



WISDOM ACADEMY

# Shamatha and Vipashyana in the Dzogchen Tradition

B. ALAN WALLACE

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GARRISON INSTITUTE



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Lesson 1:  
The Visionary World of Dūdjom Lingpa and the  
Primacy of Mind

Reading:  
*Heart of the Great Perfection: Dūdjom Lingpa's Visions of the  
Great Perfection, Vol. I*  
Introduction, pages 1–23

HEART OF THE GREAT PERFECTION

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## Introduction

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You appear in all ways as the glory and protector of disciples,  
like the moon and its various reflections in water.  
Until the radiant circle of disciples dissolves into absolute space,  
the primordial consciousness of absolute space is continuously displayed.  
— DÜDJOM LINGPA, SV 622

THE PURE VISIONS revealed by Düdjom Lingpa are streamlined accounts of the core practices of Dzokchen, which appear to transcend all limitations of specific historical eras and cultures. The *Enlightened View of Samantabhadra* describes his motivation in recording these exceptional teachings: “Once this ocean of ambrosia had been poured into the fine vase of my mind, I feared that it would be lost, so I sought permission from the *vīras* and *ḍākinīs* to put this into writing, as an inheritance to liberate future holders of the lineage.”

Düdjom Lingpa’s lucid writings and distinguished emanations made major contributions to the spread of Buddhism throughout the world in the twentieth century, and they continue to serve as seminal guides and revered teachers for practitioners in the twenty-first. His previous incarnations included the “boy translator” Drokpen Khyeuchung Lotsawa, one of the twenty-five principal disciples of Padmasambhava, and the master himself predicted that Düdjom Lingpa would emanate in eastern Tibet to tame unruly sentient beings in the coming degenerate times.<sup>9</sup>

In his autobiography Düdjom Lingpa records a visionary dream in which he encountered a god-child by the name of Dungyi Zur Pü, who appeared as “a white man, so handsome you could look at him forever and never be satisfied.” With him was a beautiful girl adorned with jewels, whom he introduced as his sister. They brought Düdjom Lingpa to Wutaishan, China’s Five-Peaked Mountain sacred to Mañjuśrī. Here he was given a white conch

9. Lama Tharchin Rinpoché, in the foreword to Traktung Dudjom Lingpa, *A Clear Mirror: The Visionary Autobiography of a Tibetan Master*, trans. Chönyi Drolma (Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2011), x–xi.

to blow in each of the four directions. The conch's sound roared forth to the west, in contrast to the other directions, signifying that disciples compatible with him lived in cities to the west. In that direction, he was told, his renown would spread, and he would have as many disciples as the rays of the sun.<sup>10</sup>

Düdjom Lingpa did indeed liberate many beings in the nomadic wildlands of northeastern Tibet, to the west of Wutaishan, so this is the most obvious interpretation of the prophecy. Nevertheless, Gyatrul Rinpoché suggested that this prophecy may also refer to those of us living today in the cities of the West. These visionary teachings repeatedly state that they were intended for people in the future, and we may consider ourselves included as beneficiaries of Düdjom Lingpa's legacy. With the hope to help fulfill the prophecy and with the permission and blessing of Gyatrul Rinpoché, these translations are offered to those who are dedicated to following the unsurpassed path of Dzokchen.

### *Concealed Teachings*

Tibet in the nineteenth century was fertile ground for a complex array of Buddhist traditions with unique lineages, diverse practices, and highly developed bodies of literature. A thousand years of state and private sponsorship had established powerful monastic institutions and a host of scholars and luminary contemplatives who were deeply revered by the Tibetan people. Learned monks as well as accomplished lay practitioners earned respect for their meditative acumen and were sought out for Dharma instruction. As these traditions and masters devoted themselves to spiritual awakening—still isolated from outside cultures—nineteenth-century Tibet witnessed a renaissance of Buddhist scholarship and practice that reverberates around the world even today.

One of many famous meditation masters who lived in those times, Düdjom Lingpa is known for the clear, incisive teachings he left to humanity. Although he was not educated in the monastic schools that dominated Tibetan Buddhism, he was a spiritual prodigy, experiencing visionary encounters with enlightened beings from an early age. The most important of these was the “Lake-Born Vajra” manifestation of Padmasambhava, the eighth-century Indian guru who helped to establish Buddhism in Tibet. Düdjom Lingpa's transcendent teachers answered his questions, offered advice, made prophecies, and spelled out the meaning of their utterances

10. Dudjom Lingpa, *A Clear Mirror*, 57–59.

and other portents. He suffered many hardships in following their repeated instructions to dedicate his life to solitary meditation and peripatetic teaching, while avoiding the worldly shackles of institutional duties, financial security, and the comforts of home. In return, his teachers revealed remarkably profound and clear explanations of the nature of reality and the path to enlightenment, which Dūdjom Lingpa recorded in texts such as those in this series, known as *pure visions* (Tib. *dag snang*).

We might think of Dūdjom Lingpa as a gnostic visionary in modern terms, but his identity in Tibetan Buddhism is as a treasure revealer, or *tertön* (Tib. *gter ston*), one who discovers and reveals Dharma teachings and artifacts that were concealed in earlier times by enlightened beings to benefit future practitioners. Buddhism's dissemination in seventh-century Tibet began with massive state-sponsored initiatives that created the written Tibetan language, translated the Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit, built monastic institutions, and trained monks and nuns. The assassination of King Ralpachen in 838 marked the collapse of the Tibetan imperial dynasty and the beginning of a century of fragmentation, conflict, and darkness in the historical record. In the absence of institutional support, many scriptures, practice traditions, and lineages that had been established in the royal period were maintained by householders and yogins. When organized Buddhism reemerged in the eleventh century, there were debates about the authenticity of the early texts and accusations of corruption. New translation (Tib. *gsar ma*) schools emerged, and the earlier texts, traditions, and lineages were retrospectively labeled the early translation, or Nyingma (Tib. *rnying ma*), school.

The Nyingmapas recognize three valid ways for the Buddhist teachings to be transmitted: the oral transmission of the Buddha's words (Tib. *bka' ma*), the concealed treasures (Tib. *gter ma*) originating from Padmasambhava and other masters, and pure vision teachings, such as those in this series. The "long transmission" of canonized scriptures that have been passed down orally from teacher to disciple for many generations includes both the exoteric sūtras and the esoteric tantras. While they enjoy utmost respect, these ancient teachings are sometimes difficult to fathom, except by the most erudite scholars, due to the complexities of translation and the cultural embeddedness of the texts. In contrast, revealed treasures and pure vision teachings are said to carry the "moist breath of the *ḍākinīs*" as they manifest directly to revealers in more recent times. This "short transmission" of revealed treasures and visionary teachings successively emerges throughout history in accordance with the needs and abilities of suitable disciples from one time and place to the next, so its blessings are said to be more potent. Dūdjom Lingpa's mind incarnation, Dūdjom Rinpoché, reported that when he listened to the

*Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*, all the difficult points of the vast ocean of tantras became clear.<sup>11</sup> In his encyclopedic treatise on the Nyingma tradition, he describes treasure teachings as “unequaled in the splendour of their blessings.”<sup>12</sup>

Guru Padmasambhava, known in Tibet as the Second Buddha, or as Guru Rinpoché, and his Tibetan consort Yeshé Tsogyal are primary objects of devotion for today’s Nyingmapas, and they were at the heart of Dūdjom Lingpa’s spiritual world. Anticipating the changing times ahead, they concealed Dharma teachings to be discovered by later incarnations of their disciples over the course of Tibet’s evolution and predicted the location and identity of the discoverers of these spiritual time capsules. When these include physical artifacts, such as ritual objects, images, and texts, they are called *earth treasures* (Tib. *sa gter*). They may include symbolic inscriptions that the revealer must decode—often a difficult challenge. Treasures secreted in the mindstreams of Padmasambhava’s close disciples, awaiting the optimal time to be disclosed to their hosts, are called *mind treasures* (Tib. *dgongs gter*).<sup>13</sup> One example is Dūdjom Lingpa’s *Profound Heart Essence of Saraha*, recently translated into English by Lama Chönam and Sangye Khandro, along with its word-for-word commentary by Dūdjom Lingpa’s disciple Pema Lungtok Gyatso.<sup>14</sup>

A pure vision, such as those described in this series, is a teaching received by an accomplished master in a visionary experience or dream as a blessing from a wisdom being such as a deity, siddha, or ḍākinī. Such pure visions are said to originate from the aspirations of bodhisattvas, as Śāntideva aspires in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*: “May all beings unceasingly hear the sound of Dharma from the birds, from every tree, from the rays of light, and

11. Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorjé, *A Marvelous Garden of Rare Gems: Biographies of Masters of Awareness in the Dzogchen Lineage*, trans. Richard Barron (Chökyi Nyima) (Junction City, CA: Padma Publishing, 2005), 284.

12. Dudjom Rinpoche Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals & History*, trans. and eds. Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), vol. 1, 745.

13. B. Alan Wallace, “The Dialectic Between Religious Belief and Contemplative Knowledge in Tibetan Buddhism,” in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, eds. John Makransky and Roger Jackson (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2000), 203–14.

14. Dudjom Lingpa and Pema Lungtok Gyatso, *Dudjom Lingpa’s Chöd and An Ambrosia Ocean of Sublime Explanations*, trans. Lama Chönam and Sangye Khandro (Ashland, OR: Light of Berotsana, 2014).

from the sky.”<sup>15</sup> Primordial purity is ultimately the nature of everything, as Dūdjom Lingpa is told by the original human teacher of the Great Perfection in this historical era, Prahevajra, or Garap Dorjé:

Primordial purity is the supreme encompassing expanse.  
From its unveiled natural radiance in pristine clarity  
emerges the spontaneously present display  
of the treasure trove of enlightenment’s wisdoms and qualities.<sup>16</sup>

Compared with the other well-known treasure revealers of his day, Dūdjom Lingpa was an outsider. As a child, he was not widely recognized as a reincarnated master, or *tulku*, didn’t take ordination, and remained apart from the monastic institutions that dominated Tibetan education at the time. Instead, he endured poverty and hardships in following the advice of his visionary teachers to practice meditation in solitary retreat. At first, because he lacked a formal education and recognition as a tulku, Dūdjom Lingpa’s authenticity as a treasure revealer was challenged and his revelations were not taken seriously. Ultimately, however, the truth of his teachings was borne out by his extraordinary efficacy as a spiritual guide, leading hosts of his disciples to high states of Dzokchen realization. It was such empirical evidence that led to his recognition by the leading teachers of his time and to widespread respect for his revelations.

These teachings include vivid accounts of a realized master’s innermost experiences and succinct words of heartfelt advice. Their style may seem formal on the surface, but they are woven like sturdy homespun cloth rather than the fancy brocade of classical Tibetan scholarship. The master speaks to readers directly, in everyday language, as a mentor supporting his disciples on the path to enlightenment—without holding anything back. This is not abstract philosophizing but a practical, experience-based guide to each step, obstacle, and accomplishment on the path to realization—from one who has walked this path and led many others to its culmination. Dūdjom Lingpa’s teachings are cherished for their clear language and immensely practical instructions on the most profound aspects of the path.

The collection of teachings revealed by Dūdjom Lingpa and his mind emanation Dūdjom Rinpoché is known as the Dūdjom New Treasures (Tib. *gter gсар*), one of the most comprehensive treasure cycles revealed in

15. Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, trans. Vesna A. Wallace and B. Alan Wallace (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997), 142.

16. Dudjom Lingpa, *A Clear Mirror*, 96.

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dūdjom Lingpa's collected writings and treasure teachings are recorded in twenty-one volumes, and Dūdjom Rinpoché's comprise twenty-five. A detailed description of the process of treasure concealment and discovery entitled *Wonder Ocean* was composed by Dūdjom Lingpa's eldest son, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, the Third Dödrupchen Rinpoché (1865–1926), who was a consummate Nyingma scholar and adept. This has been translated by Tulku Thondup Rinpoché along with his own commentary and much documentation of the rich tradition of treasure teachings in Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>17</sup>

### *Spiritual Prodigy*

Tibetans love hagiographies of realized masters for their power in inspiring disciples to replicate the guru's accomplishments.<sup>18</sup> Dūdjom Lingpa blessed us with an extraordinary autobiography entitled *A Clear Mirror*, whose highlights are summarized here from the lucid English translation by Chönyi Drolma.<sup>19</sup> She worked from a copy of the author's own manuscript made and double-checked by a disciple of Sera Khandro, regent of Dūdjom Rinpoché, and root lama of his reincarnation as Dūdjom Yangsi Rinpoché. This is Charal Sangyé Dorjé Rinpoché, who at the age of 102 continues to inspire his many disciples.

Dūdjom Lingpa's autobiography bears little resemblance to narratives of this sort in Western literature. With scant mention of life's ordinary events, it is packed with vivid accounts of the visionary experiences and dreams of a spiritual prodigy whose progress toward enlightenment is driven by life-transforming encounters with deities, siddhas, and *ḍākinīs* as well as graphic battles with demonic beings. Above all, Guru Rinpoché and Yeshé Tsogyal appear to him repeatedly to validate his realizations, direct his progress, and grant prophecies. Their first appearance in his life story occurs when

17. Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Harold Talbott (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).

18. Dūdjom Rinpoché includes short biographies of the most important treasure revealers in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 743–881. See also Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles: Lives of the Great Buddhist Masters of India and Tibet*, ed. Harold Talbott (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1996); Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal, *Light of Fearless Indestructible Wisdom: The Life and Legacy of H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008); Sarah Harding, trans., *The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa*, foreword by Gangteng Rinpoché (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2003); Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

19. Cited in note 9 above.

his previous incarnation, Dūdul Dorjé Rölpa Tsal, passes away and meets them in a pure land, where Guru Rinpoché laments the lack of qualified spiritual mentors to lead beings on the path of the Great Perfection. Yeshé Tsogyal begs him to send an emanation to guide beings in this degenerate age, and Guru Rinpoché answers that Dūdul Dorjé must return to the world to serve beings by the power of his previous aspirations.

Seeing the great difficulties in store, Dūdul Dorjé begs for permission not to return. Guru Rinpoché responds that past lifetimes' aspirations and karma connect him to three thousand fortunate individuals, including more than five hundred who can be liberated in one lifetime, ten treasure revealers, and seven teachers of secret mantra who will reincarnate as his own sons. "Now go!" he commands, promising that wrathful guardians of the teachings will protect him from harm.<sup>20</sup>

Thus compelled, Dūdjom Lingpa was born as rainbows appeared in the sky on the tenth day of the bird month in the female wood sheep year (1835), in the Serta valley of Golok in northeastern Tibet.<sup>21</sup> During the first years of his life, Dūdjom Lingpa witnessed beautiful visions of ḍākinīs and terrifying battles between demons and his wrathful guardians. The year he turned three,<sup>22</sup> a profound vision of buddhas and bodhisattvas left the young boy in a faint. Fearing for his life, his mother summoned the local leader Lama Jikmé, who reported that the boy had not been struck by disease: his karmic propensities from previous training had been awakened. Dūdjom Lingpa suddenly recognized Lama Jikmé as the reincarnation of his predecessor Dūdul Dorjé's uncle, and he states that from this time on, the turmoil in his life due to gods and demons vanished.

By the age of six, Dūdjom Lingpa reports that the spectacles of his visionary experiences had blessed him with immeasurable insight and the view of all phenomena as illusory apparitions. Vajravārāhī appeared to him upon a throne of skulls to give practice instructions and a prophesy that his mind treasures would overflow at the age of twenty-two and that he would reveal three cycles of treasures at the age of twenty-four. That same year the Great Compassionate One (Avalokiteśvara) manifested in a dream and promised to accompany Dūdjom Lingpa and dispel his outer and inner obstacles. He reports that from this time until the age of thirty, a warmly affectionate child

20. Dudjom Lingpa, *A Clear Mirror*, 7–10, 208–9.

21. Dūdjom Lingpa is identified by TBRC as P705.

22. Tibetans count a child one year old at birth, hence Dūdjom Lingpa was two by Western convention; I have retained the Tibetan ages here.

in white garments accompanied him inseparably in dreams and predicted events in his own and others' lives.<sup>23</sup>

At ten, Yeshé Tsogyal appeared and transported Dūdjom Lingpa into the presence of Guru Rinpoché and a great assembly of vīras and ḍākinīs. Guru Rinpoché again warned of the difficulty in guiding the wild and cruel sentient beings of this degenerate era. Then he predicted that Dūdjom Lingpa would reveal profound treasures at the age of twenty-five and blessed him as his supreme son, promising that “you and I will be companions without separation for even an instant, and you can speak with me as any two people would.”<sup>24</sup> Then a dream indicated that he would be summoned by his maternal uncle and that he must go to live with him. This came to pass as predicted, but working as a shepherd was not to the boy's liking—he reacted violently. His uncle declared that he must instead learn to read and become a practitioner, so at eleven he was placed under the care of Lama Jamyang, who began teaching him to read, thus fulfilling the prophecy made by a ḍākinī two years earlier. This beloved lama appeared many times in visions to counsel Dūdjom Lingpa in later life. In a dream at twelve, Guru Rinpoché questioned the boy concerning his frightening visions, and he was left in a fearful state, prompting his parents to summon a lama to perform a cleansing ritual. Like Lama Jikmé before him, this lama saw that Dūdjom Lingpa was not possessed by demons but that his past karmic propensities had been awakened. Such examples show that even though Dūdjom Lingpa says no human teacher introduced him to the view and meditation, he did rely on the kindness of his flesh-and-blood lamas, who understood his spiritual precociousness and removed obstacles in his path.<sup>25</sup>

Over the succeeding years, Dūdjom Lingpa's visionary teachers instructed him in meditation practice, assessed his view and experiences, and made prophecies that repeatedly came true. He was resolute in following their advice, but he was not always successful in convincing others to heed these prophecies. His uncle scoffed when told he would die unless he engaged in a prescribed practice, and he lived only long enough to regret his unwise response. At sixteen, Yeshé Tsogyal encouraged him to engage in the preliminary practices in reliance on Lama Jikmé. He engaged in a month-long retreat, and in a blissful vision the lama affirmed that he had received the common siddhis. Dūdjom Lingpa states that without searching, he had directly

23. Dūdjom Lingpa, *A Clear Mirror*, 186.

24. *Ibid.*, 219–21.

25. *Ibid.*, 138.

encountered the face of primordial buddhahood abiding within him, and that his awareness arose as the assembly of deities to defeat all obstacles.

At eighteen, falling asleep at the base of a cliff, a *ḍākinī* appeared and told Dūdjom Lingpa where to find a stone statue of a wrathful deity. Upon awakening, he struck the indicated spot on the cliff with a rock to reveal the statue, which he carried home and showed to his lama and parents. They insisted that he return it to its hiding place, which he did. But in a subsequent dream, another *ḍākinī* scolded him for having lost such an auspicious opportunity due to following bad advice instead of relying on his own intuition.

### *Gili Tertön*

Dūdjom Lingpa was twenty-one when, as mentioned earlier, he was taken in a dream to Wutaishan and the location of his future disciples was predicted to be in the west. The next year, a beautiful *ḍākinī* gave him a beryl mirror with thirteen mustard seeds, explaining that he would gather many thousands of students, including thirteen who would accomplish the rainbow body (Tib. *'ja' lus*), the culmination of the path of the Great Perfection. Shortly thereafter, a red woman appeared and made several prophecies, concluding with these chiding verses:

In our land of nonhuman *ḍākinīs*  
we use symbols and sing songs—  
it's impossible for us to use human speech.  
Since you are very foolish,  
I have revealed these symbols with human words.<sup>26</sup>

Then she predicted the arrival of an excellent companion and disciple from Golok and said that Dūdjom Lingpa should accompany him there: Many heart disciples would appear, and he would benefit beings on a vast scale. Gili Wangli did appear as predicted the next year, and he became the main patron of Dūdjom Lingpa, who came to be known as the Gili Tertön.

In a vision at twenty-three, the World Sovereign, Avalokiteśvara, told Dūdjom Lingpa that the time had come for him to help others impartially. He instructed him in the conduct of an authentic treasure revealer:

26. *Ibid.*, 61.

Those with true aspiration and karmic destiny as treasure  
 revealers  
 have been born in low situations, poor and humble.  
 They mostly stay in mountain hermitages, cliffs, and caves.  
 Some assume the guise of beggars.  
 Some live as busy householders.  
 In order to foster humble disciples,  
 they renounce greatness, keeping to a low station.  
 To fulfill the necessity of meeting individuals connected to them  
 by positive aspirations and karma,  
 they journey throughout every land, wandering without  
 a fixed locale.<sup>27</sup>

By the age of twenty-five, Dūdjom Lingpa reports that he had gathered disciples and performed practices to help many sick people. He also mentions the difficulties he faced in decoding the symbols of his visionary teachings and transcribing them into words. Then a red *ḍākinī* informed him of the circumstances that would lead to the discovery of his predicted earth treasure. When he went to the Ba Treasure Cliff of Mar as directed, a piece of rock broke away to reveal a clay statue, an ancient rosary, and a wax container with a roll of paper. This told him to go to a cliff called Silver Buzzard to find his prophetic guide (Tib. *kha byang*) with instructions detailing the treasures he was to reveal. Upon arriving there, a black man astride a horse struck the cliff with his lance, opening a fissure to reveal another scroll with the prophetic guide.

Following these instructions, Dūdjom Lingpa returned to his homeland and secured a treasure vase to replace the treasures he was to remove. On the specified tenth day of the month, he went with a friend named Dechen to a cliff in Sermé, where he made offerings of tormas and vajra feasts as directed, reporting that the landscape was cloaked in rainbows and appeared to be without any substantial nature. At the base of the cliff, an unseen woman's melodic voice welcomed him and declared that although there were many treasures concealed here, she would give him only half—because he had no consort. He describes climbing a stone stairway to reach the place of concealment, where he struck a fissure in the rock with a chisel. It opened to reveal many treasure caskets. Withdrawing only the seven he was allowed and replacing them with the treasure vase, he climbed back down to where Dechen waited and turned to see that the stairway had vanished. His companions wanted him to quickly transcribe the teachings, but Dūdjom Lingpa says he was required to keep them secret for six years.

27. Ibid., 263–64.

In the first month of the year he turned twenty-seven, with the vision of the direct perception of ultimate reality that he describes in the *Vajra Essence*, Dūdjom Lingpa attained the state of a matured vidyādhara, the first of four stages of a vidyādhara. In the last month of that same year, the vision described in the *Enlightened View of Samantabhadra* took place. In both of these texts, the Primordial Buddha, Samantabhadra, manifesting as the Lake-Born Vajra (Saroruhavajra), one of eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoché, illuminates the path to enlightenment with definitive answers to a broad variety of questions posed by wisdom beings who are his own emanations.

The majestic visions witnessed by Dūdjom Lingpa in the succeeding years document his spiritual progress and his proficiency as a deeply realized gnostic. He reports that by simply focusing on any subject, whatever teachings he needed would flow forth in the space of his awareness as if a precise copy had been made.<sup>28</sup> Such a manifestation of a teaching in its entirety is characteristic of pure visions. As Tulku Thondup Rinpoché explains in *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, pure vision teachings are not considered treasure teachings unless they have been “concealed through mind-mandate transmission (Tib. *gtad rgya*) in the essential nature of the minds of disciples and then awakened by pure vision.”<sup>29</sup> Having been concealed in the unchanging essential nature of the revealer’s mind rather than in physical form, the recollection of a teaching may be catalyzed by a vision or physical object.

Dodrupchen Rinpoché states in *Wonder Ocean* that all treasure revealers have consorts. In order to reveal teachings concealed in the mind’s essential nature, “it is also necessary to have the spontaneously arisen bliss which can be produced by a special consort who has made the appropriate aspirations in the past, and who is to become the key to accomplishment.”<sup>30</sup> Besides having been told that he was able to withdraw only half of the treasures revealed to him for lacking a consort, Dūdjom Lingpa received numerous instructions to rely upon consorts, both wisdom beings and worldly *ḍākinīs*, along with predictions of the accomplished sons to issue from his relationships with the worldly ones. He fathered eight sons by three consorts—all eight of whom were recognized as reincarnations of renowned masters.

Despite the profound treasure teachings he revealed and the intense surges of realization and exquisite visions he experienced, Dūdjom Lingpa repeatedly lamented to his visionary teachers that he was incapable of teaching. He

28. *Ibid.*, 74.

29. Thondup, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, 61.

30. *Ibid.*, 107.

was promised many accomplished disciples but warned to reject the conduct of false treasure revealers who fabricate teachings and collect payments for religious services. Instead, he was assigned to accomplish specific spiritual practices, often in remote locations. In a retreat at twenty-eight, Dūdjom Lingpa received a skull cup of ambrosia from Guru Rinpoché, and “an inconceivable experience of bliss blazed,” whereupon he was instructed that his conduct must remain free of pretense: “You should behave as you have in the past—as someone who doesn’t ‘keep face,’ as would a madman.”<sup>31</sup>

Later he was cautioned that “just one hundred years from now non-Buddhist barbarian border people will cause not even a murmur of the teachings to endure.” For the sake of the few fortunate disciples connected to him, he was told not to exhaust himself by transcribing many lengthy texts but instead to propagate the innermost pith of the teachings. His increasing skill in condensing the loftiest teachings into concise instructions using ordinary language is demonstrated throughout his autobiography and in the texts in this series. Dūdjom Lingpa reports overcoming those who challenged the authenticity of his treasure teachings, which an increasing number sought to practice.

Although prohibited by Guru Rinpoché himself from discussing the signs of his spiritual accomplishments with anyone, Dūdjom Lingpa consented to describe them at the age of thirty to an inquiring *ḍākinī*—who was non-human, so there was no fault. At the conclusion of his description of many signs, she confirmed his realization of cutting through (Tib. *khregs chod*) to the originally pure nature of reality. Then she gave him profound instruction in the swift path of direct crossing over (Tib. *thod rgal*), and he says that he relied upon this path from that time on. By the following year, his practice was so advanced that he reports a seven-day absorption in the panorama of clear-light appearances that caused his attendants, consorts, and disciples to fear for his life. The truth was revealed in his vision of Vidyādhara Hūmkara, who confirmed that Dūdjom Lingpa had reached the second stage of direct crossing over, the vision of progress in meditative experience, corresponding to the stage of a vidyādhara with mastery over life.<sup>32</sup>

31. Dudjom Lingpa, *A Clear Mirror*, 80.

32. *Ibid.*, 97.

### *Fearless Conduct*

Of the four kinds of enlightened activity—pacifying, enriching, powerful, and wrathful—Heruka Dūdjom Lingpa is best known as a master of wrathful enlightened activity, which is required when obstacles are particularly malevolent. His encounters with demons began in infancy, and his ability to overcome them is indicated in the name Dūdjom, which means “victorious over demons.” In a dream he had at thirty-two, Dūdjom Lingpa met Lama Jamyang, who gave him pith instructions in the practice of severance of *māras* (Tib. *bdud gcod*): the destruction of self-clinging by realizing all gods and demons to be one’s own appearances. Dūdjom Lingpa became renowned for the practice of severance from the perspective of the Great Perfection.

Throughout his life, Dūdjom Lingpa’s battles with demons were won by his fearless practice of severance. He confronted his demons directly and forcefully by recognizing them as phenomena of his own creation, devoid of any inherent existence of their own. In a dream, he meditates on compassion for a fierce demon who stabs him in the heart. When another one slings her breasts over his shoulders and plunges her teeth into his brain, he becomes lucid within the dream—inseparable from his demons and immune from harm.<sup>33</sup>

The many vivid and frightening visions Dūdjom Lingpa reports in his autobiography and in our texts may be misinterpreted unless all wrathful and peaceful deities are understood to be devoid of inherent existence. When a *ḍākinī* brings him to Guru Rinpoché’s abode on Copper-Colored Mountain, which is surrounded by innumerable wrathful beings, Dūdjom Lingpa explains that all of them possess peaceful minds of primordial consciousness, which never stray from the absolute space of phenomena, while their manifestations of primordial consciousness bristle with utterly terrifying, fierce, and majestic attributes.<sup>34</sup> Following this magnificent experience of receiving empowerments, teachings, and prophecies from Guru Rinpoché, as Dūdjom Lingpa prepares to go, the view of the Great Perfection is powerfully evoked by the *ḍākinī* who transported him there: “In the false outlines of this dream-scape’s appearances, there is no such thing as either going or staying.”

Such pointed reminders of the ultimate view appear frequently at the conclusion of Dūdjom Lingpa’s experiences—whenever he errs by investing his visions with true existence. At thirty-four, he was taken in a dream to

33. *Ibid.*, 111.

34. *Ibid.*, 103.

Amitābha's pure land of Sukhāvātī, where he expressed his astonishment that this pure land actually existed outside of his own mind. "Ha ha!" chided a ḍākinī, "Something apart from one's own perception, something that exists independently—I've never seen such a thing before, and it's impossible for me to see such a thing in the future. Even now, your thought that this dream-landscape isn't self-manifest—that is more astonishing!" Reprising the finale of many of Dūdjom Lingpa's visions, these words woke him from sleep.<sup>35</sup>

### *Lineage Guru*

By his late thirties, Dūdjom Lingpa's accomplishments as a teacher and upholder of Guru Rinpoché's Great Perfection lineage had manifested. When he transcribed the practice cycle for Ḍākinī Trōma,<sup>36</sup> a great whirlwind carried his pages in every direction: he saw this as an omen that these practices would be widely disseminated, and indeed they were. Their power is attested in Dūdjom Lingpa's account of his disciple Pema Tashi. When he transcribed the text, "a stream of milk imbued with flavors, vitality, and nutritive qualities flowed from the sphere of empty space until it just filled a cup. When he drank it, for three days his body and mind were suffused with bliss and new realization was born within him." Dūdjom Lingpa states that Pema Tashi gained extraordinary realization superior to any other of his disciples and became quite learned.<sup>37</sup> He explains this simply: "When a lama with realization and a student suffused with blessings and the utmost fortune of receiving profound instructions meet, even supreme spiritual accomplishment is achieved without difficulty. That's the nature of such auspicious connections."

At thirty-seven, Lama Jamyang appeared once more in a dream, asking how Dūdjom Lingpa had come upon his amazing treasure teachings. He explained the discovery of his prophetic guide and earth treasures, saying that the three cycles of pure vision teachings had arisen in his mind "as if a precise copy had been made there." Lama Jamyang responded by encouraging him to propagate his teachings: "Given that the Buddhist doctrine will only endure for a short time, its complete potency has come together all at once in

35. *Ibid.*, 120.

36. This is translated in part 4 of Lama Chönam and Sangye Khandro, trans., *The Sole Essence of Clear Light: Trōma Tōgal Practice, The Terma Revelations of Heruka Dudjom Lingpa and Commentary by One of His Foremost Disciples, Tülku Drimed Ödzer* (Boulder: Kama Terma Publications, 2011).

37. Dudjom Lingpa, *A Clear Mirror*, 133.

your doctrine, so it contains very great blessings, which are swiftly delivered. Individuals who put into practice these teachings will quickly gain liberation without much delay. Have no doubt!”<sup>38</sup> These three cycles are known as the “earth revelations of the heart essence of the *ḍākinī*,” the “mind revelations of the welling forth of the expanse of primordial consciousness,” and the “pure vision cycle of the matrix of primordial consciousness,” which is the category of the teachings in this series.

Although he built several houses, Dūdjom Lingpa never stayed in one place for long, repeatedly urged on by portents and the advice of his visionary teachers. He reports hundreds of disciples gathering to receive his teachings on severance and the Great Perfection in various locations. He claims that his wrathful practices were successful in subduing all who opposed him, including even the most recalcitrant sorceress, and he says the signs were witnessed by everyone. His detachment from the monastic system is shown by the single line his autobiography devotes to his construction of Dartsang Kalzang Monastery at fifty-six; this became his seat for the rest of his life.

At fifty-nine, a *ḍākinī* appeared and reminded him that, like all *ḍākinīs*, she was the dynamic expression of his sublime wisdom. She then advised Dūdjom Lingpa to travel quickly to the hidden land of Pemakö, where Guru Rinpoché said that one practice session was equal to one year of practice elsewhere. Here he would discover a prophetic guide and treasures that would be of immense aid to beings. But a few months later, another *ḍākinī* announced that it was too late. Having been unable to reach Pemakö as directed in this life, Dūdjom Lingpa told his disciples to look for his reincarnation there:

Very soon now foreign barbarian armies will begin to flood the Dharma land. Therefore there will be little peace or happiness. With prayers to Padmasambhava, quickly make ready to go to the hidden land of the Guru, Pemakö. I will go there too. In fact this old man will arrive there before you do.

At the age of sixty-nine, on the eighth day of the eleventh month in the water-rabbit year (1903), without any sickness or discomfort, Dūdjom Lingpa passed away with amazing signs. His body was transformed into light, leaving a form the size of an eight-year-old child, and many five-colored relics were found in the cremation ashes.<sup>39</sup>

38. *Ibid.*, 131.

39. Tsewang Dongyal, *Light of Fearless Indestructible Wisdom*, 53.

As he promised, he was reborn in Pemakö. When he began speaking it was with a foreign Golok accent. He told everyone that he was Dūdjom Lingpa and repeated the names of his former disciples. His Holiness Dūdjom Rinpoché (1904–87) was three years old when he inexplicably insisted that his parents prepare to receive important visitors. Soon some nomadic monks and nuns approached, and the young tulku ran to greet them, calling the disciples who had come to find him by name and asking what took them so long. They were awestruck and had no doubts about who this was.<sup>40</sup>

Dūdjom Rinpoché was recognized as Dūdjom Lingpa's enlightened mind emanation, and Jamyang Natsok Rangdröl was recognized as his activity emanation. Tulku Drachen was the emanation of his enlightened qualities. His own grandsons Kunzang Nyima (1904–58) and Sönam Deutsen (1910–58) were recognized as his body and speech emanations and were also treasure revealers.<sup>41</sup> According to a description of Dūdjom Lingpa's lineage up to the present time called *Wondrous Golden Grain*, in addition to his eight sons, Dūdjom Lingpa had four daughters, ten grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren.<sup>42</sup> In patriarchal custom, the sons are given prominence and the daughters are unnamed. Of Dūdjom Lingpa's eight sons, his autobiography mentions the prophecies he received for the first five.

The eldest son, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, was recognized as the Third Dodrupchen and enthroned at Yarlung Pemakö Tsasum Khandrö Ling Monastery in 1870. At Dzokchen Monastery he received teachings on the *Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra)* from Patrul Rinpoché (1808–87), who was so impressed with the boy that he invited him to Dzagyal Monastery to give the annual teaching of this text before a large audience—at the age of eight. He became an accomplished scholar, and in addition to his text *Wonder Ocean* on treasure revelation discussed above, he composed his first commentary on the *Gubhyagarbha Tantra* at twenty-one. Realizing that some of his views were not representative of the Nyingma lineage, he composed a

40. *Ibid.*, 74.

41. Holley Gayley, “The Scions of Dūdjom Lingpa,” TBRC blog post on January 21, 2010.

42. Holley Gayley, “Who's Who in the Dūdjom Lineage,” TBRC blog post on September 23, 2011, based on the work of Padma 'od gsal mtha' yas called *Ngo mtshar gser gyi snye ma (Wondrous Golden Grain)* in *Deb chung a ru ra'i dga' tshal* (2003).

second commentary called *Key to the Precious Treasury*.<sup>43</sup> His corpus includes ninety-nine works totaling over a thousand pages.<sup>44</sup>

His second son, Choktrul Pema Dorjé (1867–1934), was recognized as an incarnation of Dragyur Marpé Kyeta Choktrul and Dodrupchen Gönpé Tsatsa Tulku Yangsi and was enthroned at Yarlung Pemakö Monastery. He later became the administrator of Dodrupchen Monastery and managed his elder brother's projects.

Third was Khyentsé Tulku Dzamling Wangyal (1868–1907), who was recognized as the reincarnation of Do Khyentsé Yeshé Dorjé (1800–1866) and was enthroned at both Dodrupchen and Nizok Monasteries at the age of nine. The next year, following a ḍākinī's suggestion, Dūdjom Lingpa brought Khyentrul to Patrul Rinpoché, who gave them many transmissions. Khyentrul's son Dzongter Kunzang Nyima was recognized as Dūdjom Lingpa's enlightened speech emanation.

Dūdjom Lingpa's fourth son, Namtrul Mipam Dorjé (b. 1879), died at an early age.

Fifth came Drimé Özer (1881–1924), who was recognized as a reincarnation of the brilliant Nyingma scholar Longchenpa. Unlike most of his brothers, he did not remain at Dodrupchen Monastery but traveled and taught extensively, following his father's lead. He and his equally famous consort, Sera Khandro (1892–1940), the author of two texts in our second volume, revealed treasures together and worked to preserve the writings and legacy of Dūdjom Lingpa. His eighteen-volume corpus was lost in the Chinese invasion of Tibet; the sole work recovered to date is his commentary to his father's Tröma mind treasure, called *Stainless Luminous Expanse*.<sup>45</sup> His son Sönam Deutsen was recognized as Dūdjom Lingpa's enlightened body emanation.

The sixth son, Lhachen Topgyal (1884–1942), an incarnation of Zhichen Apang Kuchen, was enthroned at Taktsé Samdrup Monastery in 1893. He reincarnated as H. H. Sakya Trizin Rinpoché.

Seventh came Tulku Namkha Jikmé (1888–1960), recognized as an incarnation of Patrul Rinpoché. At seven, he was enthroned at Dzagyal

43. Dodrupchen Jigme Tenpa'i Nyima, *Key to the Precious Treasury: A Concise Commentary on the General Meaning of the Glorious Secret Essence Tantra*, trans. Lama Chönam and Sangye Khandro (Boston: Snow Lion Publications, 2010).

44. Tarthang Tulku, *Masters of the Nyingma Lineage* (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1995), 361.

45. This is translated in part 2 of Chönam and Khandro, *Sole Essence of Clear Light*. See page 14, note 36.

Monastery. He revealed nine volumes of treasures and constructed a monastic college.

The eighth son was Dorjé Dradul (1891–1959), recognized as an incarnation of Sangdak Ngönang Namchö Mingyur Dorjé. He succeeded Düdjom Lingpa at Kalzang Monastery.

### *The Path to Perfect Enlightenment*

The path to enlightenment revealed by the Buddha consists of three fundamental trainings: in ethical discipline, samādhi, and wisdom. The foundation of all spiritual practice is ethical discipline—conscientiously avoiding harmful actions and engaging in beneficial ones. Ethical behavior creates a quality of awareness that is conducive to spiritual development in general and to meditative attainment in particular. Ethical discipline is implicit throughout these texts, for without this solid foundation, the development of samādhi and wisdom is impossible.

The higher training in meditative concentration, or *samādhi*, includes a wide array of practices for achieving exceptional mental balance, and a core practice within this training is the cultivation of meditative quiescence (Skt. *śamatha*, Tib. *zhi gnas*). One major outcome of śamatha is experiential access to the substrate consciousness (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*, Tib. *kun gzhi rnam shes*), characterized by bliss, luminosity, and nonconceptuality. Through the achievement of śamatha, the body-mind is made supple and marvelously serviceable, preparing one to utilize the distilled clarity and stability of the mind to cultivate contemplative insight (Skt. *vipaśyanā*, Tib. *lhag mthong*), which lies at the heart of the higher training in wisdom. With the union of śamatha and vipaśyanā, one is well prepared to achieve a radical, irreversible healing and awakening of the mind through gaining direct insight into the ultimate nature of reality, the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena. The unified practice of śamatha and vipaśyanā as taught in our texts is an essential aspect of meditation in all Buddhist traditions.

The selections of Düdjom Lingpa's teachings translated here describe the view, meditation, and conduct of Dzokchen, the Great Perfection. Brought to Tibet from India by Padmasambhava, this is the pinnacle of the nine vehicles for enlightenment transmitted by the Nyingma school. Dzokchen's unique, radically nondual approach subsumes all other vehicles, as our texts demonstrate. The higher training in wisdom is taught in the Dzokchen tradition as the two practices of cutting through to original purity (Tib. *ka dag khregs chod*) and direct crossing over to spontaneous actualization (Tib. *lhun grub thod rgal*). Cutting through is the method for abandoning deeply

engrained habits of reification to reveal the original purity of our own pristine awareness, *rigpa*. Direct crossing over is the method for realizing the purity and equality of all phenomena in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa as displays of the ground *dharmakāya*, while manifesting all the qualities of enlightenment as spontaneously actualized displays of that ground.

The *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*, revealed to Dūdjom Lingpa by Samantabhadra appearing as the Lake-Born Vajra, is considered the root text of the teachings in this series. It further divides the path of this unsurpassed vehicle into eight sequential phases, beginning with taking the impure mind as the path and concluding with the instructions on how to dwell in the ground of being—having reached enlightenment. The same phases are implicit in the *Enlightened View of Samantabhadra*, with more extensive explanations, and in the *Vajra Essence*, which among the five texts in this series offers the most elaborate presentation of the stages of the path to enlightenment. In the tantric literature, it is sometimes said that individuals with sharp faculties may comprehend an entire teaching by fathoming only the root text; those with middling faculties may gain realization on the basis of a somewhat more elaborate presentation, in this case the *Enlightened View of Samantabhadra*; and those with dull faculties must study the more detailed tantras, such as the *Vajra Essence*. Finally, the commentaries to the tantras, such as the *Essence of Clear Meaning* and *Garland for the Delight of the Fortunate*, are to be relied upon for further clarification.

The texts in this series point to just four practices as being indispensable (for all but the most gifted adepts) on the Dzokchen path to enlightenment: śamatha, vipaśyanā, cutting through, and direct crossing over, in that order. Our most condensed texts, the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra* and the *Enlightened View of Samantabhadra*, explain only these four practices, without elaborating on the preliminary practices or the stages of generation and completion. Accomplishing these four practices alone is in principle sufficient to achieve any one of the three levels of rainbow body that signify the culmination of the path of the Great Perfection. In comparison, the *Vajra Essence* presents a more elaborate account of the path to achieving the perfect enlightenment of a buddha, beginning with a brief reference to the four common and seven uncommon preliminary practices, then proceeding through śamatha, vipaśyanā, a wide range of practices in the Vajrayāna stages of generation and completion, and finally the two phases of practice of the Great Perfection.

These texts repeatedly state that to practice the Great Perfection, it is indispensable to achieve śamatha—in which the mind dissolves into the substrate consciousness and you experience bliss, luminosity, and nonconceptuality—

and to realize the emptiness of all phenomena, the goal of *vipaśyanā*. But the practices of the stages of generation and completion are not indispensable for everyone on this path, as the *Vajra Essence* makes clear. It describes two possibilities for revealing the nature of the ground of being, or the awareness of Samantabhadra, once you have ascertained the view of emptiness. The first way is to directly identify it in your own being:

For the direct identification within your own being, you first establish all the phenomena included in *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as emptiness. Once you have ascertained them as the displays of the space of ultimate reality, you identify this state as the great revelation and apprehend your own nature. As a result, you naturally settle in ground pristine awareness as the great freedom from extremes. This is the swift path, the *yāna* of the Great Perfection.

The second way is for people who lack the fortunate karma leading to direct identification. They can identify the ground in dependence upon the expedient path of the stage of generation followed by the stage of completion:

In reliance upon the relative, effortful path—as a means for leading beings to ultimate, effortless absolute space—the *kāyas* and facets of primordial consciousness of the ground *sugatagarbha* are generated as signs. And many *sādhana*s involving visualizations and recitations are taught in accordance with the many accounts of the names and meanings of deities to be revealed, buddha-fields, palaces, teachers, and retinues. All accounts asserting that by striving in meditative practice you will reach some vast region somewhere else, called a *buddhafield*, are called *paths of expedient means*.<sup>46</sup>

A parallel distinction is made throughout Dūdjom Lingpa's Dzokchen teachings and their commentaries: the teachings describe both the signless *dharmakāya*, which is the ultimate, definitive meaning, as well as conventional, relative meanings that discuss names and objects as if they existed independently. We are continually reminded that such intellectual expedients, taught for the sake of our understanding, are not established as existing autonomously.

The vehicle of the Great Perfection takes the result as the path, and the

46. VE 182–84.

fruition of this path is the recognition of all appearances and mindsets as being empty of inherent existence, manifesting solely as displays of one's own pristine awareness. All phenomena are realized as the radiance of awareness that manifests without obstruction, with nothing to be cultivated, accepted, or rejected. Nevertheless, the profound ultimate truth must not be misconceived as something fundamentally different from conventional, relative truths. Therefore, until we attain the state of fully enlightened buddhahood, we are warned to guard the mind, avoid harmful behavior, and cultivate virtue, in accordance with the infallible law of cause and effect.

In the *Vajra Essence*, the Lake-Born Vajra, Saroruhavajra, asserts that on the basis of the teachings in this tantra, future disciples will fathom these essential points and all doubts will be vanquished. Likewise, in his commentary to the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*, Pema Tashi interprets Dūdjom Lingpa as saying that in the future many people may achieve liberation in dependence upon this path, which was revealed there in accordance with the minds of disciples of the future. The accessible and enormously inspiring content of these teachings—clearly elucidating each essential step on the path to enlightenment—suggests that the future referred to in these classic treatises is now.

### *The Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*

All the qualities of the view, meditation, and conduct, as well as  
 the ground, path, and fruition,  
 together with taking refuge, bodhicitta, the six perfections, and  
 the maṇḍalas of deities and mantras,  
 are collectively perfected in the sharp vajra.

— DÜDJOM LINGPA, SV 613–14

A masterpiece of profundity and brevity, the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra* presents the complete path to perfect enlightenment in a mere 250 lines in the original Tibetan. Composed in crisply elegant verses to facilitate memorization and daily recitation, this tantra is a poetic encapsulation of the Dzokchen view, meditation, and conduct. The “sharp vajra” is discerning wisdom that recognizes all phenomena to be empty of inherent existence, demolishing the mountains of our concepts and collapsing the false shelters we erect out of hope and fear. This consummation of pristine awareness is present in the ground of being, which transcends all extremes of conceptual elaboration and is called the Great Perfection. All spiritual vehicles and

fruits are subsumed within this primordial consciousness that knows reality as it is and perceives the full range of phenomena.

If such a consciousness is primordially present, as the text states, why isn't everyone enlightened? The Teacher, Samantabhadra appearing as the Lake-Born Vajra, explains to Dūdjom Lingpa how all the worldly appearances and mindsets we take to be real actually manifest like apparitions—reified by our grasping—without even an atom of true existence. But the sharp vajra's power and blessings bring natural liberation, whereby all phenomena are recognized as spontaneously actualized displays of primordial consciousness. To accomplish this level of realization, we are instructed to focus on the essential points of practice, clearly distinguished in succinct terms.

The Teacher promises that with the wisdom of experiencing the true nature of existence, devoting ourselves to this pinnacle of paths will swiftly bring blessings, supernormal abilities, and liberation. Even those who do not experience enlightenment in one lifetime will dwell in the splendor of pristine buddhahelds wherein they can perfect their practices. Furthermore, these instructions will allow them to recognize the crucial points during delusive transitional phases, such as dying. But he asserts that those with superior faculties will achieve enlightenment in this lifetime, awakening in the absolute space of ultimate reality, and they will continue to serve others as perfectly omniscient buddhas.

### *Essence of Clear Meaning*

Once you have found delight in the garden of excellent meaning,  
the melodious explanation of whatever you have understood  
will hum forth.

Those who taste this sweet essence again and again perfect the power  
of blessed confidence.

— PEMA TASHI, CM 462

To effectively practice the instructions given in the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*, we must rely upon its detailed commentary, *Essence of Clear Meaning*. Dūdjom Lingpa's disciple Pema Tashi is the first-named requestor of the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra* itself. Although he is considered the author of this commentary, his role in modern terms might have been closer to that of a compiler and editor. In the colophon, he describes it as the memorized oral teachings of Dūdjom Lingpa, which he set down in writing. The highly condensed teachings of the root tantra are explained with definitive verses from the sutras, tantras, and famous masters

along with Dūdjom Lingpa’s oral explanations and quotes from his teachings, especially the *Enlightened View of Samantabhadra* and the *Vajra Essence*.

In this traditional Tibetan format, called a word-for-word commentary (Tib. *tshig ’grel*), the explanatory material has been woven in between the words of the root text, which are embedded in their original order (in Tibetan). This structure makes the commentary both a comprehensive tutorial and a quick reference tool, because the root text’s words serve as an index to the meaning of any passage. In translation, it is not always possible to match the order of the root text within the commentary, but the root terms have been boldfaced, making it easy to find the explanation for any verse. For example, where the root tantra reads “subtle self-concepts obscure wisdom and primordial consciousness,” the commentary offers this expansion: “In the beginning, **subtle self-concepts** adventitiously arise where there is no self, **obscuring** the essential nature, **wisdom**, and its creative power, **primordial consciousness**.”

Furthermore, the commentary is structured in classical Tibetan style with a detailed outline, which elaborates upon the eight-phased structure of the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*. This not only facilitates access to specific subjects, but it offers an in-depth conceptual map of the teachings. The outline does not appear explicitly in the Tibetan text but is defined implicitly by subtopics listed beneath each topic.

Because Dzokchen literature employs a unique vocabulary, and interpreting this profound language is crucial to our understanding, *Essence of Clear Meaning* embeds definitions for many key terms and concepts in the form of succinct explanations called contextual etymologies, as mentioned in the preface. Similar etymologies are found in most of our texts, offering us the opportunity to compare multiple explications of the lexicon of the Great Perfection.