

THE LIFE AND LIBERATION  
OF PHAGMODRUPA,  
THE PROTECTOR OF MIGRATING BEINGS

*by Takpo Chän Nga Rinpoche'*

Indistinguishable from the chief of the ocean of conquerors<sup>2</sup>  
Manifestly superior in the center of the ocean of bodhisattvas  
Splendorous at the pinnacle of the ocean of learned and accomplished ones –  
This friend to an ocean of realms of migrating beings is all-victorious.

This heart-son of the world-famous Dharma king<sup>3</sup>, with realization equal to space, was extensively praised and requested to sit at the head of the row of the ocean-like Sangha: “Great Khampa Geshe<sup>4</sup>, sit at the top of the row,” and was empowered as prophesied as the master of the lineage of all Kagyupa.<sup>5</sup>

This one renowned throughout the three worlds, called Shri Phagmodrupa, described by Gampopa’s vajra speech as one to be viewed as inseparable from himself, has an ocean of good qualities, but explaining them partially – taking a few drops from the oceanic expanse with the tip of a stalk of kusha grass – his qualities can be related in three ways: as a buddha for those of highest capacity; as continua of rebirths as realized persons for those of middling capacity; and for those of least capacity as a great bodhisattva who abided on the bhumis, having trained in stages starting as an individualized being possessed of good fortune.

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1 (p. 137) This biography of Phagmodrupa is found in *History of Drikung* (a Drikung Kagyu dharma history), Tib. *'bri gung chos 'byung*, by Takpo Chännga Rinpoche. This book was published under his ordination name, Drikung Konchog Gyatso, in 2004, by Nationalities Publications (Tib. *mi rigs dpe skrun khang*), Beijing.

2 ‘The chief of the ocean of conquerors’ is an epithet of Buddha Shakyamuni.

3 ‘World-famous Dharma king’ is an epithet of Gampopa.

4 ‘Geshe’: Tib. *dge bshes*, is an abbreviation of Tib. *dge ba'i bshes gnyen*, ‘virtuous spiritual friend’, another way of saying ‘lama’ or ‘Buddhist teacher’. This became an academic title in the Gelugpa tradition, but all usage of the word in this text has the former meaning.

5 These actions of praising, requesting, and empowering were performed by Gampopa.

## Phagmodrupa, Buddha

Phagmodrupa himself clearly stated: “I myself was Sugata Krakucchandha<sup>6</sup>, the first of the ten hundred suns of this good kalpa who evaporate the ocean of existence; in the future I will be the World Honored One Akṣhobhya Vajra in the eastern bud-dhafiield, Scattered Flowers, turning the Dharma-Wheel of the Great Vehicle with limitless bodhichitta; and in this current age of strife of the time of the rampant five defilements, I am preeminent among the conquerors, the one possessed of the en-lightened activity of compassion-driven attachment to the beings migrating in the defilements, the Master of Teaching, the Lord of the Shakyas himself.”

When the Lord Drikungpa, the very essence of Acharya Nagarjuna, was in his presence acting in the guise of a layperson with vows, Phagmodrupa said: “I have a great expectation that you, a layperson with vows, will benefit many beings; in order for you to be able to accomplish this, I have endured hardship for many kalpas.” By this he meant that he was the Buddha himself.

## Phagmodrupa, continua of rebirths as realized persons

To the faces of trainees<sup>7</sup> the presiding master<sup>8</sup> Vajradhāra proclaimed that Phag-modrupa was the lord-owner of the treasury of the Uddiyāna Dharma<sup>9</sup> as the Se-cret Holder, Vajrapāṇi.

Another Phagmodrupa rebirth-continuum: At the teaching of Buddha Machag Peme Pün<sup>10</sup> he was the householder Pälgyi Khorlo; and was later Bhikshu Gewe Lotrö Chökyi Pal Sangpo; the Monkey Bodhisattva<sup>11</sup>; Gyälse Trakpa, the minister of King Tung, and so forth.

As for Phagmodrupa’s rebirth-continuum in the Aryan Land:<sup>12</sup>

Pañchapa deciphered the heart-secret;  
 Saraha released the fundamental knowing;  
 Virupa overcame mistaken understanding;

6 Sugata Krakucchandha was the first buddha of this formation of the universe; Buddha Shakyamuni was the fourth.

7 ‘To the faces of trainees’ means ‘from the perspective of relative truth’.

8 ‘Presiding master’ can also be understood as ‘center / principle of the mandala’.

9 ‘The Uddiyāna Dharma’ refers to the dharma of Secret Mantra.

10 Buddha Machag Peme Pün: Tib. *sangs rgyas ma chags pad ma'i spun*.

11 The Monkey Bodhisattva is the father of the Tibetan people.

12 A note that follows this quote in the original text reads: “In the Taklung Kagyu Dharma history, Phagmodrupa is explained to be an emanation of Nagarjuna, and so the explanation of the Drikung Dharma Lord as an emanation of Nagarjuna is falsely denied.”

Dignāga defeated debating challengers;  
Indrabhuti protected the kingdom;  
Asaṅgakīrti elucidated the sutric teachings;  
Kambalapada taught the method-path; and  
Padmasambhava tamed the haughty beings.

Phagmodrupa also has rebirth-continua in the realm of the Four-Direction Kings and in Tibet as Ame Chenpo<sup>13</sup> and so on.

## Phagmodrupa, individualized being liberated by the stages of the path

In Do-Kham, Derge, in the center of Drilung Meshö, in a place called Tagngö Sabkhang, to a father named Wena Athar from the family line Dung Wae, and to a mother named Tsünne of the family line Rechesa, he entered the womb in the aspect of a self-sounding clockwise-whorling conch as a son; his mother dreamed she held a golden, nine-pointed, light-radiating vajra in her lap. He was born in an Iron-Tiger year called ‘Transformation’, sixteen hundred and fifty-four years after the Passing<sup>14</sup>. He later said of his birth: “The suffering of birth is said to be like metal being pulled through an extruder, but as in my case, it is said such suffering does not arise when one just appears to have fallen out of a frayed sack!”

From the age of two he engaged in calm-abiding meditation without having being taught to do so. While still a child, the compassion of exchanging self and other arose when a companion fell into a ravine and he thought, “If only that was me ...” Starting with this event he remembered some of his past lives, including one as a monkey in which he heard a teaching of the Buddha Kashyapa, but he forgot them after he ate some unclean meat that his parents had given him.

After his father and mother passed away he went to live with his father’s younger brother, Tsünne, and this uncle was very kind to him. In his ninth year, in a monastery named Jakhyi Lhakhang, he was ordained into the Sangha by the learned and disciplined Khenchen Yänthub Tshültrhim and Lobpön Lhingngewa Öser Gyaltshen, and received the name ‘Dorje Gyälpo’. He knew writing, reading, medicine, painting, and so on naturally, without needing to study. When the khenpo made a silver-lettered copy of the one-hundred-thousand-line *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, Phagmodrupa lettered one volume and painted the deities. Whatever he did, he did with undaunted courage, and his body was fine and strong: For example, once he carried

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13 Ame Chenpo was a great scholar of Tibet.

14 ‘The Passing’ refers to the passing into parinirvana of Shakyamuni Buddha.

away on his back a large stone in the center of a nearby field that could not be pulled away by a horse-wagon.

From Lama Gyachenpo he received the empowerment of Manjushri Yamantaka; at the tshok assembly he made a commitment never to drink beer apart from the small amount used as tshok-offering substance, thereby pleasing the lama. Next, he attended teachings on the *Bodhicharyavatara* and other texts. The one called Uring Gyälbar appeared to others as the lowest of ordinary beings, but with his discernment Phagmodrupa saw him as actually being a tenth-bhumi bodhisattva, and therefore listened to his Dharma teachings.

Summarizing these experiences and others of adhering to sixteen or so geshes in Kham: He listened and trained without regard to new or old tradition, internalized much textual tradition and quintessential instructions, developed an abundance of innate and trained discriminating awareness, and began to teach the *Bodhicharyavatara* himself.

Having pleased the Khenpo and Lobpön, Phagmodrupa aspired to be sent to Ü<sup>15</sup>, but because he had nothing other than some pieces of turquoise with which to fund the journey, he met with the wealthy Great Wae who said that they could travel together, and so they did. When they arrived at Mernagkha in the area called Sog, the sky in the direction of Ü-Tsang became entirely filled with dark, menacing clouds, but by using the wisdom-sword of wrathful Acala, Phagmodrupa dispelled the clouds and the sky became almost white, as he himself related to others later.

Arriving in Ü in his nineteenth year, he first unloaded his horse's saddle at the place of Lama Gyamar of Tölung.<sup>16</sup> There he began to study and contemplate the sublime Dharma of Vinaya and Abhidharma, the prajñāpāramitā textual tradition of Madhyamaka, and Pramana and so on from the textual tradition of intellectual reasoning. To learn more about Madhyamaka and Pramana, he also requested teachings from Sharchöpa Geshe Yornyän. While undertaking these studies he received the precious generation of aspirational and engagement bodhichitta from the Kadampa geshes Yangkangwa, Töntengwa, Jayulwa and others, and studied thoroughly the *Stages of the Path of the Teachings*.

While he was staying at the foot of Gyamar, a Khampa monk he knew stole a yak; Phagmodrupa introduced this monk to Geshe Chapa so that he could confess most effectively and abandon this non-virtue, but he later told his disciples that the monk was unable to purify that deed even after eight years of effort.

Having entered his twenty-fifth year, a Wood-Tiger Year called 'Totally Pleasing', sixteen hundred and seventy-eight years after the Passing, in the monastic

15 Ü is the name of the central province of Tibet, the province in which Lhasa is located.

16 A note here in the original text reads: "The Taklung Kagyu Dharma history says that he arrived in Ü in his twenty-second year, but as this doesn't match what is accepted its author needs to check the source of that information."

university of Sülphu, he received the ordination of a full monk from the khenpo named Tsöndrübar, one possessed of stability and learning and whose actions always held to the Vinaya, with Gyamar as lobpön, and with the Great Geshe Ar acting as sangtön. With Chapa, Nyangtränpa, and others he studied many texts related to bodhisattva conduct. While staying at the Tshännnyi monastic college, he maintained unbroken four-session guru yoga practice. Although he had become unequalled in teaching, debating, and composing through his vast understanding, he also studied much secret mantra by receiving teachings on the Chakrasamvara tantra and its associated empowerment, transmission, and instruction from Marchökyi Gyaltshen, a disciple of Purang Lochung. He met Palchen Galotsawa and received from him many Dharma teachings as well as much advice on practice.

Traveling to Tsang, he received the ‘Aro’ advice from Tragkarpopa, and studied the *Phagkor*<sup>17</sup> and Abhidharma with a student of the translators Gö and Bari named Jangtrag Tagpa and his nephew Ngogmune. He then traveled to the place of the lama Burgom Nagpo and politely requested the practice advice of Mahasiddha Lorrowa. By meditating eight months with that lama, his body was so filled with bliss, that even when he stepped on a thorn it was a blissful experience.

Next he went to Sakya where he received much advice on lamdre<sup>18</sup> and the like from Sachen Kunnying. The lama was pleased with Phagmodrupa’s well-formulated answers to his Dharma questions, and therefore called him ‘Khampa Possessed of Discriminating Awareness’. Master and disciple meditated together in the Vajra Cave and achieved stable realization of the subtle-body practices, and so the lama introduced him to the dawning realization of the path of seeing.

From Jim Lotsa Kumara Budha he received much Secret Mantra advice such as the ‘Three Subsidings’<sup>19</sup>. From Jangsem Dawa Gyaltshen he received the practice of the Great Compassion generation of aspirational and engagement bodhichitta and was told: “If you stay in retreat during the waning moon, teach Dharma during the waxing moon, and don’t give empowerments or blessings, then you will be of great benefit to others.” From Nyanggom Göpo, a disciple of a disciple of Kharag Gomchung, he received the three special teachings from the Kharag tradition and others. From Lama Mangkharwa he received the ‘Eight Distinctive Teachings of Mangkharwa’ and others.

Together with one named Tönjam, he went to meet Lama Sanggye Nyänchung in Tölung; when he met him and requested Dharma, the lama replied that he would first see what he would dream that night. The next morning he related his dream and its meaning: “Four dakinis wearing golden ornaments have followed you here,

17 Phagkor (Tib. *phags skor*) is a teaching cycle related to the yidam Guhyasamaja.

18 Lamdre is the name of the highest meditation system practiced in the Sakya lineage, comparable to the mahamudra and dzogchen of the other lineages.

19 ‘Three Subsidings’: Tib. *thim pa rnam gsum*.

Khampa Teacher. Since it will come to be that you will benefit many migrating beings at the Black Mountain of Ngam-Shö, I will teach you the Dharma.” The lama then taught him the profound advice of the path of method, accompanied by the practice of *trhülkhor*.

During this time he also met thirteen or so yogini lamas who were named Majig Shama and so on.

From the lama named Aseng Wangchug he received a special Dharma of Palchen Ga Lotsawa, the entire compendium of quintessential instructions of the Raven-Faced Teaching-Protector Mahakala – mode-of-abiding-and-nature Protector, path-that-is-to-accomplished Protector, and spontaneously-accomplished-result Protector, which combined the three lineages of the practice – the pure-instruction lineage from the Buddha, the pure-blessing lineage from the dakinis, and the treasure-lineage of pure prophecy – into one stream.

It is said that by performing the root hundred powers of samadhi, Phagmodrupa dispelled the mistaken understanding that had arisen in the tea-maker man.

Returning to Sakya, where his renown had spread, Lama Shang<sup>20</sup> bowed respectfully to him. While staying there, he wrote the *Lamdre Pedzöma*.

In summary, adding up the lamas he met, the Dharma he became expert in, and important advice he received in Ü, Tsang, and Kham, he was like Bodhisattva Sudhana<sup>21</sup>! Having met various teachers with good qualities without choosing between them – just as one has many kinds of relatives on both the father’s side and mother’s side and cannot choose which of them one is related to – of all known classic texts of general and distinctive fields of learning, grammar, Pramana, and the rest, there were none that he did not study and understand by the combination of hearing, contemplating and meditating. Later scholars would say (quite reasonably) that if the compendiums of practice advice owned by The Protector of Migrating Beings were placed end-to-end from Päl Phagmodru<sup>22</sup>, they would reach farther than Chuwo Mountain<sup>23</sup>!

The great mendicant, the lord-owner of the training-benefits<sup>24</sup>, was visited by Lama Shang, who invited him to a monastery in Önrongchung that he had built. Lama Shang then encouraged him to stay, hoping a lama / patron relationship would develop in the area of Jasa Tsangpo. While there, Phagmodrupa received much practice advice from Dänma Geshe, who in turn asked him not to return to Kham.

20 Lama Shang was a disciple of Gampopa and the founder of the Tshalpa Kagyu.

21 Bodhisattva Sudhana, Tib. *nor bzang*, is a character from a teaching story who is famous for having had at least 108 lamas.

22 Päl Phagmodru was the later location of the seat of Phagmodrupa.

23 Chuwo Mountain is near Sakya.

24 ‘The training-benefits’ refers to a list of twelve needs that are fulfilled for one authentically engaged in dharmic training such as food, clothing, housing, etc.

In Phagmodrupa's forty-second year, Lama Shang was unjustly blamed for the death of the scholar Nyälwa Döldzin. In order to resolve the situation, Phagmodrupa discussed it with someone from Takpo, and then he and Lama Shang traveled there together. When they arrived, Lama Gyagom offered Phagmodrupa a monastery in Jangtshig. Upon accepting the offer, the lama asked Phagmodrupa to tell him his name, and so he did. Lama Gyagom replied, "'Phag' means 'the unborn dharmakaya', and 'Dru' means 'liberating all migrating beings into that state without exception' – you exist to benefit sentient beings; by all means, please come and take possession of the monastery!" Lama Shang then said, "The monastery is on the border between the areas of Ye and Ngam; holding on to it will be difficult." Phagmodrupa replied, "I am not worried about Ye and Ngam; I have held the border between samsara and nirvana." The next morning, seeing the monastery, Phagmodrupa was pleased.

Phagmodrupa then traveled on to Gampo, but his meeting with the lord of Gampo did not take place for four days after his arrival, as Gampopa was not feeling well. This was in Phagmodrupa's forty-second year, an Iron Sheep year called 'Renunciate', sixteen hundred and ninety-five years after the Passing. When he was able to meet with the precious teacher, he perceived him as an uncontrived buddha, and they discussed at length their Dharma-training backgrounds.

One day, Gampopa said to the assembly, "I need to instruct the Khampa Geshe separately from the rest of you." After the others had left he said, "Protector of Migrating Beings, come to see me." When he went to see the lama he was asked, "What Dharma have you studied? What have you practiced?" and so he described the many pieces of advice he had received and how he had put them all into practice. To the question: "What experiences have you had?", he described the way non-discursive wisdom, the path of seeing, had arisen. To: "Are you holding to that as the path of seeing?", he replied that he was, based on his understanding of *The Vajra-Verses of Lamdre*<sup>25</sup>. To this, the lama said: "Really? You are holding to that as the path of seeing?" He replied that he was certain that he had realized it as it was introduced to him by Lord Sakyapa<sup>26</sup>, who had used these words: "Uninterrupted continuity of the experience, the bliss, and the emptiness of the uncontrived nature of mind, the peak state of innate mind – this is the non-discursive wisdom, the path of seeing, that which produces the fine distinctions of awareness." Gampopa then exclaimed, "How unfortunate! Are you holding to that from the bottom of your heart as the path of seeing?" He replied, "This is the path of seeing as realized by way of all sutra, tantra, quintessential instruction, and meditative experiences." To

25 *The Vajra-Verses of Lamdre*: Tib. lam 'bras rdo rje'i tshig rkang

26 'Lord Sakyapa' is Kunga Nyingpo.

steer him away from this way of thinking, Gampopa squeezed his *sän*<sup>27</sup> in his hand and replied, “I prefer this to your nice ‘path of seeing.’” Gampopa then said, “Take a walk to that hill over there in the east; later we will discuss all of the dharmas received from others to which you are attached.”

Phagmodrupa went up the eastern hill and pondered all of this. A short time later, all of his former good experiences quickly disintegrated, falling away like chaff and husk, and he then genuinely realized the true face of authentic realization, that which is beyond rational mind, the mahamudra. At that moment, his mind became unobstructed, like space, and he gasped, “All those former lamas – what are they to me now?” He returned to Gampopa, who was aware of his realization and said to him: “I have nothing more than that to teach you; however, my tradition has a convenient method that I will give you,” and so he taught him the practice, ‘Unification with Co-emergence’<sup>28</sup>. After asking him questions about the nature of mind, Gampopa said, “I say! Geshepa, you understand the Dharma very well”, and explained to him the authentic, vast and profound points of Dharma and gave him the entire set of practice advice in the manner of pouring into a full vase.

Some time later, the Three Men from Kham<sup>29</sup> were celebrating the tenth lunar day with a beer-offering, but they were expelled from the monastery by the disciplinarian because of the monastery’s rule forbidding the drinking of beer. Hearing of this, the lama, Gampopa, left his hermitage and sang a song, ‘Come Back Up’. The Three Men offered a song, ‘Going Back Up,’ in return, and the lama and disciples met and danced, leaving footprints all over a boulder that can still be seen today.

When Gampopa was about to pass into parinirvana, he said, “Geshe Khampa and myself are so indistinguishable from each other, you could split a hair one hundred times and still find no difference. Therefore you great meditators, all you who need to request practice advice and all you who need to cut superimposition, look to him.” After the lama passed away, Phagmodrupa stayed to construct the stupa and to console Löbpon Gompa. In the first days of the following year, a Bird-Year, he sang songs of mourning. He also taught practice advice to those who came requesting the Dharma.

Thinking that his Sakya teacher would certainly be pleased with the discriminating awareness that had developed in him, he went to Sakya. But when he came before him, his former teacher just looked displeased and did not say a word. On his

27 The staple food called *sän* or *pag* is prepared by kneading roasted barley flour, tea or hot water, and butter together by hand; it is then eaten as a handful of dough.

28 ‘Unification with Coemergence’: Tib. *lhan cig skyes sbyor*.

29 ‘The Three Men from Kham’ were Phagmodrupa, Düsüm Kyenpa (the first Karmapa), and Sältong Shogom. The following story about them is contained in full in *The Rain of Wisdom* (pp. 275–282), translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee and published by Shambhala Publications.

way back, in the Nyangrotsi temple, he met Phatampa Sanggye<sup>30</sup> in a dream and was taught the ‘Pacifier’ Dharma, ‘Manglamma’. He next stopped in Ön and stayed in Tshälgang temple, where many disciples gathered.

For the next five years Phagmodrupa was content to focus his practice on implementing the advice of Takpo<sup>31</sup>, and by doing so became quite renowned. During this time he sang the song, ‘The Nine Moods of Dance’. Thinking that staying close to towns was not beneficial, he advocated solitude, often supplicating the lineage lamas with the couplet: “Please may I continue to enjoy and be free / Living in the forests and wastelands.” One morning, without telling anyone in the sangha, he thought that he should depart for what would become his precious monastic seat. On the way, he arrived at the house of the noble Tsarong and offered him through his door-man a fine *katag*, with this message: “I am the one who stays in Tshälgang. Now I am thinking to stay over there in that forest at the top of the valley of Phagmodru, and I ask your permission to do so.” The nobleman came to the door himself and granted him permission.

So then Phagmodrupa entered the valley near the town of Phagmodru. In his forty-ninth year, an Earth Tiger year called ‘Much Grain’, seventeen hundred and two years after the Passing, he planted his feet in a place called Thatsa Pälkyi Chöjung in a forest named All-Good, and so gained renown as ‘The Precious Thatsawa’. The monks had followed after him and also arrived there soon. A man staying in the area named Gyagom Mire invited Phagmodrupa into his grass hut, and he thought that if he accepted the invitation by saying “this is a pleasant hut” to him three times it would be offered to him and become the heart of the area. Then he said, “Well then, fetch my cushion,” and so it became his monastic seat. The area then began to gain in renown and many trainees, all fortunate disciples, assembled there. By leading them in retreat during the waning moon and by teaching them Dharma during the waxing moon, many became experienced practitioners; eight hundred direct disciples are known to have gathered there.

One day he said to those assembled in that place: “If I practice in retreat I will become a siddha equal to the sky with good qualities such as the manifest knowledges, and will have a long life and so forth. However, you all need to request interviews and blessings from me, and if I teach Dharma, my lifespan will decrease.” The assembled disciples called for Geshe Shang’s advice on the matter; he said to them, “The lama needs to teach the Dharma; if he doesn’t teach, what benefit is there in that?” They all discussed the matter and reported their decision to the lama who replied, “The viras and dakinis are displeased.” Geshe Shang then said, “Viras and dakinis displeased by the teaching of Dharma are demons.” And so the lama

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30 Phatampa Sanggye was an Indian master; one of his disciples was Majig Labdrön, who mastered the practice of his known as Chod.

31 ‘Takpo’, here, is an epithet of Gampopa.

turned the Wheel of Dharma without interruption and many people attained realization.

When teaching up to this point, Phagmodrupa would say, “My monks are not yet assembled”; when the Drikung Dharma Lord arrived in front of him he said “Now, my monks are all assembled.” Before the Dharma Lord arrived, all dawning realization of mahamudra was introduced with the instructions called ‘Not Keeping the Skull on the Head’; after the Dharma Lord came, it is known that he taught many Dharmas unlike those taught earlier, such as ‘The Arising Togdän’s Wheel-Turning’.

The very same time he was protecting the Sangha, he was also displaying twelve body-forms in various other places. In one case he flew to Uddiyāna, studied great tantra teachings with dakinis, and then composed a number of chapters on those tantras and some concise summaries. Around the same time, a woman’s voice was heard in the lama’s bedroom. When Taklungpa went to investigate, he saw a Jölmo bird fly away. When he inquired about this with the lama he was told, “The dakinis have assembled. In Phagmodru, there is a certain girl who has reached the age of fifteen; since she is an emanation of Vajravārāhī, your corpse will become the rainbow body at death if you take her as your consort.” Taklungpa twice found her, and twice lost her, and then she passed into parinirvana. When Lingrepa was cutting into her head to make a skull-cup, a sound arose that said, “I am going home” and so the lama told him to take her head to Tsari. Although Taklung Thangpa quickly sought the rest of her corpse, he is known to have said, “It’s disappeared, it’s gone.” Since Phagmodrupa’s vast deeds, alluded to by him when he said, “In such ways, my many likenesses work for the benefit of sentient beings in all directions,” have been elucidated by the lamas of old, I will not attempt the hardship of elaborating them all here.

Thus Phagmodrupa abided as the great three-vow-embodied holder of the vajra, the exact equal to the nature of all Dharmas, the lamp that teaches the path for all migrating beings in all existence by turning the jeweled wheel of inexhaustible enlightened activities.

In his sixty-first year, due to a corresponding former cause, his meditation-attendant, Chöseng, and a woman named Lotrö Lhamo served him food mixed with poison. Even though they encouraged him to eat repeatedly, he did not. When they offered it one final time, he remembered an occasion in the past in which he himself had poisoned someone and so accepted the food. Soon it was obvious that Phagmodrupa was close to leaving this life. The attendant implicated the woman by asking the lama, “This one has non-virtue that will cause her to become firewood in hell – who will protect her?” The lama explained the history of the situation and how the circumstance of dealing with such unruly beings was of his own making. He then imparted advice and so forth to all his best Dharma-sons. Telling them “This is interdependence; nothing is able to benefit this body now,” they completed the

celebration of the anniversary of Gampopa's passing. The next night, the sixteenth, the lama signaled the beginning of his passing with these words: "Alas! Since all composite things – impermanent, production-disintegration dharmins – disintegrate after being produced, pacify your minds closely and be happy!" Over the next few days he finished the Dharma teaching he had been giving, and then on the twentieth day of the month he gave away all his possessions and made this last testament: "Wealth is the root of all suffering – don't cling to it! It is easy to be tainted by the stench of bad friends – don't entrust your mind to worldly people! Wherever you go and wherever you stay, be inseparable from loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhichitta! Don't investigate other's faults; this will bring about your own downfall!"

The lama gave his orders to the Dharma protectors, and then said to his attendant and the rest: "You faithful ones: In the eastern buddhaheld "Dust-Free," in the presence of Buddha Akṣhobhya, I will be the Bodhisattva 'King of Discriminating Wisdom and Stainlessness'. I say this so that you sons and disciples and all migrating beings will be able to have a beneficial focus for your supplications," and continued with further detailed advice. In the early morning of the twenty-fifth day of the month, the lama went to the assembly and gave many instructions for building projects. Returning to his room, in the late morning he said "All dharmas are non-dual / Non-dual and fully pure," and passed wholly into parinirvana.

The lama's corpse was lifted from his bed and placed in the Jagjil main shrine, where the Drikung Dharma Lord offered a maṇḍala. When he came to the supplication section, a golden vajra with a garuḍa in the center emerged from the lama's heart-center, emanating light, and dissolved into the Drikungpa's heart-center. All who were there saw it the same way. At that time, the lineage was passed on and the blessings were imparted.<sup>32</sup>

At that time, there were wondrous miracles that caused the minds of beings to rejoice: the earth shook, a profusion of rainbows appeared, the fragrance of incense floated up, the sound of music arose, and more. Marvelously, when the corpse was purified in fire, clouds of offerings from the gods amassed above the crematory and much remained behind: his heart, tongue, and eyes, and many relics. After having been lost track of, the tongue is now said to be in Dzing. The ashes were mixed with various precious substances, and from this two statues were constructed that captured the lama's appearance exactly. Wondrously, these statues taught the Dharma many times in assemblies, were seen as an auspicious sign, absorbed all nearby diseases, and more, and so their fame spread far and wide. The heart was also lost track of and then later turned up in Chushul where it was bought back by the Drikung Dharma Lord. He constructed a stupa named Auspicious Blazing Light and

32 A note here in the original text reads: 'The writer of the Taklung Kagyu Dharma history has that the vajra dissolved into the heart-center of Taklung Thangpa.'

placed the heart inside it; this has remained the principal representation of the lama and has been of much benefit to migrating beings. The relics were distributed in all directions.

From among the five hundred disciples worthy of being shaded by parasols, some of the most important were: the Three Perfected Heart Sons, holders of the lineage – the Drikungpa, the perfected one of interdependence, the Taklungpa, the perfected one of respect and devotion, and the Phuwa, the perfected one of realization; the Four Early Disciples – Mogjogwa, Shangsum Thogpa, Tsilungpa, and Nyangshän Trongpa; the Four Sons of the Instruction – Kundän Rechung, Kaldän Yeshe Sengge, Togdän Menyag Gomring, and Trubthob Nyagre Sewo; the Four Heart Sons – Marpa, Yelpa, Parphupa, and Chänpu Gyare; the Four of One Taste – Lama Tum, Pänta Phugpa, Chöje Tum, and Gyergompa; the Four Close Sons – Shengön Karwa, Ngog Sengge Khapa, Sengge Päl and Sobö Gyalpo; and others – Shugtsherwa, Lhasawa Gedün Kyab, Trutön Lotrö Sengge, Gyatön, Tönjam, Jangye, Konyer Gomtar, Neso Gom, Gom Tsön and the rest. In the various Dharma histories there are many different ways of categorizing the disciples.

Through the enlightened activities of the disciples the tradition has remained without decline until today, and in the same seat. Furthermore, the Kagyu Teachings continue to exist in the many temples and colleges of the lineage that have been established throughout Tibet and the rest of the world. Drikung Gompa Shak-rin spoke truthfully when he said: “The Seat, Glorious Phagdrü / Source of a hundred springs.”

From the vast compositions of Phagmodrupa such as the meaningful and concise *Seven Precious Excellent Treatises*, the essence of the Teachings of the Three Lineages<sup>33</sup>; the *Pearl Mala*; *Engaging the Intelligence*; and the rest, the volumes held as objects of veneration by all today are the same in number as the enumeration of the sense pleasures<sup>34</sup>.

After the passing of the Protector of Migrating Beings, the precious seat was protected by the Drikung Dharma Lord for three years or so. Then, expanding the protection, three hundred new retreat huts were built, and in the Earth-Horse Year, letters of invitation were sent to the disciples who had scattered in all directions. A marvelous and large temple was built that fulfilled the intention of Phagdrü, just as he had described. When the Drikung Dharma Lord had grown old and could no longer travel, he appointed Chännga Tragpa Jungne, his heart-son of the family of

33 The ‘Three Lineages’: 1. the lineage of the profound view, from Manjushri / Nagarjuna; 2. the lineage of vast conduct, from Maitreya / Asanga; and 3. the lineage of blessed practice, from Vajradhara / Tilopa.

34 The current edition of *The Collected Works of Phagmodrupa* numbers nine volumes, and more may yet be added.

Lang, to lead Dänsathil and its Dzong<sup>35</sup>. The precious Chännga improved and expanded Phagdrü's seat and then returned to stay at the seat of Drikung. The precious Bönse Gyalwa of Drikung was appointed to replace Chännga at Dänsathil. In both the religious and secular spheres Drikung and Phagdrü were as enmeshed as a single piece of cloth. The glorious Lang family line continued to control both the religious and secular spheres of Phagdrü with this lineage: Chännga Tragpa Tsöndrü, the Twelfth Rinchen Dorje, Chännga Tragpa Yeshe, Nyichöpa Tragpa Rinchen, Tsheshi Nyingma Tragpa Gyaltshen, the Twelfth Sarma Tragpa Sherab, Tsheshi Sarma Tragpa Jangchub, Chöje Sönam Tragpa, Namkang Sarma Paldän Sangpo, the Twenty-Eighth Sönam Sangpo and Chöje Sönam Gyaltshen. Following a long vacant period the lineage continued: Chännga Ngagkyi Wangpo, the Fourth Shamar, Chännga Tragpa Jungne, Namgyäl Tragpa, Kagyu Namgyäl and Chökkyi Wangchug. The rule then declined, and with an interruption in the continuity of the seat-throne-holders, the seat was then protected by a succession of khenpos.

Phagdrü began to rule in the larger sphere of secular affairs with Tasitu<sup>36</sup>, bringing all of greater Tibet under its control. The manner of this rule, lasting more than two hundred years, is wholly explained in well-known histories and therefore will not be explained here, apart from one point: In some histories it is written that Drikung and Phagdrü were equal in power. This should be understood to be in connection with the secular sphere. Concerning Dharma lineage, they were the same lineage, and their extraordinary reciprocal relationship was more profound than that of the other Kagyu lineages. Due to the interconnections created by the Dharma Lord father and his two spiritual sons, the students from Phagdrü studied in Drikung in the year called 'Excellently Ornamented'; although at one point the relationship became somewhat strained it was later restored to its previous state. The Dharma lineage of Drikung and Phagdrü has been maintained up to the present, and although it was nearly lost without a trace during the Cultural Revolution some restoration is taking place and it is still in existence, albeit tenuously.

## A discussion ancillary to Phagmodrupa's life story

A manner of expression exists that the disciple-lineages from the Protector of Migrators Phagdrü comprise the 'lesser' Kagyu sub-lineages and the disciple-lineages from Takpo comprise the 'greater' Kagyu sub-lineages. This position is not taken by the early histories of Tibet. In my view, the fact that some say this position *is*

35 'Dzong': Tib. *rdzong*, the fortified structure that was responsible for an administrative area.

36 Tasitu (Tib. *ta si tu*) was a lay follower of the Phagdrü tradition also known as Chang-chub Gyaltshen (Tib. *byang chub rgyal mtshan*) and should not be confused with the Karma Kagyu lama by the name of Taisitu (Tib. *ta i si tu*).

taken by the early histories is due to a misreading of Pängar's<sup>37</sup> *Praise of the Entire Kagyu Lineage*<sup>38</sup>, which in fact says nothing about this issue other than differentiating the disciple-lineages of the Karmapa into four greater and eight lesser ones. Pängar wrote: "[The followers of] Tüsum Sheja Künkyen Karmapa<sup>39</sup> [are] the holders of the four greater and eight lesser lineages, and [there are] the three [lineages of] Drikung, Taklung, and Tshälpa, [as well as that of] the glorious Drugpa and others."<sup>40</sup> Since this statement clearly shows the lineages as separate, it was not intended to provide a basis with which to subsume all the other lineages under that of the Karmapa. The idea that the entire Kagyu tradition is divided into the four greater and eight lesser lineages only came later. I have studied how this came to be and have reported my findings in another publication. Those ill-advised enough to use the expression 'four greater and eight lesser' incorrectly, think that they can stop the correct understanding with just a few words, but people are not so gullible. The histories express everything as it actually happened and they should not be manipulated by those who are devoted and faithful.

## Colophon

Lord of speaking two languages  
 Owner of secret mantra  
 Finder of manifest completion in one lifetime  
 Most magnificent of accomplishers  
 Teacher of the certain meaning of the three lineages  
 Protector of Dharma propagators  
 Personification of the four kayas  
 Kinsman to the gods and all migrating beings

With an entire inexhaustible ocean of good qualities, limitless in both  
 Fame spread wider than the surface of the earth and in  
 Meaningful renown like the four principle offering places of gods and humans,  
 That none apart from a Conqueror can express.

37 Pängar was a Karma Kagyu lama.

38 *Praise of the Entire Kagyu Lineage*: Tib. *bka' brgyud spyi bstod*.

39 Tüsum Sheja Künkyen Karmapa was the first Karmapa, and as one of the Three Men from Kham (which also included Phagmodrupa) was a disciple of Gampopa.

40 The quotation reads: *dus gsum shes bya kun mkhyen karma pa/ che bzhi chung brgyad brgyud pa 'dzin rnams dang/ 'bri stag tshal gsum dpal ldan 'brug pa sog*./

On the other hand, just as a piece of the philosopher's stone  
Transforms a thousand *sang*<sup>41</sup> of iron into gold,  
If this small portion of the profound and extensive,  
Boundless story of life and liberation  
Is seen, heard, and remembered, know that it has all the meaning.

Not relying on the hardship of creating this from my own thinking,  
All of it is a reflection of previous scholarship  
From both inside and outside the lineage;  
Arranged and composed in a manner easily engaged in by myself and others,  
Like an objective and informative television news program.

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41 A *sang* is a Tibetan unit of weight.