built a monastery there. It is at his monastery that Rechungpa's lineage was continued as an unbroken lineage. The disciples at Zamgri found that Rechungpa's teachings were very special and profound and so they requested him to sing a spiritual song that contained the essential meaning of the view of meditation. So Rechungpa sang:

Rechungpa Visits Five Sacred Places

If we do not understand the actual nature of appearances, then we are going to continue in samsara.

If we do realize the nature of appearances, then we know them to be the Dharmakaya and there isn't any need to look for any other view.

If we do not know how to rest the mind in meditation, then we have to meditate on the mind.

The mind has three characteristics: luminosity, awareness, and emptiness.

Luminosity means that there is an unbroken continuum of the mind.

Awareness means we know exactly what we are doing.

Emptiness means the mind has no true, solid reality.

If we do not understand these three characteristics, many different kinds of thoughts will arise in us.

However, if we are able to rest the mind in a natural, uncontrived state, this is the sambhogakaya.

In our conduct, we should just deal with whatever occurs and rest totally naturally without any fixed plan or system.

This is called "naturally appearing" or "naturally liberating" conduct.

During this time that Rechungpa was in his room and had a direct vision of the "lords of the three families." These are Manjushri,

Avalokiteshvara, and Vajrapani. Manjushri, the embodiment of all the wisdom of all the buddhas; Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig) embodies the compassion of all the buddhas; and Vajrapani is the embodiment of the power of all the buddhas. Rechungpa saw these deities directly as well as seeing Padmasambhava. He felt great happiness having seen them directly.

4. Visiting Sinmodrak

Rechungpa then went on to Sinmodrak, where there were many different texts on sorcery. Realizing these teachings could actually harm or injure sentient beings, he decided that the best thing to do would be to hide them as *terma*, or treasure texts, until the time was appropriate for the texts to be read. These texts (Tib. *terma*) were entrusted to certain nonhuman spirits who were told to guard these teachings and to give them only to appropriate persons at the appropriate times. Here at Sinmodrak during his practice one day, Rechungpa had a vision of Padmasambhava surrounded by four dakinis. He was so overjoyed at this vision that he spontaneously sang a spiritual song:

*In between the actual words of the Buddha and the commentaries
are the oral instructions on how to practice.
These instructions are extremely wondrous.*

Rechungpa Visits Five Sacred Places

In between the scriptures and the logical expositions are the experiences of great bliss.

I am very fortunate to have great bliss.

I am able to dwell in mountain solitude and retreats where my meditation experiences has greatly increased.

Therefore, I have nothing but disgust for worldly activities.

In between this life and the next life are the wondrous oral instructions of the bardo.

With these instructions I can attain enlightenment in One lifetime.

In between my chest and my back are the subtle drops, channels, and winds.

With this practice of the subtle channels and winds, the blessings can enter my body.

If we don't have this realization, then it makes little sense to be a great meditator.

Many disciples came to Sinmodrak and Rechungpa were able to benefit many beings.

5. Visiting Yukar

Rechungpa also gave many teachings on the mandala of Vajrapani. At this time Rechungpa had a dream in which he saw a mandala. This dream of the mandala had offerings on it, and he realized that

this was a special sign. Milarepa in his prophecy Milarepa had told him that there were five places Rechungpa should go. The fifth place was Yukar and Rechungpa thought that this sign in his dream was that the dakinis were telling him to go to Yukar. He sang a song to his disciples about Yukar and then using his cotton robe as wings, he flew over the high snow mountains to Yukar.

After Rechungpa had flown to Yukar, he went very high up in the snows to a very solitary place where no one ever went. None of Rechungpa's disciples knew where he was, so they went everywhere trying to find him. It was a very long time before they finally located him in a cave high up in the mountain. They were very happy after such a long time to find him again and stayed with him receiving Dharma teachings.

Rechungpa was in retreat there, but because he had become very famous as a highly accomplished master, many people came to him to request teachings. One day when he was giving instructions on Mahamudra, he felt great delight, and therefore sang a song about how very fortunate he was which also explained the path:

*First, I am very fortunate because I have a precious human birth.
Second, not only do I have a precious human birth, but I was able
to meet with the Dharma.*

Third, not only was I able to encounter the Dharma, but I was able to study, contemplate, and resolve all my doubts about the Dharma.

In this way, definite certainty and confidence arose in me.

I was also fortunate in another way:

First, I was able to renunciate samsaric confusion.

Second, having developed renunciation, I was able to abandon all worldly activity.

Third, I was able to attend to a guru who was endowed with great meditative experience and realization.

For these three reasons, I have not only understood the Dharma, but I have been able to attain success on the path.

I have had many benefits from the special meditations:

First, I have practiced and was then able to receive the transmissions of the oral lineage.

Second, by receiving these transmissions but I was able to directly see the true nature of mind without any fabrication.

Third, by practicing this meditation, the realization of nonmeditation arose in my mind.

Based on this realization, I experienced no distinction between meditation and post-meditation.

Therefore, my meditation is unceasing because:

First, I am continuously inseparable from meditation itself.

Second, I have no attachment to this life.

Third, because I have realized this, all external appearances arose as meditation.

When we see the true nature of mind, all appearances that arise in the mind arise as meditation.

I also developed great confidence based on this realization:

First, I have been able to attain mastery over all discursive thought.

Second, the wisdom of great bliss arose in my being.

Third, I have realized the true nature of mind which is beyond separation, accomplishment, and refutation.

Therefore, I have great confidence in my realization and do not need to ask anyone else about the quality of my meditation.

At this point there is no reason for me not to die.

First, I am able to meditate continuously day and night.

Second, experiences of realization have arisen in my mind.

Third, I have realized the true nature of reality which is beyond all concepts.

I have been able to put disciples on the path of enlightenment:

First, I have received the blessings of a very special guru.

Second, having received his blessings, I have also received his prophecy to help a great many beings in the future.

Third, having received his blessings and prophecy, the benefit to these beings has been spontaneous and effortless for me.

Rechungpa then transmitted the power of his experience, realization, and compassion to his students, saying, “May this occur in you as well.”

It was also in Yukari Rechungpa met Gyalwa Lo who was to become his main student. During this time there were many, many disciples who had gathered around Rechungpa. Rechungpa became slightly overwhelmed by all these students, so he and Gyalwa Lo went into retreat. During this retreat very special experiences and realizations arose in Gyalwa Lo. In particular, he was able to resolve all doubts concerning the practice of the subtle winds and channels.

While Gyalwa Lo was practicing this meditation, he had an experience of many bodhisattvas appearing in the space in front of him, while he heard different kinds of music being played. He went to Rechungpa and asked him, “What do these experiences mean?” Rechungpa replied, “This is a sign that the subtle winds have entered into your central channel; however, it seems that your subtle wind is still a little bit rough.”

Gyalwa Lo then asked Rechungpa, “What is the difference between rough subtle wind and soft subtle wind?” Rechungpa then explained, “The subtle wind cannot be too rough, or too hard. For example, if you are irrigating a field, and the water becomes too cold, it will

cause problems to the crops. In terms of subtle wind, there are two kinds of subtle energies or prana: the upper prana and the lower prana. When you are holding the upper prana, you need to hold it completely whereas you need to hold only two-thirds of the lower prana.”

With these instructions on the inner heat practice, the illusory body, the dream yoga, and the luminosity practice, Gyalwa Lo became an extraordinary student.

Rechungpa's Accomplishments

Rechungpa had a retreat center on top of a mountain called Rechung Drak. This was a very wonderful place and staying there and practiced, his meditation experience developed greatly. So Rechungpa felt very fortunate to have stayed there.

There he achieved the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom which is essential for the attainment of Buddhahood. These two accumulations allow one to develop non-dualistic compassion which when developed is wonderful. The sign non-dualistic compassion is that we are longer concerned with “I” and “other” in our inner meditation, but not externally. Therefore, Rechungpa did not need to make any physical effort of body or speech to develop this type of compassion. It just appeared naturally from his inner realization.

Rechungpa continued going to the sacred places, singing spiritual songs, and giving his students many meditation instructions. He also possessed instructions on sorcery, but if these instructions had fallen into the wrong hands, they could bring great harm to other beings. So Rechungpa concealed these instructions on sorcery in a rock cliff in a mountain as a Dharma treasure (Tib. *terma*). He entrusted care of these to a spirit who lived in that area saying, “Guard these teachings so that they don’t fall into the wrong hands and cause harm to others. Sometime in the future when a person of good karmic fortune appears, reveal these instructions to him or her.”

Rechungpa then went to a solitary place to practice and during his practice he had a vision of Vajradhara encircled by Indian mahasiddhas. After receiving this vision, his meditation improved and deepened; he became steeped in samadhi and remained for several days in this meditative state. When he finally emerged, he felt great joy.

Lhachik Repents

Rechungpa concealed the teachings on sorcery as a treasure to be discovered in the future. He also had a vision of the Kagyu lineage which made him very happy. His disciples said that their guru's songs were powerful and had very great blessing. They also found that hearing even a few of the words would cause a change in their experience, so they requested him to sing them a song. Rechungpa sang the following spiritual song:

I am a yogi and the song that I composed comes from my own experience.

You should listen carefully to this song without any distraction and keep it in your mind.

The lineage I hold is the lineage of meditation instructions that benefits the mind.

If these meditation instructions were received using only reasoning, it would be a great loss.

If we look at our body externally, it is an illusory body.

It has no solidity, but actually it is the body from which the body of the Buddha can arise.

Since it is the foundation from which the body of the Buddha arises, we shouldn't see it just as just an ordinary body.

We should meditate on it as the body of a deity, and we should see our own body as the body of a deity.

If we have the instructions of the path of means, we should not just listen to these instructions without practicing them.

This would be a great waste.

Instead, we should apply ourselves with diligence to the path of means and follow the oral instructions.

Rechungpa Buries More Dharma Treasures

Milarepa had told Rechungpa that he should go to the Yarlung Valley and practice Chakrasamvara and if he did this, he would gain a special disciple. So, with this prophecy Rechungpa returned to the Yarlung Valley. In the Yarlung Valley is a mountain called Yarlha Shampo, which looks like an upside down *kapala*, (human skull cup). It is said this is a sacred place for Chakrasamvara practice and where one can receive very great blessings from doing the Chakrasamvara practice. While practicing there, Rechungpa had a vision of Tipupa who was dressed in charnel ground ornaments and accompanied by many dakinis. Tipupa told him that at present there was no one

practicing the instructions of One Taste³⁷ so it would be best if he were to hide these instructions as a terma for the future. So Rechungpa went close to the south of Tibet where there is a very deep ravine and many special caves. There he concealed the teachings on One Taste for a tertön to find in the future. After Rechungpa had a vision of Vajrapani in the form of a garuda, he concealed these teachings of One Taste in a place called Lhodrak Kharchu where there was a local female deity called Genyen Nyönga. Rechungpa told Genyen Nyönga, “You must guard these teachings for seven generations. In the future someone called Lorepa will come here. When Lorepa comes, you must give him these teachings. Until that time don’t give them to anyone else and keep them secret.” So he entrusted the teaching to her with that command.

What Had Become of Lhachik

Meanwhile Lhachik’s father, the ruler of Yarlung, was angry at her for her poor behavior towards Rechungpa. To punish her he said to her, “I’m going to give you away to the first person who comes to the palace tomorrow and you will have to leave this land.” That night Lhachik prayed very hard that the first person to come the next day would be handsome, rich, and important. She must have had very bad karma because the first person to come was a leper. So, her father gave her to the leper, and she was exiled from Yarlung.

37. One taste is the fourth stage of Mahamudra meditation in which all phenomena both good or bad, beautiful or ugly is perceived as being the same.

She had a very hard time being a servant to this leper and had to go around from place-to-place begging for food for her and him.

During this time, she also caught leprosy. She asked several lamas to help her. One lama prophesized that she must have done something very terrible to a special teacher and broken her samaya commitment to him. He said, “Ideally the best thing you could do is to find him and confess to him. If you can’t do that, you should do the practice of Vajrapani. If you can’t even do that, at the very least, you should go to Nyalmay and circumambulate the stupa there.” So Lhachik and her husband decided the best thing to do was to find Rechungpa. She knew which spiritual commitments she had broken and how badly she had mistreated him. Rechungpa also had the Vajrapani instructions so if they could meet him, he could give them the instructions that could cure their leprosy. Thus, they began searching for Rechungpa.

They were told that Rechungpa was living at Yarlha Shampo mountain. When they arrived there, his students told them, “Oh, he was here, but he left.” Lhachik and her husband were very upset, so they went on to nearby Nyalmay to circumambulate the stupa. Discouraged Lhachik lay face down on the grass and thought, “I used to be a princess, and I used to have gold and turquoise jewelry. I had beautiful clothes made of silk and brocade. I used to have a good horse to ride on and I could eat whenever I wanted and now look

at the state that I am in!" As she thought about this, she became more and more depressed and upset.

While Lhachik was lying there, some merchants came by. One was saying, "I came to sell my things, but it didn't work out. I haven't been able to sell them, so I'm going to give up being a merchant and I'm going to practice the Dharma. I'm going to go to the Loro valley where there's a disciple of Milarepa called Rechungpa. I've made up my mind to practice Dharma with him."

When Lhachik heard Rechungpa's name she thought, "So now I know where he is!" She then went up to the merchant and asked him, "Where is this place where Rechungpa is staying and how long is he staying there?" The merchant replied, "You must be going around with a pot over your head. You don't know anything! Everybody knows Rechungpa. He is famous! He's staying in Loro and I'm going there because I've been beating my donkey a lot for no purpose." "Well, how far is it?" she asked. He replied, "If you go by donkey, it's three days, but if you walk on your own it will only take you one day!"

So, Lhachik told her husband, "You stay here and circumambulate the stupa. I'll go see Rechungpa and confess to him and then I'll come back. If I find him and confess to him, we may both be cured." Her husband agreed saying, "Yes, that's a very good idea. You go find Rechungpa and confess to him."

Rechungpa Teaches Lhachik a Lesson

At this time Rechungpa was giving teachings in a cave. He knew that Lhachik was coming, and told his disciples, “Today there is someone coming who broke her Dharma commitments. So, when she comes, throw dirt on her and mistreat her and pour abuse on her. The reason for treating her like this is that she has accumulated negative karma and feels very great regret and unhappiness about it. If you do this to her, she will be purified.” Rechungpa went back to his room and stayed there.

Lhachik arrived and started to approach the place where Rechungpa was living. She saw his disciple Rinchen Drak who had been living with Rechungpa in Yarlung. When she saw him, she started crying saying, “You and Rechungpa just went off and left me. I’ve had such a hard time. But I’ve come to confess to him so would you help me do that?” Rinchen Drak said, “It will be very difficult for you to go and make this confession, so I’ll help you.” He went up with her and as they got closer all of Rechungpa’s disciples began throwing dirt and stones at her. Rinchen Drak pleaded, “No, No! Don’t do this! She lived with Rechungpa for a long time. Her family gave him everything. They lived and ate their food together and everything. So please stop throwing stones at her! We need to meet with Rechungpa.”

Then Rinchen Drak went up to see Rechungpa and said, “Lhachik has arrived and wants to confess to you. Will you let her come?” But Rechungpa said, “No, she can’t come and confess to me. She likes turquoise so much. I have some turquoise and gold, so you go and give it to her and tell her to go away. She has broken her Dharma commitments so she can’t do Dharma practice. There’s nothing to be done.”

Rinchen Drak went back down and said, “He told me to give you this turquoise and gold. It’s best that you don’t come and see him.” Lhachik said, “I don’t want the turquoise and gold. I used to live in a palace and had plenty of gold and turquoise and it didn’t do me any good. It is impermanent, so I don’t want it. If I can’t go and confess to him, I’ll kill myself. It’s better than living out this awful life!” So Rinchen Drak went back up to see Rechungpa and Rechungpa said, “If she really wants to make this confession, she should recite the one-hundred syllable Vajrasattva mantra and get a stupa and a statue of the Buddha made. If she does that then she will be able to make an actual confession for what she has done.” When this message was brought to her, Lhachik was so happy to hear it, she left and said the mantras continually and had the stupa and the statue built. After doing all this she was able to meet with Rechungpa. When Lhachik met with him, Rechungpa sang her a song:

Lhachik Repents

*I always think of the kindness of my guru Milarepa.
You should know that the turquoise piece over which you desired
and we quarreled was on the mandala in Milarepa's cave.
When I saw it, all the hairs on my body stood on end and I felt
very great faith and devotion towards him.
In the beginning Milarepa told me not to go to central Tibet and
then later on he told me I must go.
When I think of him, I think of how very amazing and wonderful
he is.
For Milarepa earth, mud, and gold were exactly the same.
But when I was leaving for central Tibet, he insisted that I take
this gold with me.*

*The reason he asked me to take the gold was so I could now give it
to you.*

*If you use this gold to make stupas and statues of the Buddha,
it will purify your negative karma and the obscurations of your
body.*

*You can use it to get mantras written to purify your speech and
you can use it to get a tsa tsa made to purify your mind.*

If you do all this, I will give you Dharma instructions.

Lhachik had already made one statue and one stupa as purification in order to meet Rechungpa and now she had to have others made to receive his actual instructions. After she finished these acts of

Lhachik Repents

contrition, she and her husband received the empowerments and instructions for the Vajrapani practice. By doing this practice, she was cured of leprosy. Not only were Lhachik and her husband cured, but all their leper friends were also cured.

Finally, after practicing for seven or eight years, Lhachik attained the accomplishments of a siddha so that when she passed away, her dead body was covered with sacred relics (Tib. *ringsels*) demonstrating that she had become a great meditator.

Rechungpa's Final Days

Rechungpa Meets Dawa Drakpa

A man called Dawa Drakpa who was extremely ill and dying who requested that Rechungpa come to see him. So Rechungpa went to help him he gave him teachings on refuge and bodhichitta as well as on the bardo. The man in return said that when he died, he wanted Rechungpa to have his house, all his possessions, and his wife. Rechungpa said, “Oh no! I can’t look after all these things because I have left behind me a life with a home and wife. I’ve given all that up, so I can’t look after them.” The man said, “I can’t just die and leave my wife behind, so I’ll kill her before I die.” Rechungpa said, “Oh well! In that case, I’ll take these things.” So, he got the house and married the man’s wife.³⁸

38. Rechungpa did receive Dawa Drukpa’s wife, and he gave her teachings and instructions. She then practiced these and became a great meditator. Four years after Rechungpa died, she herself died and when she was cremated there were sacred relics (*ringseis*) found in her ashes. — *Thrangu Rinpoche*

Milarepa's Death

Rechungpa continued giving teachings to his disciples. One night when Rechungpa was practicing in strict retreat, at midnight his state of sleep and the luminous clarity mixed together so that he had a vision of Milarepa at Lachi Truwar. He saw a crystal stupa being lifted up into the sky by a host of dakinis who were paying homage to it. There were also many gods and goddesses who were making offerings to the stupa. Rechungpa prostrated and circumambulated it. Milarepa's face appeared in the stupa and said to Rechungpa, "Please come and see me. We have to meet." Milarepa was very happy and joyous. At this point in the dream two women appeared and said to him, "Please come quickly. If you don't, you will not be able to meet with your guru." At this point Rechungpa awoke and remembered the dream thought, "My guru is entering parinirvana."

The cockerels were crowing, as it was the beginning of the day. It was actually a two months' journey to Gungthang where Milarepa was, but through his practice "swift feet" (Tib. *kang khyok*), of holding his inner air, he got there by the next sunrise. When Rechungpa arrived, he saw many rainbow lights in the sky and many strange clouds. He could also see many male and female deities doing prostrations there. When he saw this, he felt a mixture of happiness and sadness thinking, "Maybe this means that Milarepa has passed away." Sitting in meditation, he met a goddess and asked

her, "What is the reason for all these signs and omens?" She said to him, "Are you going around with your eyes and ears covered? Don't you know that Milarepa is going to the pure realms? We are making offerings to him."

Rechungpa then set off immediately to reach Milarepa's cave and close to the cave was a great rock. As he arrived, he saw Milarepa sitting on top of this rock. Rechungpa thought, "Milarepa is still alive! They told me that he had died but he hasn't! Here he is!" He prostrated to him and supplicated him and Milarepa said to him, "Don't come straight away, follow me afterwards. I'll go ahead of you and prepare a welcome for you." Then Milarepa disappeared.

When Rechungpa finally reached the cave, offerings were being made and at the entrance to the cave and there were some new disciples of Milarepa who wouldn't let Rechungpa in. They said, "No, you can't go in! New people are not allowed into the cave." Of course, they didn't recognize Rechungpa, and he felt very sad and upset that Milarepa was in there dying and he couldn't meet with him because the newer generation of Milarepa's disciples were not letting him into the cave. So he sang a supplication to Milarepa.

The funeral pyre was on fire when Rechungpa arrived, and the students saw Milarepa holding down the flames with his hands and singing a song. When the cremation pyre was lit, the smoke and flames formed various shapes in the sky. The fire was form-

ing into the eight auspicious symbols and the smoke formed into offering goddesses and mandalas. Seeing these shapes the people thought, "When the cremation is over, there will be many sacred relics contained in the pyre and many special objects." So, they spent the night circled around the cremation pyre.

While they were sleeping, Rechungpa had a dream that the five classes of dakinis came carrying silk cloth and in this cloth, they took away all of the sacred relics. When he woke up, he called to all the other yogis saying, "Quick, go and open the cremation pyre!" They opened it, looked inside, and it was completely empty; there weren't even any ashes left. Everything had been taken by the dakinis.

Then Rechungpa sang a song of supplication to the dakinis saying that he needed to have some special objects of Milarepa to make special offerings and prayers to. But the dakinis called back saying that the disciples had the special samadhi and the supreme accomplishments given to them by Milarepa, so they didn't need any relics. It was the dakinis who needed something to make an offering to. They said, "We're not going to give you any!"

The disciples ended up without any relics except for Milarepa's robe and his staff. These few things that he wore were kept as relics and divided among his disciples. Rechungpa took charge in giving advice to the disciples and he told them what they should do and how they should practice.

At that time Gampopa was in central Tibet and had not been able to come to Milarepa's cremation. The staff and robe were to be given to Gampopa, so Rechungpa set off to meet Gampopa and give him these things. Since they were both Milarepa's two main disciples, they met at Rechungpa's residence and there they went through all of the instructions that they had received from Milarepa. Working together in harmony they reviewed and checked the instructions they had received from Milarepa to see that they were complete, and they then organized them.

During that time some of his disciples were not acting in accordance with the Dharma so Rechungpa sang to them:

We are all very fortunate so we shouldn't have these differing views and negative conduct.

There is a marketplace full of gurus, but we have been able to study with the very best guru, Milarepa.

There is a great marketplace full of instructions, but we have the best which are the instructions of the oral practice lineage.

There is a large marketplace full of meditations, but we have the best which is the Six Dharmas of Naropa.

So having the best teacher, instructions, and meditations we are indeed fortunate.

At this time we should not be involved in wrong views and activities.

All of his disciples were able to follow the Dharma properly and became very good disciples, with many becoming very accomplished.

The Meeting of Rechungpa and Dusum Khyenpa

One night when Rechungpa was asleep, he dreamt that an extremely ugly woman appeared and said, “An emanation is going to come to see you,” then she disappeared. Later Dusum Khyenpa, the first Karmapa, who came to visit him in Kham in eastern Tibet. Dusum Khyenpa had many special signs and had previously met Gampopa and received meditation instructions from him. Gampopa at the time had about eight hundred great meditators among his students, but among them Dusum Khyenpa had the greatest skill and greatest diligence in his meditation. Now he had come to see Rechungpa.

The meeting between Dusum Khyenpa and Rechungpa happened in Tsang in the western Central Tibet. There he received from Rechungpa instructions on the Six Yogas of Naropa, the instructions on Mahamudra, and in particular, instructions on Red Chenrezig and the oral instructions by Maitripa on Mahamudra. He also received special instructions on eliminating obstacles and hindrances to meditation.

Rechungpa asked the Karmapa that he must come to see him where he was staying. The Karmapa came and was given the empowerment

of the mandala of Chakrasamvara and through this he gained great realization and power. For example, it was said that when a lightning flash struck, he was able to make the lightning turn around and go back up simply by doing the pointing mudra with his hands.

Rechungpa's Passing Away

At the end of his life, Rechungpa told his disciples that all worldly things are impermanent, and that he also was impermanent so they should receive all of the instructions that he possessed, without any being left out. They did this and he taught all the instructions that he knew. Then he said to some disciples, "You must practice this particular practice and having practiced it, you must spread this teaching to other disciples." To another person he said, "You must do that practice and then spread it to these other people." So he gave everyone individual advice on what they should do.

At this point, Rechungpa's sacred biography gives the names of a number of different disciples and what practices they were to do, and how they should spread the teaching. We will skip these details.

Then Rechungpa said his Dharma activity was completed. All the disciples whom he needed to train had been helped and there was no one else to train. It was time for them to help persons in other places and they should begin working elsewhere.

Then the news began spreading that Rechungpa was going to pass away. So his students asked him, "What should we do? What pure realm are you going to go to and what should we do with your body? How should we do the cremation and what offerings should we make?" Rechungpa answered, "As I have realized the Dharmakaya, it doesn't really make any difference what pure realm you pray to. Because my body has become the mandala of the deity, when I die there won't be any body, so you won't have to light any fires for the cremation."

Rechungpa then said, "I have given you my Dharma teachings and you have received and are practicing them, so I will never be apart from you." He went into his own room and was in a state of great happiness. Many offerings were set out, and his students made a ganachakra feast offering together right in the middle of that night. When this feast was over, Rechungpa said, "Now go back to your own individual rooms and meditate there. Tonight, many lights, sounds, and so on will occur, but whatever happens, don't come out to look at me. You must all just stay where you are and meditate."

At daybreak, all sorts of sounds and music and flutes and lights appeared from space, and the smell of perfume pervaded everywhere. There was also an earth tremor. All the disciples in their caves had been told by Rechungpa that whatever happens, they should just stay in their rooms and meditate and not look, but they

went out to just have a tiny, little peek outside. In the sky, they sometimes could see dakinis: sometimes half a dakini, sometimes a whole dakini. Sometimes they could see Rechungpa there in the sky as well, sometimes appearing as Chakrasamvara, sometimes as different things. In time these appearances kept going higher and higher into the sky.

At daybreak, all the disciples went to Rechungpa's cave and found that their teacher was gone and there was no sign of him. All that was left were his clothes and his seat. He had gone to the pure realms without leaving any physical body behind. He hadn't died in the ordinary way by becoming ill, gradually dying, and then becoming a corpse, but died without any sign of illness but rather he had immediately left to the pure realms.

All of the disciples sang spiritual songs or made supplications and prayers to Rechungpa. Although there was no image to be seen during the day, a voice came from space saying, "If you pray to the pure realm of Vajrapani, you will receive Rechungpa's blessings." So, all the students who were there gathered together and did supplications and prayers to Rechungpa and preserved all of the teachings that been had given them. They maintained and practiced these teachings and transmitted them to others so that all of Rechungpa's teachings were able to spread and continue to exist to this day.

Rechungpa's Lineage

Originally the teachings of Rechungpa were passed on by his disciples. Later on, a separate tradition of Rechungpa ceased to exist because lamas of other traditions received these teachings causing his teachings and instructions to spread to other traditions, particularly, to the Karma Kagyu and the Drukpa Kagyu schools. The First Drukchen Rinpoche, Tsangpa Gyare, passed the oral instructions of Rechungpa on to the Drukpa Kagyu lineage. Dusum Khyenpa, the first Karmapa, passed them on to the Karma Kagyu lineage.

In this biography we have found that Rechungpa encountered a great number of obstacles and difficult situations. For example, when Milarepa was dying, Milarepa's students stopped him from going into Milarepa's cave. We hear about these obstacles, but the main point of this text is one of meditational accomplishment, of the oral instructions, and the validity of the instructions because when Rechungpa died, using these practices he was able to enter the pure realms. This story also shows the power of Dharma practice and the power of the oral instructions. If we can practice the Dharma, then as they say in Tibetan, "we create our own benefit." What we are doing in Dharma practice is not for someone else, but we are trying to help ourselves and the person who can help is us. So, we have to help ourselves. If we wish to do that, then we should carefully practice the Dharma.

Rechungpa's Final Days

Before Rechungpa passed away, many different kinds of signs and omens occurred. His disciples came and asked him what these signs meant. Rechungpa replied, “Well, for me they mean something really good, but who knows what it means for you.” He knew he was going from a state of happiness and bliss to a state of even greater happiness and bliss. This then shows the power of the Dharma. If we are able to practice the Dharma, then we can also achieve this state.

Rechungpa died at the age of 78 in the year 1161 CE.



This is Rechung Puk Or “Rechungpa’s cave” which was a large monastery which at its height held about 1,000 monks. It is located in the Yarlung Valley at the confluence of two major rivers.

This photograph of Rechungpa’s monastery was taken in 1932 before the Cultural Revolution when it was completely destroyed. Above this monastery is a cave that Rechungpa meditated in.



Milarepa was Tibet's greatest saint. As a younger man he killed over a dozen relatives in a hailstorm using black magic out of revenge their misbehavior against him and his mother. He then repented and became Marpa's disciple. In order to purify Milarepa's negative karma, Marpa put him through many arduous trials. Milarepa overcame these ordeals and received the teachings from Marpa. He then spent the rest of his life in retreat in caves in the high Himalayas. He passed his teachings on to Rechungpa and Gampopa who helped found what is now the Kagyu lineage.

Rechungpa's Disciples

In general, Rechungpa had numerous disciples and thirteen spiritual Sons.³⁹ These possessed the complete initiation, and the teachings had penetrated their mind, a cardinal doctrine of the Kagyupa, consisting of an introspective study of one's own mind.

1. Lobi Gopa

Lobi Gopa was a native of upper Nal. He offered Rechungpa a golden mandala and obtained from him the complete precepts and initiation. He was able to direct his vital breath (*prana*) into the central channel and had numerous visions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. He also had a vision of yidam deities without their consorts. He was known as being a great Master of Yoga. A daughter of Machig

39. Thrangu Rinpoche did not have time to cover the topic of Rechungpa's disciples, so we have included in this chapter a text which comes from the *The Blue Annals* written by Lotsawa Zonnudpal and translated by George Roerich because it is one of the few texts in English on this topic. We have greatly reduced and simplified this text and included only eight of the twelve main disciples. The original text contained a large number of persons, locations, and practices all in Wylie script of each of these disciples.

Yango attended him, and for 25 years Lobi Gopa acted as an assistant to Rechungpa and supervised his retinue.

2. Sangpa Sumpa

The Venerable Sangpa was born as the eldest son of the five sons. He ran away before his marriage ceremony, taking with him a large turquoise, and proceeded to Satak Tsel to become ordained.

After his ordination he spent one year there and then went to the Rechungpa was staying and he was filled with devotion. Having cut the fourth finger off his right hand, he made an offering lamp out of it and offered it to Rechungpa. He met Rechungpa when he was 21 and served as his domestic attendant.

Every time he saw Rechungpa, he prostrated three times and also promised to prostrate a hundred times every day. Because his parents had become lay supporters of Rechungpa and he had come from afar to study the Dharma, it was said, in Sangpa Sumpa's absence that Rechungpa had abstained from giving to others even a single lesson on the Dharma or precepts during his absence. After Rechungpa passed away, he occupied Rechungpa's chair and became famous on the north side of the Ganges River. He also had many followers in India and Tibet.

Sangpa was characterized by mercy and gave help to all living beings. There was not a single man, from high lamas to women and

children, who slandered or mistrusted him. It was said that a single explanation by him was better than the listening to many hidden precepts and doctrines at the feet of other teachers.

Though he had great knowledge, he spoke with humble speech. The Master Pagmo Gampa said, “Sangpa was an incarnation of a great Indian siddha, but because of the absence of auspicious omens, his benefit was not great.” He and Rechungpa had several disciples in common.

3. Khyung Shangpa

Khyung Tshangpa was born at Tolung in 1115. He heard the exposition of the Madhyamaka system from Satsap Lotsawa but did not have sufficient time to complete his studies under him or the time to hear the exposition of the “Six Treatises.” He studied the Prajnaparamita and the Guhyasamaja according to the system of Manjushri and also the Guhyasamaja according to the method of Nagarjuna.

He received and studied many more texts but was unable to comprehend their hidden precepts. He then visited Drigom Lingkhapa and received the hidden precepts from him and by practicing Tummo. He used the Gyulü Milam to serve as his guide. Gyulü Milam said, “You are foolish because Rechungpa is residing inside you and instead you have come to me.” Khyung Shangpa then

visited Rechungpa and requested an interview. His students said, "Rechungpa is disgusted with priests so you probably will not be able to meet him." However, Rechungpa said, to Milarepa, "In my dream, I saw a moon of little luster which told me that a shining sun is approaching." Milarepa replied, "The moon indicates your disciple and the sun represents yourself. I shall help you by giving you some hidden precepts." Within 90 days Milarepa gave him all the oral instructions and he held nine tantric feasts (*ganachakra*) and said to Rechungpa, "Now do not stay here, but go! Until my death, you should keep your teacher and these hidden precepts secret. Afterwards, you can bestow them from kings to lepers; whoever is fit to receive them. But do not sell these precepts!"

Shangpa stayed for seven years at Khyung Tsheng with no one paying homage to him. At Khyung Tsheng he practiced the transference of the conscious into a pigeon and said, "There is no hindrance in these visual objects." He also had numerous visions of yidam deities. His blood turned into milk, his bodily defilements vanished, and he developed a high awareness that did not differentiate between samahita and prisithalabdha wisdoms, as well as innumerable other faculties. He died at the age of 62 in the year 1176. After his cremation numerous relics were left behind.

4. Machig Ong Jo

Machig Ong jo, a disciple of Khyung Shangpa, was born at O-yug. She studied and meditated from childhood. From Khyung Shangpa, she received the complete hidden precepts of the Oral Tradition. She also achieved high realization of the true nature phenomena.

She also practiced the six paramitas. For the first paramita of generosity she offered all her possessions to her teacher and acted as his tantric assistant during the initiation rites. For the paramita of exertion she observed the moral precepts of the three kinds of vows (Pratimoksha, Bodhisattva and Tantric vows). For the third paramita of patience she developed the realization of the true nature of phenomena. For the fourth paramita of exertion, she constantly practiced the creation and completion stages. With this paramita of exertion she developed mental concentration so that she could contemplate the inseparability the teacher in the pure mirror of her own mind. For the sixth paramita of wisdom she developed the wisdom to realize that the nature of phenomenal existence had no origination and no characteristic marks.

5. Gedingpa

Gedingpa was ordained in his youth and studied extensively the Madhyamaka system and the Domain of Practice (Tib. *chöchog*) at the feet of many scholars. He also heard many tantras as well

as other texts at the feet of the acarya Gyamapa and others. He obtained from Khyung Tshangpa the Oral Tradition (Tib. *nyengyü*) and acquired the understanding of ultimate reality and developed having permanent concentration.

6. Tsultrim Jungné

In his youth Tsultrim Jungné received beginning ordination and at the age of 20 he received the final monastic ordination. He studied the Kadampa doctrine and the Vinaya along with many tantras and the complete Oral Tradition. He became expert in the understanding of the dharmata and the practice of transforming the bardo which transforms bardo of death into the dharmakaya, the intermediate bardo into the Sambhogakaya, and the entry into the womb of the next mother into the nirmanakaya. Through his luminous clarity he was able to perceive the passing of Rechungpa. Through his bodhichitta activity he labored extensively for the welfare of others. He also taught the Oral Tradition extensively and propagated it.

7. Zhang Lotsapa

At the age of 14, Zhang Lotsawa learned to read from the Gyagom and entered Buddhism by studying the Six Doctrines of Naropa and other texts. From a famous tertön of the Nyingma school, he obtained the secret doctrine of terma. From Rwa Sanggye he received the Hevajra Tantra teachings.

Rechungpa's Disciples

From Repa Wangne he obtained numerous precepts of Rechungpa, including the Kalachakra system and the cycle of Yamari and the Cycle of Hevajra and many other teachings. On three occasions he invited Machtig Orlo and received from her the complete Oral Tradition. She also gave him a pill made of sacred ingredients containing six bone ornaments and other objects and she also foretold future to him. From a disciple of Sanspa Marston, he obtained an introduction into the Path of Means.

He had seventy teachers from whom he obtained instructions in the Dharma. He journeyed to Ivmmndia and Nepal where he studied Sanskrit Grammar and Logic. He used to say that he had obtained more than 200 tantras and their respective commentaries, and some 84 complete rites of initiation. He also obtained the Cycle of Tara as well as her mandala rites and other ceremonies.

While he was teaching the commentary on the Tantra to Thangston, he discovered that he had left the text of the commentary somewhere else. He made prayers to his teacher, and within a single moment the knots (hidden meanings) of the symbolical language of all the Tantras and commentaries were revealed to him.

He offered prayers to Khyuh-tsharlpa and was initiated in his dream, and then became an excellent poet. When he was being initiated into the Chakrasamvara by the mahapandita Shakyasri, an earth-

quake took place. When he was listening to the exposition of the Guhyasamaja, Chakrasamvara himself expounded the Tantra to him.

When he was listening to the Yamari tantra, the yellow Chenrezig preached the Doctrine to him assuming different mudras.

In his dream he met the great brahmana Saraha, who preached the Dharma to him. He drove away the magic influence of the leprosy demon with the help of the badu kordok ceremony (one of oldest rites for driving away demons).

In Nepal he defeated the magic influence of heretics by the means of a courageous deed. He made many translations, including that of the Dorje Trengwa and other texts, as well as composed many termas (to be hidden and later revealed).

At Bongron he had a vision of Cakrasamvara. He obtained an inseparable understanding of the undifferentiated relation between subject and object of all the elements of phenomenal existence.

He proceeded to the pure land of Heruka in the year 1237 CE.

8. Seton Joro

From his childhood Seton had heard from his mother the *Life Story of Milarepa* and used to spend his time alone in a cave. He studied the Cycle of Maya and the Yahdag. He listened to the exposition of the Dzogchen and thus realized the nature of the mind. He obtained

the Guide on Radatsa (symbolical language taught by Naropa to Marpa) and penetrated the meaning of the Mahamudra. He also listened to instructions in the Lamdre (Path and Fruition) realizing Mahamudra. At the age of 32, he obtained the transmission and teachings of Chakrasamvara and Vajrayogini as well as the Six Dharmas of Naropa and chod. He learned from Dorje Trenpa and realized that all phenomenal existence to be a dream and an illusion. In short, all his actions belonged to the sphere of bodhichitta.

The Five Major and Five Minor Subtle Winds

These major subtle winds (Tib. *lung*) provide the energy for most bodily functions. The subtle energies control many of the bodily functions and are therefore intensively studied in Tibetan medicine.

1. The life-supporting wind is located in the heart. This subtle wind regulates functions such as swallowing, inhalation, sneezing, concentration and stabilizing the mind. This life-supporting wind assists breathing and is located in heart center.

2. The upward-moving wind is located in the chest and thorax. This subtle wind is responsible for speech, general body energy and health, maintaining the skin, and mental diligence. It is located in the mouth and nose through which the wind passes upwards or downwards and controls the faculty of speech which has its seat in the chest.

3. The downward-clearing wind is located in the rectum, bowels, and perineal region. Its function is to expel feces, urine, semen, and menstrual blood. If a woman is pregnant, this subtle wind also nurtures the fetus and regulates uterine contractions during labor.

4. The all-pervading wind resides in the heart, this subtle wind is responsible for all the motor activities of the body such as lifting, walking, opening the mouth, closing the eyelids, and so on.

5. The fire-accompanying wind is found in the stomach and abdominal area and regulates digestion and overall metabolism.

Glossary

Amitayus. “Boundless Life” sambhogakaya aspect of Amitabha. He is usually depicted sitting and holding in his hands a vessel containing the nectar of immortality. Amitayus is one of the three long life deities.

amrita. A blessed substance which can cause spiritual and physical healing.

Avalokiteshvara (Tib. *Chenrezig*). See Chenrezig.

bardo. Literally, “interval.” There are six types of bardos, but most commonly the bardo refers to the time between death and rebirth in a new body.

bodhichitta. Literally, “mind of enlightenment.” There are two kinds of bodhichitta: absolute bodhichitta, which is completely awakened mind that sees the emptiness of phenomena, and rela-

tive bodhichitta which is the aspiration to attain Buddhahood in order to free all beings from the suffering of samsara.

bodhisattva. An individual who is committed to the Mahayana path of practicing compassion and the six paramitas in order to achieve Buddhahood and free all beings from samsara. More specifically, those with supreme motivation to achieve liberation for the sake of all sentient beings and who are on one of the ten bodhisattva levels that culminates in Buddhahood.

bodhisattva levels (Skt. *bhumi*). The levels or stages a bodhisattva goes through to reach enlightenment. These consist of ten levels in the sutra tradition and thirteen in the tantra tradition.

bodhisattva vow. The vow to practice in order to bring all sentient beings to Buddhahood.

Bon. The religion that was prevalent in Tibet before Buddhism was introduced in the seventh century. This religion is still practiced in Tibet.

Chakrasamvara. A meditational deity belonging to the annutara-tantra set of teachings.

chakravartin Literally, “the one who turns the wheel.” A king also called a universal monarch who propagates the Dharma that begins a new era.

Chenrezig. The bodhisattva of compassion and the patron deity of Tibet. His mantra is OM MANI PEDME HUNG and H.H. the Dalai Lama and H.H. Karmapa are said to be emanations of Chenrezig.

Chod practice. Pronounced “chö.” Literally “to cut.” A Vajrayana practice designed to reduce ego-clinging and disturbing emotions by visualizing one’s body and cutting it up and offering it to spirits. It is one of the eight practice lineages of Buddhism in Tibet.

clear light (Tib. *ösel*). According to tantric teachings the clear light is perceived the subtle state of mind when realization is attained.

dakini. A female deity who protects the tantric doctrine. The term is also used for a woman who has achieved high realization.

Dharma. The teachings of the Buddha (also called Buddha-dharma).

dharmas. With a lower case this means phenomena.

Dharma treasure. See **terma**.

dharmakaya. One of the three bodies or kayas. The third dharmakaya is phenomena as it truly is. See kayas, three.

dharmata. Also translated as “suchness” or “the true nature of things” or “things as they are.” This is phenomena as perceived by a completely enlightened being that does not have any distortion or obscuration so one can say it is “ultimate reality.”

disturbing emotion (Skt. *klesha*, Tib. *nyön mong*). Also called “afflictions” or “poisons.” These are mental factors that produce suffering. The five main disturbing emotions are attachment, anger, ignorance of the true nature of things, pride, and jealousy.

Doha. See **spiritual song**.

Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193). The first of the Karmapas. He was a student of Gampopa and founder of the Karma Kagyu lineage.

Dzogchen. Literally, “great perfection” and also known as *ati-yoga*. The highest of the nine *yanas* according to the Nyingma tradition.

eight worldly dharmas. These behaviors keep one from entering the path to realization. They are being attached to (1) material gain, (2) pleasure, (3) praise, (4) fame, and an avoidance of (5) loss, (6) pain, and (7) causing blame, and (8) causing defamation.

empowerment. A Vajrayana ritual given by a qualified lama who grants permission to do a particular spiritual practice.

Formless Dakini teachings. See *footnote 13*.

Gampopa (1079-1153). Gampopa and Rechungpa were Milarepa's two main students. Gampopa established the monastic foundation of the Kagyu lineage. His best-known work is the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*.

Ganachakra. A ritual offering usually done at the end of deity practice.

Garuda. A mythical bird that hatches fully grown.

Guhyasamaja tantra. This is the “father tantra” of the anuttara-yoga tantras which is the highest of the four tantras. Guhyasamaja is the central deity of the vajra family.

healing nectar (see **amrita**).

Hevajra tantra. The “mother tantra” of the anuttara-yoga tantras which is the highest of the four tantras. Hevajra tantra was taught to Tilopa who taught Naropa who passed it on to Marpa. Marpa also received instructions in this tantra from Maitripa.

illusory body. See the **Six Yogas of Naropa**.

Kadampa. One of the major lineages in Tibet founded by Atisha (982-1054).

Kagyü. One of the four major lineages of Buddhism in Tibet founded by Marpa. The other three are Nyingma, Sakya, and Gelug.

karma. Literally “action.” Karma is a universal law that when one does a wholesome action one’s circumstances will improve and when one does an unwholesome action negative results will inevitably occur from the act.

kayas, three. The three bodies of the Buddha. The dharmakaya, or “truth body,” is the complete wisdom of the Buddha, which is unoriginated wisdom beyond form. It manifests in the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The sambhogakaya or “enjoyment body,” appears only to bodhisattvas, usually when they reside in one of the pure lands. The nirmanakaya, or “emanation body,” manifests in our world and can be seen by ordinary beings. The Shakyamuni Buddha was the nirmanakaya body of the Buddha.

khenpo. A title given to someone who has completed many years of study of Buddhist philosophy and logic. It can also mean an abbot of a monastery.

kyang. A wild Tibetan ass.

klesha. See **disturbing emotions.**

luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*). The second Mahayana vehicle taught that everything is empty or insubstantial on the relative and ultimate level of reality. The third turning holds that phenomena are empty just on the relative level of reality, but this emptiness is not completely void because it has a knowing quality called lucidity. This luminous clarity allows all phenomena to appear in the mind.

Machig Labdrön (1103-1201). The Tibetan female saint who established chod practice, one of the eight main practice lineages. Mahamudra. Literally “great seal.” All phenomena are sealed by the primordial perfect true nature. This is a high view and practice of directly realizing the true nature of the mind. The Indian siddha Saraha (10th century) is considered the first person of this meditation lineage.

mahasiddha. A realized tantric practitioner.

Mahayana. Literally, “great vehicle.” The teachings of the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, which emphasize emptiness, compassion, and bodhichitta.

Maitripa. (986-1063) The principal Indian master of Mahamudra who was one of the teachers of Marpa the Translator. He taught Marpa the path of liberation through Mahamudra practice.

mandala offering. One of the four Ngöndro practices. See Ngöndro.

Manjushri. A meditational deity representing discriminating awareness (*prajna*). He is usually depicted holding a sword in the right hand and a Dharma text in the left.

Milarepa (1040-1123). A yogic disciple of Marpa who attained enlightenment in one lifetime. His two principal students were Rechungpa and Gampopa.

naga. A water spirit that can take the form of a serpent and is often the guardian of underground treasures such as texts or jewels.

Naropa (956-1040). An Indian scholar and master who is best known for transmitting many Vajrayana teachings to Marpa who then took them back to Tibet.

ngöndro (Pronounced “nundro”). The four Vajrayana preliminary practices involving about 100,000 refuge prayers and prostrations, 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras, 100,000 mandala offerings, and 100,000 guru yoga practices.

nirvana. Literally, “extinguished.” The state of enlightenment beyond samsara where delusion and suffering has been extinguished.

one-taste. The third level of the four levels of Mahamudra, the yoga of one-taste is the equal taste of all phenomena as the inseparability of mind and appearances.

Padmasambhava (Tib. *Guru Rinpoche*). He was invited to Tibet in the eighth century CE and is known for pacifying the non-Buddhist forces and founding the Nyingma lineage.

pandita. A great scholar.

paramitas, six. In Sanskrit paramitas mean “perfections” and the Tibetan they mean “gone to the other side.” These are six practices of the Mahayana path: transcendent generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, and knowledge (Skt. *prajna*). The ten paramitas are these plus aspirational prayer, skillful means, power, and primordial wisdom (Tib. *yeshe*).

parinirvana. The time when an enlightened being leaves their physical body.

perfections, six. See **paramitas, six.**

Phowa. The tantric practice of the ejection of consciousness at the time of death.

prajna. Literally, “perfect knowledge.” In the Mahayana context this refers to the knowledge that realizes emptiness.

prana (Tib. *lung*). The subtle energy that flows through the subtle channels in the body.

rolong. A Tibetan zombie.

sacred biography. These biographies are special biographies in that they relate the conduct and spiritual practices that bring the practitioner to realization.

Cremation sacred relics (Tib. *ringse*). Small spherical stones the size of grains of rice that usually appear in the ashes after the cremation of a realized being. They do not exist anywhere on the earth except as the result of sacred activity.

sadhana. A tantric ritual text that details how to attain meditative realization of a specific deity.

samadhi. Meditative absorption or one-pointed meditation.

samaya. Vows or commitments made in the Vajrayana which can be to a teacher or to a practice.

sambhogakaya See **the three kayas**.

samsara. Literally, “to turn.” Cyclic existence in which beings experience continuous rebirth and suffering as a result of their karma and disturbing emotions. It is contrasted to nirvana.

Samye Monastery. The first Buddhist monastery built in Tibet around 750 to 770 CE.

Saraha. One of the eighty-four mahasiddhas of India known for his spiritual songs on Mahamudra.

Shravaka Literally, “one who hears.” A Foundation vehicle practitioner (arhat) who has realized the nonexistence of personal self.

siddha. An accomplished Buddhist practitioner.

siddhi. Spiritual attainments resulting from Dharma practice.

six realms of samsara. The six possible kinds of rebirths for beings in samsara: the god realm where gods possess the disturbing emotion of pride, the jealous god realm characterized by jealousy, the human realm which is considered advantageous because one has the possibility of achieving enlightenment, the animal realm characterized by stupidity, the hungry ghost realm characterized by great craving, and the hell realm characterized by great anger.

Six Yogas of Naropa. Six special yogic practices that were transmitted from Naropa to Marpa: the subtle heat, the illusory body, the dream yoga, the luminosity practice, the ejection of consciousness, and the bardo practice. These are practiced most often in the three-year retreat.

Skillful means. Generally, skillful means highly developed teachers teach the Dharma skillfully, taking into consideration the various needs, abilities, and shortcomings of their students. In relation to Vajrayana practice, skillful means refers to the special practices that manipulate the subtle winds and channels.

spiritual song (Tib. *gur*). Often called a doha. A song of realization spontaneously composed by a Vajrayana practitioner.

stupa. A dome-shaped monument to the Buddha often containing relics and remains of the Buddha or great bodhisattvas.

subtle winds and channels. Subtle channels are not anatomical but are more like the meridians in acupuncture which make up the vajra body of a person. Energy (*prana* in Sanskrit, *qi* in Chinese medicine) flows through these channels. In Tibetan, this subtle energy is called *lung*, which literally means “wind.” We use the term “subtle winds” so they are not confused with ordinary wind.

Tantra. The teachings, texts, and practices of the Vajrayana.

terma literally, “treasure.” Texts that were hidden by great bodhisattvas and later rediscovered. They can be actual physical texts often written in dakini language or teachings that were hidden in the mind streams of individuals to be revealed at a later date.

ten negative actions. These actions are murder, theft, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, irresponsible chatter, verbal abuse, envy, vindictiveness, and holding wrong views.

terton. A master who discovers or reveals a terma concealed by great masters of the past.

thangka. A Tibetan religious scroll painting.

Tilopa (928-1009). One of the 84 mahasiddhas who became the guru of Naropa. He is considered the founder of the Kagyu lineage in Tibet.

Trisong Detsen (742-797). The king of Tibet who invited Padma-sambhava to Tibet. He also directed the construction of Tibet's first monastery.

tsa tsa. A small clay icon of deity. tsampa. Roasted barley flour, the staple food of Tibet.

Tsangpa Gyare (1162-1211). The First Drukchen, who was the founder of the Drugpa Kagyu lineage.

Tummo. Also called subtle heat practice. The tantric practice that combines bliss and emptiness to produce inner body heat. It is one of the Six Yogas of Naropa.

upasaka. A lay practitioner who has taken the five vows of not killing, lying, stealing, taking intoxicants, and engaging in sexual misconduct.

Vajradhara (Tib. *Dorje Chang*). The sambhogakaya Buddha who is the source of the teachings of the Kagyu lineage.

Vajrapani. One of the three main protector bodhisattvas who is said to the lord of power. He is especially associated with curing illness caused by nagas.

Vajrasattva. The Buddha of purification. Vajrasattva practice is one of the four preliminary practices.

Vajrayogini. She is one of the main yidams of the Kagyu lineage who is the embodiment of wisdom. She is often depicted as being in union with Chakrasamvara in Vajrayana practices.

Vajrayana. There are three main levels of Buddhism called vehicles. The Foundation vehicle are the direct words of the Buddha. The Mahayana vehicle which was based on the teachings of Naropa and emphasized emptiness and the Prajnaparamitas. And the Vajrayana vehicle which emphasized the nature of reality and the tantric teachings.

yidam. A tantric deity that embodies the qualities of Buddhahood and is supplicated and visualized in Vajrayana practice.

Glossary

yogi. A Buddhist practitioner who has chosen an unconventional path of practice.

The Tibetan Glossary

Pronunciation	Transliteration	Sanskrit/English
bardo	bar do	bardo
Bön	bon	Bon religion
Chenrezig	spyan ras zgis	Avalokiteshvara
Chod	Chod	Chod practice
Genyan	dge bsnyen	lay person's vows
Dorje Chang	rdo rje 'chang	Vajradhara
Kadampa	bka' gdams pa	Kadampa school
Kagyu	bka 'brgyud	Kagyu lineage
kang gyok	rkang mgyogs	swift feet
khandroma	mkha' gro ma	dakini

The Tibetan Glossary

Pronunciation	Transliteration	Sanskrit/English
khenpo	mkhas po	pandita
lung	lung	reading transmission
lung	rlung	subtle wind (prana)
nyön mong	nyon mongs	disturbing emotion
ngöndro	ngon dro	preliminary practices
phowa	'pho ba	ejection of consciousness
phowa tronjug	'pho ba grong 'jug	transfer of consciousness
ringsel	ring bsrel	secret relic
salwa	gsal ba	luminous clarity
terma	gter ma	hidden texts
thangka	thang ka	Dharma painting
tri	'khrid	Dharma explanation
tsa tsa	tsa tsa	clay offerings
tummo	gtum mo	inner heat practice
wang	dbang	empowerment
yidam	yi dam	personal deity

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