

A short account of the unfathomable enlightened activity of the Fifth Kyabje Gochen Tulku Namchak Sang-ngag Tenzin Rinpoche

The fifth Gochen Tulku, Namchak Sangak Tenzin Rinpoche, was born in 1953. His father was Lama Tashi Döndrup of the Namchak clan, and his mother was Meru Tsoma Dza Pema Yangtso of the Kyungpo clan, more commonly known as Peyak. While Rinpoche was still quite young, his elders would remark on the prophecy found in Drupwang Tsoknyi's account of the origins and future of Gochen Monastery, in which it is stated,

Widespread fame of a blue rat will be seen from the distant region.
The male dragon will wander in the ten directions from the border.

Rinpoche heard people say that they interpreted the former statement to refer to the Lord Lama Namkha Tsewang, since the rat was the animal symbol with his birth year, and although his enlightened activities were extensive he died just as his fame began to spread. They also told Lama Tashi Döndrup, "The latter statement concerns your son, and prophecies that his activities will be widespread."

When Rinpoche was three years old, he was taken to a farm where he walked barefoot on a boulder, whereupon impressions of his footprints appeared in the stone, so that rumors spread that he was the incarnation of Namchak Tulku.¹

Later on, when Kongtrul Lodrö Rapel came to the child's house, the little boy caught hold of his horse's rein and wept, saying, "This rein is mine." The lama asked him, "Who are you?" whereupon he respectfully told him, "I am Namkha Tsewang."

Kongtrul Lodrö Rapel replied, "Since this rein was one I received when the former master Namkha Tsewang and I made an exchange, it truly belongs to you." And he handed the reins to the child. The report gradually began to spread that young Sang-ngag Tenzin had been recognized as the incarnation of the former master Namkha Tsewang.

Then, when Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö was fleeing into exile, he arrived at Zegyel. There, Drongpa Tenpa, the lama representing Gochen Monastery, requested an audience for the purpose of Rinpoche's formal recognition as the Gochen Tulku. This coincided with Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö Rinpoche visiting this sacred site and finishing his account of Zegyel, and he said, "On the one hand, at present we are stateless and fleeing into exile, but given that I have received this request to formally recognize an incarnation, this is an excellent and auspicious set of circumstances!" With this, he conferred on the child a letter confirming him as the fifth Gochen Tulku and the name Orgyen Sang-ngag Tenzin. He also laid a silk scarf around his neck and bestowed a white horse. Since what Lama Drong Tenpa offered Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö was far outweighed by what he bestowed back, under the circumstances Lama Drong Tenpa felt embarrassed.

Following this, Gadra Lama Nyima Özer Rinpoche and the lamas and monastic community of Gochen Monastery performed Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche's formal enthronement at Gadra

¹. Zodpa Rabten.

Monastery. Because of his premonition in a vision that the maturing and liberating transmission of the Tsasum Lingpa lineage might be at risk of disappearing, this lord Nyima Özer conferred the extensive lineage of Tsasum Lingpa—the empowerments that mature one spiritually and the teachings that liberate one, as well as the supportive oral transmissions—on the most important lamas and incarnations, like one vase filling others to the brim.

In 1958, Rinpoche was preparing to set forth, accompanying the lama² to Pema Köd,³ but this coincided with military forces invading along the route, so they returned back to his home region. Young Rinpoche then studied rituals and spiritual practices under his noble father Tashi and others, and following that went through the motions of pursuing spiritual practice. During the Cultural Revolution, however he was imprisoned for the “crime” of practicing Buddhism. While incarcerated for a period of 9 years, he studied with a number of tutors, learning calligraphy, the Indian and Chinese systems of astrology, and other subjects.

While in prison, Rinpoche requested Lama Karma Zangpo to teach him the transference of consciousness⁴ and instruct him on the nature of mind. Lama Karma Zangpo directly introduced Rinpoche to the latter through the threefold process of mind at rest, mind in motion, and pure awareness.⁵ Rinpoche meditated as much as he could during his breaks, both day and night, gaining a stable familiarity with the calm abiding state of mind⁶ and having all manner of meditative experiences of bliss, clarity, and nonconceptual awareness. Lama Karma Zangpo directly introduced him to the *tögel* approach of Dzogchen, and though he had many experiences of the *tögel* visions, he had no one with whom to clarify his uncertainty, so he stopped this practice for the time being.

Following this, while still in the prison, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche met Tulku Orgyen Chemchok Rinpoche. He imparted to Rinpoche the training in compassion and bodhicitta, on the basis of which the key point revealed itself to him, that all things depend on mind. The darkness of his suffering gradually cleared away, and he began to feel as though he had been freed from a hell realm and transported to a pure realm. Beginning with the 100 day practice of the common methods for training the mind, Rinpoche received Tulku Orgyen Chemchok’s kindness in the form of the experienced-based teachings for the Great Aural Linage as well as instructions on *tögel*.

Then the authorities in Kongpo implemented a policy of leniency toward the Buddhist tradition, under which Rinpoche and the other imprisoned lamas were released, recovering their former freedom and status. But rather than returning to his home region, Rinpoche immediately traveled to Lhasa in the company of Tulku Orgyen Chemchok. During the several months they stayed there, Rinpoche received Tulku Orgyen Chemchok’s entrustment of empowerments, oral transmissions, and instructions, primarily for the Nyingthig and Dudjom traditions.

². Gadra Lama Nyima Özer.

³. A lowland region on the southeastern border of Tibet with India, through which many Tibetan refugees fled into exile during the Communist invasion of their country.

⁴. Tib. *po-wa*.

⁵. Tib. *ney-gyu rik-sum*.

⁶. Tib. *zhi-ney*.

Following his lord's directives, Rinpoche undertook retreats, first focusing on the Dudjom tradition of Vajrakila in the Moon Cave at Yerpa.⁷ He then spent more than a year undertaking successive spiritual retreats at places such as Samye Chimpu, Yarlung Shedrak, Gangri Tökar, Tsering Jong, Önpu Taktsang, Pakdru Densatil, Zangri Karmar (the seat of Machik), Dakla Gampo, and Tramo Drak. At each of these sites, he spent several weeks or months undertaking retreat and establishing a spiritual connection with them. It was during this period that he repaired the sacred sites of Yang-dzong, Nubchen Sangye Yeshe's birth place, and Yeshe Tsogyel's life force lake Latso in the Drak region, installing three new statues of Guru Rinpoche and his two consorts, as well as one of the dakini Dechen Gyelmo (Queen of Bliss). In the Jokang temple of Lhasa, Rinpoche installed three new statues of Guru Rinpoche, which he filled with such things as the "regent" statue⁸ known as Jemey Atrong (a *terma* of Sangyey Lingpa).

In 1981, on the first day of the first month of the Tibetan iron bird year, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche arrived in Bhutan and was taken under the care of the lord Khyentse Rinpoche,⁹ who nurtured him at Bumthang with the oral transmissions of the Kangyur,¹⁰ as well as such transmissions as the Druptap Gyatsa, the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, the *Treasury of Enlightened Qualities* with the author's own commentary, and many others. Following the directive of the sublime incarnation Orgyen Chemchok, he presented Khyentse Rinpoche with a test of his realization and Khyentse Rinpoche was delighted, giving him all encouragement. Khyentse Rinpoche told him, "Henceforth, you should continue with receiving all the empowerments, oral transmissions, and teaching transmissions that are available." From that point onward, until his passing, this lord was Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche's primary source of food, clothing, and teachings for fifteen whole years, caring for him with an extraordinary love.

During the winter of that first year with Khyentse Rinpoche,¹¹ Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche stayed in strict retreat in his refuge lord's personal chambers at Sisina in Thimphu,¹² practicing *The Heart Drop of Chetsün* (*Chetsün Nyingtig*). Following his refuge lord Khyentse's directive, he journeyed to Shechen Monastery in Nepal, where he met the refuge lord Chatral Rinpoche and Khetsün Rinpoche.

Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche then accompanied his lord Khyentse Rinpoche to Bhutan, where he received from Khyentse Rinpoche such instructions as the teaching manual *Yeshe Lama; Drimed Zhalung*, a teaching manual concerning the Nyingtig Yabzhi; the Chetsün Nyingtik cycle; Yönga's commentary on the *Yönten Dzöd*; the commentary on the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* entitled *Chokchui Münsel* and its overview entitled *Ösel Nyingpo*; the advanced yogic practices of the Nyingthig tradition and so forth. Throughout this time Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche also received transmissions for numerous practices with a seal of secrecy, such as the *Dzogchen Desum* of

7. A sacred site to the east of Lhasa.

8. Regent statues (Tib. *ku-tsap*) are statues of Guru Rinpoche created by the Guru himself and concealed as *terma*.

9. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

10. The corpus of the Buddha's teachings translated into Tibetan.

11. 1981.

12. The capital of Bhutan.

Chokgyur Lingpa and *Tsasum Ösel Nyingthig* of Khyentse;¹³ for everything contained in the collected writings of the omniscient Longchenpa, including the Yabzhi, the Seven Treasuries, the Ngelso Korsum; and likewise for the collected writings of numerous other masters, including the omniscient Rogzom, the omniscient Jigmed Lingpa, the omniscient Mipham Rinpoche, Paltrul Rinpoche, Khyentse Wangpo, Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, Jamgön Kongtrul, Zhechen Gyetsap, Karmapa Kakyap Dorje, and Tsele Natsok Rangdrol. He also received the threefold conferral of empowerments, oral transmissions, and teachings for such terma cycles as those of Dorje Lingpa, Pema Lingpa, Jatsön Nyingpo, and Chokgur Lingpa and many others.

Most especially, at Bodh Gaya in India, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche experienced the great good fortune of receiving the bodhisattva vow on the basis of the extensive ceremonies for conferring the two mainstream traditions of the bodhisattva vow, and the name Khyente Rinpoche conferred on him was Jamyang Drowa Kündul (Mañjushri, Who Guides All Beings).

At Palyul Monastery¹⁴, Khyentse Rinpoche conferred the empowerments and oral transmissions for the extensive Kama tradition of the Nyingma school, as well as the oral transmissions for such commentaries on the *Guyhagarbha Tantra as the Oral Transmission of the Lord of Secrets (Sangdag Zhalung)* and *the Ornament of the Lord of Secret's Intent (Sangdag Gong-gyen)*.

Following his lord's directive, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche received the empowerments for *the Treasury of Precious Hidden Treasures (Rinchen Terdzöd)* from the lord of refuge Kalu Rinpoche, and the oral transmissions for this Treasury, as well as the empowerments and oral transmissions for *the Treasury of Spiritual Instructions (Dam-ngag Dzöd)* from Benchen Tulku Tenga Rinpoche. In addition, from Drupwang Penor Rinpoche he received the empowerment for *Sutra of the Union of Enlightened Intent* entitled *Flow of Nectar (Düdtse Chugyiin)*;¹⁵ from Taklung Zhapdrung, the entire range of teachings from the Taklung Kagyü tradition and the collected works of Jedrung Jampa Jungney; and from Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche, the entire cycle of the Northern Treasure (Jangter) tradition.

In the presence of the lord of refuge Trulshig Rinpoche, he received the combined transmission for the extensive and direct lineages of Yangti Nagpo Sergyi Druchikpa, (Single Golden Syllable of the Black Quintessence) and the threefold conferral of the empowerments, oral transmissions, and instructions for the Four Cycles to the Heart Drop of Enlightened Mind (Thugthig Korzhi). Most especially, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche received from Trulshig Rinpoche the practical instructions of the oral lineage for the yoga of the dark retreat; the empowerment ritual this lord himself composed for *Hayagriva and Varahi: The Wish-Fulfilling Gem*, which had been transmitted from the lord of refuge Zhapkar; the Dzogchen teaching manual *Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance (Marig Münsel)*; and the background teaching for this, entitled *Flight of the Garuda (Kading Shoklap)* and many others.

¹³. Jamyang Khyentsei Wangpo.

¹⁴. This is Namdrooling Nyingmapa Monastery in Bylakuppe, south India, founded in 1963 by the late Penor Rinpoche of the Pelyul tradition.

¹⁵. The source tantra of anuyoga.

From Khenchen Jigmed Püntso, Tulku Sang-ngag received the authorization ceremony for Mañjushri, personal instruction on the Gangloma (Manjushri) prayer, and Mipham Rinpoche's conferral of life force for Gesar. When Khenchen Jigmed Rinpoche visited Chagdud Rinpoche's center in America, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche received from him the threefold conferral of empowerments, oral transmissions, and instructions for the Chetsün Nyingtig cycle, as well as the empowerment and instructions for his own terma for the peaceful sadhana of Mañjushri. Rinpoche received the rest of the transmission for his collected works and a complete range of other empowerments from Jetsünma Muntso.¹⁶

The excellent Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche Jamyang Dorje perceived in particular that Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche was to belong to the lineage of students from Khenpo Ngagchung. He told Tulku Sang-ngag that the mainstream lineage for the explanatory teachings on Dzogchen lay in Khenpo Ngagchung's works *Commentary on Samantabhadra's Enlightened Mind: Key to the Mother and Child Cycles of the Heart Drop Teachings (Künzang Thugthig)* and *Vision of the Sun: Detailed Explanation of the Vast Expanse of Space, the Further Text on the Two Cycles (Nyimey Nangwa)*. Out of his love for Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche, in his personal chambers, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche conferred personal teachings on these works and, in addition, a detailed transmission of this lord's own collected works.

In the wood rat year of the 16th sexagenary cycle [1984], during a *drupchen* ritual focusing on the Tsogchen Düpa cycle at Shechen Monastery¹⁷, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche's refuge lord Khyentse emphasized the importance of taking monastic ordination to the spiritual masters who were presently upholding the teachings. As a result, in the presence of the refuge lord Trulshig Rinpoche, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche received the full degree of monastic ordination according to the uninterrupted threefold oral tradition of the Early Translation School's¹⁸ transmission of vows, which involved receiving the upasaga, novice, and Bikshu vows uninterruptedly.

Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche's precious lord of refuge¹⁹ told him, "Even though we have completed the construction of the outer monastery until now, inside, we are yet to establish the monastic community and the ongoing traditions of this great monastery of our own tradition. To begin with, you must accept the responsibility as vajra master." Following his directive, Rinpoche trained assiduously in such subjects as the Mindroling system of *drupchen* rituals; the duties of a vajra master for the regular ceremonies; the three topics of ritual chanting, melody, and percussion instruments; the three topics of torma making, drumming, and wind instruments; and the practical instructions in ritual dance and the laying out of mandalas. Rinpoche shouldered the responsibility to serve the monastic community as vajra master for seven years.

Although Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche had not spent the years preparing to be worthy of the post of *khenpo*, Vajradhara Khyentse Rinpoche conferred on him the responsibility of acting as *khenpo* for the summer monastic retreat, maintaining the tradition of the threefold grounds of Vinaya,

¹⁶. The niece of Khenchen Jigmed Puntsok.

¹⁷. Shechen Tennyi Dargyeling Monastery, in Baudanath, Nepal, founded by Dilgo Khyenste Rinpoche in 1980.

¹⁸. The Nyingma school.

¹⁹. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

which he carried out during the next seven summer retreats. After presenting Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche with the title of khenpo for the monastic community, Khyentse Rinpoche directed him to teach on the *Treasury of Qualities (Yönten Dzod)*, *the Words of My Perfect Teacher (Künzang Lamey Zhalung)*, *Source Verses for Novice Monastics (Getsül Karika)*, *Background Accounts of Monastic Discipline (Dulwey Lengzhi)*, as well as detailed treatments of the development stage and other subjects. Following these directives, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche felt that he himself improved somewhat.

In the wood ox year [1985], accompanied by his younger brothers Dr. Trashi and Khenpo Ngagwang Gelek, Rinpoche journeyed with his refuge lord and retinue to Bodh Gaya in India, where they received the great empowerment of Kalacakra, personal teachings on the *Bodhicaryavatara*, and the bodhisattva vow.²⁰

At Kyichu Temple in the Paro district²¹, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche met the great *tertön* Pegyel Lingpa who told him, “We need to fix on the correct occasion to establish auspicious circumstances because of the prophecy that you are the custodian of my teachings.” Thereupon, he conferred on Rinpoche the great empowerment of Vajrasattva and the teaching transmission for the source tantra of his Gongdü cycle, *Web of Lotus (Pema Drawa)*. Following this, Tertön Pegyal Lingpa came to Shechen Monastery in Nepal, where he spoke to Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche of the need for the empowerments and oral transmissions for the earlier and later terma cycles²² to continue. Rinpoche begged him, “For me to receive empowerments from you, a *tertön*, is one thing, but I feel unqualified to offer any to you in return.” Regardless of this, he said, “Since the refuge lord Khyentse Rinpoche, master of the entire tradition of the Early Translation School, is present here, tomorrow we should put the question to him so that he can decide the matter.”

The next day they made this request to the lord of refuge who told Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche, “It would be best if the lineages you hold were not to disappear. He, the *tertön*, is foreseeing what will benefit the teachings.” At that, there was nothing more for Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche to say. Khyentse Rinpoche then immediately said, “Bring me all the texts for the Namchak terma teachings!” He then invited the *tertön* to join them and conferred the terma empowerment of Pema Trakthung and volume empowerment (Pöwang) of other Namchak texts. Following this, one day Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche was summoned to Khyentse Rinpoche’s presence, and Khyentse Rinpoche said, “You should undertake a retreat on Yangphur at Paro Taktsang.” The next day Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche was preparing to set out for Bhutan; when he was on the point of departing, the lord himself bestowed on him the terma empowerment for the Nyak line of Vajrakila and placed the *kila* dagger he wore around his neck on his head while making fervent prayers. Giving many personal instructions, he also conferred on him a letter that read as follows:

Homage to the gracious lama!

²⁰. These were bestowed by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso.

²¹. In western Bhutan.

²². The earlier cycle is that of the termas of Namchak Tsasum Lingpa (1694–1738); the later those of Pegyal Lingpa (1924–1988).

Generally speaking, you are to some extent aware of the fact that the Vajrayana requires authentic empowerment for numerous reasons. Nowadays, however, when the teachings are on the point of disappearing, I feel that it is very important for the teachings to be taught and heard with an eye to serving them. Given that the continuance of the empowerments and oral transmissions for this cycle of Tsasum Lingpa's teachings are close to dying out, pray again and again to Guru Rinpoche to ensure that the transmissions you hold may flourish! Make continuous prayers of aspiration for these profound teachings to be explained, studied, meditated on, and practiced so that they might flourish! If you render service to the teachings with such motivation, you will encounter no censure from the dakinis and dharma protectors for having exposed secret teachings. Rather, you should humbly request that they grant their permission for you to mature your own mind stream spiritually and then liberate those of others, and add to this your prayer of aspiration as a humble request that they grant you spiritual attainment. Knowing your own innate awareness to be in nondual unity with Guru Rinpoche, rest without distraction as much as you can in the immediacy of pure awareness. Encourage others to virtue, and make aspiration prayers that the degeneration in these times be quelled and that the teachings of victorious ones spread and flourish. These are old man Mangala's personal words of advice, sharing all that I know with Tulku Sang-ngag Tenzin.

Giving Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche this letter, Khyentse also gave him a very timely boost of inspiration. At that point Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche respectfully told Khyentse Rinpoche, "Previously I have not had much experience in giving empowerments, and since there are no texts laying out the structure of the Namchak empowerments, I wouldn't know how to give them."

After Khyentse Rinpoche had examined most of the empowerment manuals carefully, he said, "There are many terma sources that are for the most part like these. Transmission will be difficult to survive these days if there isn't a practical continuum of authentic visual transmission of pith instructions. So you should include the obscure passages, eliminate the corrupt passages, and lay it out in a straightforward manner wherever it's crooked. Therefore, it is crucial that the Namchak texts be such that someone can recite them just by looking at the liturgical arrangements and know how to perform the rituals."

"Please make this so," Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche begged.

"I will, I will," Khyentse Rinpoche said. "These days people are disparaging certain great Kagyü lamas in places such as Nupri where, it is said, when performing empowerments they don't know anything about the proper order of things, such as the preparatory phase of the empowerment and the practical methods to be used."

"So what is to be done at this point?" Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche asked.

He replied, “For the time being there is no problem. Just perform the rituals according to the templates that exist for all empowerments in general, written by the two Jamgöns.²³ Generally speaking, it is necessary for you to be able to distinguish the respective meanings of the four levels of empowerment, which are the crux of the three yogas.²⁴ It is true that there are specific minor discrepancies in individual cases, but both Jamgöns, Khyentse and Kongtrul, would confer the entire *Treasury of Precious Treasure Teachings* within a single unifying format. Now most importantly, you should ask the advice of the tertön himself, Pegyel Lingpa, and it will suffice to do whatever he says. You will certainly know what to do.”

Following his directive, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche spent a month in Bhutan in strict retreat. Then, in the earth dragon year of the 17th sexagenary cycle,²⁵ during the fourth month, at Chorten Kora, Trashig Yangtse in eastern Bhutan, he offered the empowerments and oral transmissions for the entire Namchak tradition and received *the United Intent of the Three Kayas (Kusum Gongdü)* cycle²⁶ from Tertön Pedgyal Lingpa. Once these had been completed, the lord Pegyel Lingpa himself bestowed on Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche his empowerment implements—his vase, crystal, the entire set of deity pictures, and crown—saying, “I have placed these in the hands of the custodian of these teachings.” He also prophesied that in the future Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche would be the one to disseminate the earlier and later terma cycles simultaneously. The foregoing account shows how this became evident.

At that time, Pegyel Lingpa examined the prophecy account for the cycle *Overwhelming Samsara and Nirvana with Splendor*²⁷, and spoke to Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche confirming how he, the great tertön himself, as well as Tulku Sang-ngag and others, were attested to in prophecies. In addition, he said, “There are other prophecies concerning you to be found in such as the Prophecies of the sacred sites of Zegyel Mountain Range. Were you aware of that?”

Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche answered, “No, I was not.”

Later Rinpoche examined *the Illuminating Lamp: Route Map of the Zegyel Site*, and found the passage, “A powerful master of attainment named Nagashri will sow the seeds for thousands of siddhas in that place.” This came in accord²⁸ with the name that Trulshik Rinpoche bestowed on Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche upon his full monastic ordination as Ngawang Ludrup Pel Zangpo. So Rinpoche thought, “Although I haven’t benefited the monastic seat much, despite having the name Tulku of Gochen Monastery, perhaps this indicates that there will be many good practitioners among the followers of this lineage in the future.”

This is mentioned here because Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche was uncertain whether he had been prophesied or was to hold the formal transmission. Indeed, he had no sense of confidence that this

²³. Mahayoga, anuyoga, and atiyoga.

²⁴. Jamyang Khyentse Wango (1820–1892) and Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayey (1813–1900).

²⁵. That is, 1988.

²⁶. The principal cycle of Pegyel Lingpa’s termas.

²⁷. Tib. Kordey Zilnön.

²⁸ The Tibetan name Ludrup Pel corresponds to the Sanskrit name Nagashri in the prophecy.

or that was the case. Previously, the lord of his crown chakra Nyima Özer had issued a decree concerning this matter, and further to that his refuge lord Dudjom Rinpoche bestowed the following letter on him, written in Dudjom Rinpoche's own hand:²⁹

This is offered to the excellent Sang-ngag Tenzin, a sublime incarnation.

I am overjoyed and extremely delighted to know that you have vanquished the hordes of maras and enemies and have safely arrived in India and Nepal. Here I, a childish old man, am still stumbling along. As mentioned in your letter, I did the divination and it turns out that, as for your place of residence, both Darjeeling and Nepal are suitable for you and thus I see no difference. Concerning your reverence's health, the divination showed there will be no sign of any problems.

The primary thing to mention to you is that you are the one who will ensure that the lifeline of the Namchak terma cycles not be cut off, but rather prolonged, because the aspirations and motivation from your prior lifetimes have matured in a timely fashion. Please do not let your attention stray from this purpose. With sincere aspirations that I will enjoy the pleasure of actually meeting with you before long, I beg that you accept my profoundest respect. Offered on the 23rd day of the first month of the water pig year [1983] by the childish old man Dudjom while casting blossoms of auspicious wishes.

Dudjom Rinpoche later sent the another following missive to Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche:

This is offered to the august presence of Gochen Tulku, a lamp for the teachings of the Early Translation school.

Knowing that you are in the best of health and striving to benefit the teachings and beings, I was extremely delighted to have well received your gift of U.S. dollars and the skull fragment of the merchant Norzang together with a silk scarf.

Concerning your daily personal practice, I have nothing new to suggest, only that you continue according to your personal wishes. Given that the teachings of the victorious ones in general, and primarily those of the Namchak tradition, are waning to an extreme degree, like a lamp running out of oil, it is crucial that you strive to find a means to ensure their increase and not let your courage wane. Please be deeply committed to this.

In order to bring long life to you and all your wishes to benefit the teaching and beings without hindrances, you should earnestly engage in taking care of yourself with all the time virtue.

With the wish that we will enjoy the pleasure of actually meeting with you before long, this is offered on February 2nd, 1983, in New York in the United States by the childish old man Dudjom.

Similarly, sublime Vajradhara, his refuge lord Dilgo Khyentse sent him the following letter:

²⁹. That is, not dictated to a scribe.

This is offered to the hand of Gochen Tulku Mantra Guhya Shasana Dhara,³⁰ whose wisdom, realization, and faithful mind are utterly expansive.

In response to the letter you bestowed on me, it is in fact the case that you hold the personal transmission to extend the life force of the Namchak teaching cycles, which are like a lamp dying out. Arousing your courage accordingly, if you carry out your plans to establish retreat centers at Yangleshöd and to confer the empowerments and oral transmissions, and practice it, there are no other life stories of the holy ones surpassing that.

So I beg and beg and beg that you hold this within the expanse of your enlightened intent.

By the old Dilgo.

Thus, both the two precious lords of refuge, including the supreme head of the Nyingma sect, actually sent Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche personal letters confirming him as the one responsible for extending the life force of the Namchak teachings.

As well, in the midst of a vast assembly, of the great and sublime incarnate tertön Drodul Pegyel Lingpa conferred on Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche an extraordinary trust of his enlightened intent concerning the direct lineage of his teachings and proclaimed, “While you might have some challenges for the time being, there are auspicious circumstances indicating that in the future you are to ensure that this extensive lineage expands in all directions. In particular, there is a vajra prophecy that you are the one to cause these teachings to spread and flourish in Tibet, so you should not let your inspiration wane.”

On the basis of the foregoing, Rinpoche understood that there were prophecies that indicated he would render some small service to these profound terma teachings. Therefore, thinking of future generations who would uphold this lineage, he has tried as much as he could to help them. This has involved composing structured arrangements for most of the liturgies; synopses and instruction manuals where appropriate for those existing source or root instructions; and empowerment manuals arranged on the basis of the authentic sources. He has commissioned new paintings for the entire ranges of mandalas and deity cards. Concerning the new arrangements of these profound termas, he offered a gift of the dharma text (and continues to do so) by publishing these in 32 volumes equal in number to the thirty-two major marks of a buddha’s physical perfection by printing thousands of sets.

If the purpose and underlying reasons for the foregoing work were not explained in this way, there would be no guarantee that people would not have misgivings and erroneous opinions, feeling that Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche was corrupting these profound terma teachings for his own selfish ends, mixing in other elements, interpolating, or muddling with them. Rinpoche therefore felt that it was necessary to explain things by expanding a bit.

Eventually, in 1991, because of challenges of the administration work in the monastery in Nepal and messages from the monasteries of his home region about the waning of the Namchak lineage there, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche humbly went into the presence of refuge lord and prostrated

³⁰. The Sanskrit equivalent of Gochen Tulku’s Tibetan name, Sang-ngag Tenzin.

himself, intending to offer his resignation. But before he had the opportunity to say anything Khyentse Rinpoche told him, “I am aware of the fact that you aspire to be a very pure practitioner of the dharma. For the time being, don’t make any plans to go back to your home region. In order to ensure that the Namchak teachings benefit in the future, collect whatever copies of the Namchak texts that exist and publish them; arrange the liturgies, commission deity cards for the empowerments, and so forth. Then, when at some point you do return home, you will be able to confer the entire range of empowerments and oral transmissions.” When he bestowed this directive, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche helplessly burst into tears. Then, before his refuge lord Vajradhara passed into a state of peace, Rinpoche received a letter in his own hand, appointing him as lama to the nuns of Shugsep in northern India, and accordingly he spent several months there giving empowerments and instructions.

During this time Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche had some disturbing dreams, indicating that if he were not to go immediately it was sure that he would not meet again with his refuge lord. Fearing that speaking about this with others would seem pretentious, he set forth while keeping it a secret. But his journey was interrupted, and after several days’ delay he arrived to find that Trulshig Rinpoche and others had come in haste and were offering Khyentse Rinpoche a ceremony to prolong his life, which Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche joined. Finally, when Khyentse Rinpoche was taken to hospital Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche stayed to serve him, and at dawn he passed into a state of peace through the dharmakaya method of transferring his consciousness. Rinpoche stayed for three days in the presence of his holy remains, during which time all his ordinary thoughts, both positive and negative, ceased and he experienced a natural state of rest. He understood this to be due to the power of this sacred lord’s blessings.

Following this, during the funeral ceremonies of the refuge lord, the venerable nuns of Shugsep came to Nepal. Without a single one of them returning to India, they expressed their hopes of staying in the retreat center. As patron Kelsang’s earlier plan of establishing a retreat center under Kyentse Rinpoche’s direction changed to be under the auspices of the refuge lord Chatral Sangye Dorje, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche founded the three-year retreat center for nuns called Nesum Dakki Ling at Yangleshöd.³¹ for the first time. Later on, Chatral Rinpoche graciously served as retreat lama in four programs for both Sang-ngag Purpa Ling, a three-year retreat center for monks, and then for Kusum Khandro Ling, a three-year retreat center for nuns. He appointed Rinpoche to be the retreat instructor, and graciously bestowed the entire range of teachings, including the preliminary practices for the Nyingthig tradition, the instructions concerning the empowerment for the Three Roots, the *tsalung* practices, and Dzogchen. Following this, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche founded a new Institute for nuns at Turquoise Leaf Nunnery, where the nuns complete six years of study in the college followed by three years of meditation in the retreat center. In the three year retreat they practice the preliminaries, intensive retreats on the Three Roots, *tsalung* and the advanced yogic exercises, as well as the *trekchö* and *tögel* techniques of Dzogchen. Rather than simply going through the motions of being retreatants, they have been able to firmly establish themselves in the practice of the three yogas.

³¹. Pharping, Nepal.

When the new Mönlam Chenmo foundation was registered at Bodh Gaya³², Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche accepted the responsibility of being registered as accountant among the seven members. The sponsor of the Mönlam Chenmo, Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche had begun a project to research and preserve the kama and terma teachings.³³ Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche was assigned the responsibility of going to Tibet to collect kama and terma teachings, to collect rare texts, and to organize drupchen rituals and the founding of new retreat centers. Obtaining a visa through the immigration and tourist departments of India and Nepal, he was able to travel to the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 1994, visiting the monasteries of the Lhasa and Lhoka regions, primarily Samye, Mindroling, Dorje Drak, Tsering Jong, Pelri, Shekdrak, Shuksep, and Drigung Katsel. Having procured permission and a visa to visit eastern Tibet from authorities of the relevant government departments, he left Lhasa and traveled to Nakchu, Tengchen, and Riwoche. As a side trip, Rinpoche went from Gyang-ngön to his father's ancestral home of the Namchak clan, Ngangzo Monastery, Gangda, and his own Gochen monastery. He then went on to Chamdo, Gonjo Korkang, the great monastery of Derge, Dzogchen Shri Simha, Shechen, Palyul, Katok, and other primarily Nyingma institutions, visiting these places and making offerings to establish a connection. On his return journey he traveled through Zangdok Pelri in Kongpo, Dakla Gampo, and Tsetang to Lhasa, and then to Yang-dzong in Drak (the site of Nupchen Sangye Yeshe's spiritual accomplishment), Shugsep, and Gangri Tökar. Among his attempts to restore the kama and terma teachings, he offered funds to support the retreat centers of Tsering Jong, Pelri, Karchu, and Sheldrak.

In 1993, following the command of Chagdud Rinpoche, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche first came to the United States to offer the empowerments and oral transmissions for the Namchak and *Kusum Gongdü* cycles to Rinpoche himself and his students. At that time, Ngagpa Yeshe Dorje, a student of the refuge lord Dudjom Rinpoche and his son Dungse Rinpoche Thinley Norbu, passed away and Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche assisted in the cremation, as he had received a directive to go and offer his services.

Two years later when Rinpoche came to erect the stupa to house Yeshe Dorje's remains, he sought an audience with Dungse Rinpoche and had the opportunity of receiving teachings from him. Previously in Nepal he had received in Dungse Rinpoche's holy presence the text empowerment for the terma cycles of the former and later Dudjoms,³⁴ personal instruction on the Dzogchen text *Refining One's Perception (Nang-jang)*, and later on in the United States a very detailed personal teaching on *Calling the Lama from Afar: A Spontaneous Song of Genuine Being (Lama Gyangböd Nyukmey Tollu)*. One day during a tsok feast, he conferred on Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche the extraordinary methods of direct introduction for the two higher levels of profound empowerment and also honored him with praise saying, "You are a Dzogchen yogin." He further told Rinpoche, "If in the future you adopt the lifestyle of a mantra holder, I would be very delighted." "Wonderful," Rinpoche replied, whereupon he had set the auspicious circumstances for this in place. Later on Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche did change to the lifestyle of a lay tantric practitioner, marrying his spiritual consort Melong Yeshe, with whom he now has four children.

³². In 1989.

³³. **Is this the Yeshe De Project?**

³⁴. Dudjom Lingpa and his rebirth, Dudjom Rinpoche Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje.

Later, thinking of the rules and regulations of the monastery, he permanently resigned from his position there via both writing and verbally to the refuge lords Khandro Rinpoche and Rabjam Rinpoche.

As for his other projects in service to the teachings, Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche oversaw construction of a stupa of enlightenment in New Mexico in the United States. Following this, in California he oversaw the construction of a set of eight stupas at Chagdud Gonpa; a stupa of enlightenment and a tiered stupa, both at Mount Shasta; eight stupas in Arcata; a stupa of enlightenment and a tiered stupa, both in Los Angeles; a great stupa of enlightenment in Sedona, Arizona;³⁵ a stupa for Mingyur Dorje's relics at Penor Rinpoche's center in upstate New York; in South America, a set of eight stupas at Chagdud Gonpa in Brazil; in Taiwan, a stupa of enlightenment; two stupas enshrining relics of refuge lord Khyentse and Pedgyal Lingpa at Phurpaling, Pharping, Nepal; again in the United States, a set of eight stupas at the Namchak Montana Retreat Ranch; and at The Garden of One Thousand Buddhas of Ewam Sang-ngag Ling or Ewam Maghadha, (Bodhgaya of the US) a statue of the great mother Parjnaparamita, surrounded by a retinue of the one thousand buddhas (principally the buddhas of the three times) and the eight stupas of the Sugata, with an additional one thousand stupas around the perimeter. At Yangti Gomde there are many statues of Guru Rinpoche, Vimalamitra, and other figures of the lineage of Dzogchen lamas. He oversaw all this new construction to provide a support for universal peace and gathering the collective merit for all.

These days Rinpoche is applying himself earnestly to furthering the enlightened activity of the earlier and later cycles of termas.³⁶ Having collected and edited some thirty volumes of the profound Namchak termas, he published 1500 copies in India and 1500 in Chengdu in China. He also sent both the earlier and later cycles to Yachen Chögar in Tibet to be included in the Great Collection of New Termas and get published. As well, he has been able to offer the entire range of empowerments and oral transmissions for the profound termas of Namchak and Pegyel Lingpa to, Asang Rinpoche, a sublime incarnation of Namkhey Nyingpo and the regent of Drupwang Lungtok Gyatso; other Tulkus, khenpos such as Khenchen Yeshe Döntok; and the lama and tulkus who uphold the Namchak tradition in the uplands and lowland of central and eastern Tibet such as Namtrul Pakpa Gyatso; Gyeltsen Tulku of Ripa; Pelmey Khyentrul, who is a descendent of Ngönney Tulku; Richey Setrul Rinpoche; the two sons of Gadra Lama; the tulku of Gadra Lama Nyima Özer Rinpoche; Sangye Nyima, the son of Namtrul Trinley Gyeltsen; Gochen Tsampa Lodrö; and Draknak Sertsa Lama.

As indicated above, Rinpoche has transmitted the entire range of empowerments and oral transmissions for the earlier and later terma cycles three times in Bhutan, once in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, and once in Tibet. He has transmitted the empowerment and oral transmissions for the *Kusum Gongdü* cycle some six times. Over the years he has transmitted the empowerments and oral transmissions for the Namchak tradition one time each in the United States, the Russian capital of Moscow, and Pharping in Nepal. In addition, he has transmitted the empowerments and oral transmissions for *The Four Higher Collections of the Heart Drop Teachings (Nyingtihak Yapzhi)* twice at Tsenkar in Bhutan, also in Taipei, and in Santa Fe, New Mexico in the United States. He

³⁵. Known as the Amitabha Stupa.

³⁶. The cycles of Tsasum Lingpa and Pedgyel Lingpa, respectively.

has transmitted the *Künzang Gongpa Zangtel* cycle once, and the empowerments and oral transmissions for the *Dzinpa Rangdrol* cycle in Bhutan, the United States, and Nepal. In conjunction with his founding of the new center of Ewam Yangti Gomde, he has transmitted the empowerments, oral transmissions, and instructions for the cycle of *The Black Innermost Drop: The Single Golden Letter (Yangti Nagpo Sergyi Druchigpa)*; overseeing the editing, translation and publishing of the texts.

In this and other ways Rinpoche has tried to be of service in promoting numerous profound teachings that are in danger of disappearing. In establishing funding for *drupchen* and *drubchöd* rituals in dharma centers in the East and West, he has ensured that these traditions will continue without being lost.

As the foregoing illustrates, the centers of Ewam Sang-ngag Ling (The Garden of One Thousand Buddhas), Ewam Pema Khandro Ling, Ewam Samten Ling, the Namchak Retreat Ranch in the United States, the three Ewam centers in Taiwan, Ewam Hong Kong, Ewam Vietnam, Ewam Japan, the mother monastery of Ewam Namchak in the holy country of India, and other centers in many corners of the world are dharma centers and groups upholding this extensive tradition which are spreading and flourishing. Rinpoche has every confidence that this is entirely due to the motivation and aspirations of the lord protectors of his crown chakra. As well, he has the unflagging hope and wish that in the future he will be of whatever service he can to the scriptural transmission and realization of the teachings.