

The Making of a Bhutanese Buddha: Preliminary Remarks on the Biography of Tenzin Gyatso, a Bhutanese Scholar- Yogi

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The biography of Tenzin Gyatso (*Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho*)¹, known as *The Play of the Siddha*,² provides a fascinating glimpse into the life of a Bhutanese scholar-yogi early last century. It records the story of a young Bhutanese man who scaled the heights of the Buddhist scholarly world in Bhutan before travelling to Tibet to pursue a yogic education with teachers renowned throughout the Himalayas. After travelling widely in Tibet, he returned to Bhutan and began to practice and gather students. He again travelled to Tibet for further instruction, and then on to India, before returning home to attend to his teachers and practice in retreat. He ultimately became a renowned teacher, was accorded the title of Vajra Master (*Rdo rje slop dpon*), and maintained close ties with Bhutan's Royal Family and important Drukpa Kagyu (*'Brug pa bka' brgyud*) hierarchs of his time. The biography hints at the academic and yogic virtuosity of Bhutanese practitioners

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¹ Tibetan and Bhutanese words in this essay will be given first in phonetic form, followed by the Wylie transliteration in brackets given after the first appearance of the word.

² Henceforth referred to as 'biography' or *The Play of the Siddha* (TPOS). The author is Dge slong yon tan 'od kyis sgro, and the full Tibetan text name is *Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho'i nam thar grub pa'i rol rtsed*, which can be translated as, *'The Play of the Siddha: The Biography of the Great Lama Tenzin Gyatso*'. A copy of this text was kindly given to me by Khenpo Shedup Tenzin of Buddha Mahavihara Parkhang in Kathmandu, and my great thanks to him and his brother Ven. Lama Thinley Namgyal for their generosity in answering my enquiries regarding Shakya Shri's Bhutanese lineage. No publication data for this text is available to me at this time. Thanks also to Dorji Penjore for his corrections and suggestions regarding this manuscript. Any errors within remain my own.

like Tenzin Gyatso who excelled in the religious centres of his time in Tibet but remained dedicated to Bhutan, and returned home to share his knowledge and experience in his later years. These kinds of individuals acted as important conduits, carrying new ideas and knowledge from the religious powerhouses of Tibet to Bhutan, while also sharing rich Bhutanese traditions with wider Himalayan religious and cultural matrixes.

This biography tells the story of a Bhutanese practitioner who spent his life in the pursuit of learning and did not discriminate between different tenet systems, and who was willing to travel anywhere in order to attain that learning. For the purpose of facilitating a deeper reading of the biography, I have added here some contextual notes, but this article merely provides a preliminary exploration of the text. A full excavation and understanding of the milieu in which Tenzin Gyatso lived would be a complex undertaking. Hopefully, this preliminary translation of the text in English will make it more accessible and raise new questions for readers. It may also encourage a deeper appreciation of the potential for Bhutanese practitioners to influence the wider Buddhist world in unique ways through the remarkable variations available in their own traditions stemming from the soils of the land of the Southern Dragon (*Lho 'brug*).

Tenzin Gyatso's Era

The Play of the Siddha is not directly concerned with the historical events around Tenzin Gyatso's time, but nonetheless provides an interesting insight into some of them. The world Tenzin Gyatso was born into, that of the late 1800s in Bhutan, was a time of considerable change that culminated in the coronation of the first of the Wangchuck (*Dbang phyug*) dynasty as Druk Gyalpo (*'Brug rgyal po*). Meanwhile, in Tibet, the Great 13th Dalai Lama Thubtan Gyatso (*Thub bstan rgya mtsho*) was warding off British interests in Central Tibet. To the east in Amdo and Kham (*Mdo khams*) the Chinese were attempting to consolidate

empire before the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1912 and the beginning of the civil wars that raged through the Republican Period.³ It is clear from Tenzin Gyatso's life story, however, that these political events did not impede the travelling mobility of religious clergy and individuals. His biography makes several mentions of long pilgrimages throughout Central and Eastern Tibet undertaken between the early 1900s and the 1930s. The mobility of such individuals helped to create a variety of interpersonal social networks that facilitated the interchange of new religious ideas and practices. These interactions have been crucial to the creation of the enormous variety of contemporary religious traditions in the Himalayas.

This variety is also partially attributable to other factors. In other religious spheres there was also considerable activity. Sectarian infighting of the 18th century was somewhat calmer, which led to a considerable amount of religious interchange in Kham that has been termed by scholars as the Rime (*Ris med*) movement.⁴ Recently several other scholars,

³ For more information on the events of this era, see Kolmas, Josef (1967). *Tibet and Imperial China: A Survey of Sino-Tibetan Relations up to the End of the Manchu Dynasty in 1912*, Canberra: Center of Oriental Studies, Australian National University; and regarding Shakya Shri's area Kham, Lawrence Epstein (Ed.) (2002) *Khams pa histories: Visions of People, Place and Authority. PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies: proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*, Brill: Leiden; Tsomu, Yudru (2006). *Local Aspirations and National Constraints: A Case Study of Nyarong Gonpo Namgyel and His Rise to Power in Kham (1836- 1865)*, Harvard, MA: Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, among others.

⁴ Regarding this so-called 'Movement', see Smith, E. Gene (2001a). "Mi pham and the philosophical controversies of the nineteenth century", in *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*, Boston: Wisdom Publications: 227- 233; (2001b) "Jam mgon kong sprul and the nonsectarian movement" in *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*, Boston: Wisdom Publications: 235- 272; Samuel, Geoffrey (1993 [1995]). *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*,

such as Alexander Gardner, have seriously questioned the validity of terming the attitude in this environment as a ‘movement’⁵, and this essay will follow their redefinitions of Rime as an “unbiased attitude” as opposed to something as concrete as a movement or school, which would entail some doctrinal or philosophical base underlying the groups involved that was actually absent.

The abundance of practitioners and scholars in Kham who had this “unbiased attitude” was significant in the life of Tenzin Gyatso, for he, and many of his teachers, were among them, suggesting that unbiased interchange was common elsewhere in the Himalayas. While the biography does not explicitly state which tradition he took novice vows in as a child, it is mentioned that soon after he turned eleven he received “the stages of the path of the glorious Drukpa Kagyu (*‘Brug pa bka’ rgyud*) school”⁶, and that at 16 he travelled to Bumthang to attend a grammar school.⁷ Here he excelled and secured royal patronage as one of the top three students of the school. This would appear to have consolidated a promising academic future in Bhutan- until a mysterious Tibetan appeared.

The Creation of a Trans-Himalayan Lineage: The Pragmatic Importance of Recruitment and Sponsorship

This mysterious Lama was known as Artsa Lama Ngawang Namgyal (*A rtsa bla ma ngag dbang nam rgyal*, d.u⁸) and he had travelled to Bhutan to deliver a letter from Kham to the

Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.

⁵ For more on this, see Gardner, Alexander Patten (2006). *The Twenty- Five Great Sites of Khams: Religious Geography, Revelation and Nonsectarianism in Nineteenth Century Eastern Tibet*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan. Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services: 111- 165, and also Chapter 2 of my forthcoming dissertation.

⁶ TPOS: Folio 10.

⁷ *Ibid*: Folio 10

⁸ D.u. refers to ‘dates unknown’ in this essay.

King of Bhutan. This letter was from his teacher, Drubwang Rinpoche Shakya Shri (*Grub dbang rin po che sha' kya shri*, also known as *Rtogs ldan sha' kya shri*, 1853- 1919). Shakya Shri remains a fascinating figure from this period, who, despite being on the peripheries of established religious institutions in Kham, became influential and respected throughout the Himalayas with students travelling great distances to study with him. Shakya Shri was originally a novice monk at Drugu Monastery (*Gru gu dgon pa*) in Kham, but later left, took a consort, and established a network of meditation centres stretching from Karzha Khandroling (*Gar zha or Dkar zha mkha' 'gro gling*) in Lahul (modern Himachal Pradesh) in the western Himalaya through to Bhutan to the east, and many places in between. The reasons for the success of his lineage promulgation are complex, and beyond the scope of this article.⁹ However, one of the reasons was his students and their teaching efforts in different geographical locations. Artsa Lama was particularly active in this regard and has appeared in accounts of the founding of other Shakya Shri lineage communities in the Himalayas.¹⁰ Artsa Lama gave instructions for the preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) to a group of young Bhutanese students that included Tenzin Gyatso, and in a private interview told Tenzin Gyatso the life story of his teacher. The young man felt “his hair stand on end” with inspiration, and decided to request Artsa Lama to take him back to Kham with him so he too could study with the Master.¹¹ The King of Bhutan and Artsa Lama both approved of his decision, and he then became one of the earliest Bhutanese students of Shakya Shri. He would be followed by others, including Lopon Sonam Zangpo (*Slop dpon bsod nams bzang po*, 1888-1984) and Monlam Rabzang (*Smon lam rab bzang*, d.u) appears to have already been

⁹ Drubwang Shakya Shri and his lineage are explored in depth in my forthcoming PhD dissertation.

¹⁰ See Stutchbury, Elizabeth Anne (1991). *Rediscovering Western Tibet: Gonpa, Chorten and the continuity of practice with a Tibetan Buddhist community in the Indian Himalaya*, Canberra: Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Australian National University.

¹¹ TPOS: Folio 12-13.

present in Shakya Shri's community when he arrived. Bhutanese students played an important role in the creation and promulgation of Shakya Shri's lineage, particularly as they became influential back home later on, especially in Tenzin Gyatso's case. This appears to have largely stemmed from the generous Royal patronage that students were afforded, which made their travels and studies possible.

The narrative surrounding Tenzin Gyatso's initial meeting with Artsa Lama and his decision to travel to Kham is significant, as it suggests how students, on an individual level would initially have felt drawn to study with Shakya Shri. This decision entailed great personal sacrifice, as seen in Tenzin Gyatso's biography which describes his sadness at leaving his parents.¹² However, the exhilaration and charm of such a powerful teacher was an inducement for Tenzin Gyatso and his friends, and seems to have been a recruitment method of sorts for Shakya Shri's lineage. This section of the biography is also important for the depiction of the relationship between the King of Bhutan and Shakya Shri. The first King, Ugyen Wanghuck, remained a passionate supporter and sponsor for Shakya Shri's projects throughout his life, and appears throughout Shakya Shri's biography.¹³ The King also provided generous assistance to the community following Shakya Shri's death.¹⁴

Alternative Institutions: The Meditation Centres and Encampments of Kham and Bhutan

After pilgrimage throughout different regions of Tibet and to Lhasa where he got to meet the 13th Dalai Lama, Tenzin

¹² TPOS: Folio 13.

¹³ The Druk Gyalpo appears on numerous occasions throughout Shakya Shri's biography. See SSNT: Folios 143; 152 and also SSSB: 679. See my dissertation for more on their relationship.

¹⁴ A particularly important project that he supported was the renovation of stupas in Nepal led by Shakya Shri's sons and Lopon Sonam Zangpo. See the biography of Shakya Shri's son Phagchog Dorje (*Sras 'Phags mchog rdo rje*, 1893- 1952), PDNT: Folio 8a.

Gyatso accompanied Artsa Lama on an arduous journey that finally culminated in his arrival at Shakya Shri's encampment centre.¹⁵ Upon meeting the Drubwang in person, his expectations were all realized, and he undertook an intense period of yogic practice. Shakya Shri taught both Dzogchen and Chagchen (*Phyags chen*; Skt. *Mahamudra*) to his students, and Tenzin Gyatso, along with his enthusiasm at the time for Dzogchen, also mastered the Six Yogas of Naropa (*Na ro chos drug*).¹⁶ Considering Tenzin Gyatso had excelled in his academic life by studying with the best teachers, his decision to study long term with Shakya Shri and his sons would appear to be a significant indicator of Shakya Shri's fame. Shakya Shri's reputation as far south as Bhutan shows the respect in which this unconventional teacher was held in the wider networks of Himalayan Buddhism. The biography holds further evidence of this respect with the inclusion of meetings between Shakya Shri and other important teachers of his time, particularly Ju Mipham Rinpoche (*Ju Mi pham rin po che*, 1846-1912).¹⁷

Tenzin Gyatso also spent a great deal of time travelling in Tibet to different pilgrimage sites.¹⁸ The sections that note his destinations are fascinating as they suggest common places of interest for an average pilgrim of the period. After covering much ground on a pilgrimage through Eastern and Central Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso returned back to Bhutan to receive a hero's welcome from the King and clergy, and then went to visit his family.¹⁹ The description of their meeting is laced with suggestions at the bitter-sweetness that trans-Himalayan travel must have brought during that period. He

¹⁵ TPOS: Folios 14- 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid*: Folio 17. See Stutchbury, Elizabeth (1998). "Tibetan Meditation, Yoga and Healing Practices: Mind- Body Interconnections" in *The Embodiment of the Mind: Eastern and Western Perspectives*, Delmonte, M.M and Y. Haruki (Eds.) Delft: Eburon Publishers for an excellent overview of these yogas.

¹⁷ TPOS: Folio 18

¹⁸ *Ibid*: Folio 18- 20

¹⁹ *Ibid*: Folio 20

discovered that his father and several of his siblings had passed away since his departure. His remaining family, including his mother, remained supportive of his aspirations however, and economically supported him through several traditional three-year retreats at the sacred site (*gnas*) of the Female Elephant Cliff (*Glang mo brag*).²⁰ Following his first retreat, in which he perfected the teachings bestowed on him by Shakya Shri, students began to gather around him to receive teachings.²¹ This point marks the beginning of the formation of Tenzin Gyatso's own Bhutanese lineage, which would later be supported by the Bhutanese state.

Leaving the Nest(s): The Ending and Beginnings of Lineage

Before too many students gathered around him, there was an interruption. In 1918, Tenzin Gyatso was summoned to Tibet again to receive more teachings from Shakya Shri. At this point Shakya Shri had settled in Tsa'ri (*Tsa' ri or Rtsa ri*) in Southern Tibet in a new community named Kyiphug (*Skyid phug*; 'The Happy Cave'). Tenzin Gyatso gathered with hundreds of other students to receive teachings on all of Shakya Shri's own Treasure teachings, as well as on both Old and New Translation school practices.²² However, there was a sad reason for the sudden outpouring of teachings. Shakya Shri had been ill for some time, and passed away in 1919, surrounded by students. The students carried out elaborate funerary offerings before again dispersing back to their own regions.²³

The ending of the personage that had founded this lineage led to the beginning of a new career for Tenzin Gyatso. His pilgrimage to Bodhgaya²⁴ marked an intensification of an ongoing relationship with his maternal uncle Ngawang Chokyi Wangchuk (*Ngag dbang chos kyi dbang phyug*, d.u.) who had

²⁰ *Ibid*: Folio 20-21

²¹ *Ibid*: Folio 22

²² TPOS: Folios 23- 24

²³ *Ibid*: Folio 25

²⁴ *Ibid*: Folio 25-26

originally taught him to read as a child. While Tenzin Gyatso spent many more years in retreat, he also began to have a closer association with his uncle, who was rising through the ranks of the Bhutanese religious hierarchy. In the late 1920s, Ngawang Chokyi Wangchuk was made a Vajra Master (*Rdo rje slop dpon*)²⁵, and in 1931 he rose to the lion throne to become the Je Khenpo (*Rje mkhan po*), the head of Drukpa Kagyu school in Bhutan. Tenzin Gyatso became his attendant, and remained with him until his death in 1942 at the age of 81.²⁶ The biography here provides an interesting and rare insight into the election process of Je Khenpos, and scenes of Ngawang Chokyi Wangchuk's funeral provide a vivid glimpse of the veneration that Je Khenpos are accorded in Bhutan.

Tenzin Gyatso at this point continued to attempt to remain in isolation, but eventually the demand of students became so great that he too, like his uncle, became a Vajra Master.²⁷ Following the assumption of his duties, Tenzin Gyatso became a well-known teacher throughout Bhutan, and established his own lineage, which combined both what he had learnt in Bhutan and what he had learnt from Shakya Shri.²⁸ After leaving the nest of his homeland to pursue his studies, he eventually returned. In doing so, he had left the other, northern Himalayan nest of his teacher Shakya Shri's lineage to embark on the creation of his own lineage.

The Sainthood of Tenzin Gyatso: The Life and Death of Tenzin Gyatso and his contribution to Bhutanese Buddhism

At the age of 84, Tenzin Gyatso began to experience ongoing problems with his health, and he eventually passed away in 1967.²⁹ While he had apparently been a simple practitioner, his death revealed his level of realization. His body and face remained unchanged for seven days, and when he was

²⁵ *Ibid*: Folio 27

²⁶ *Ibid*: Folio 29

²⁷ *Ibid* Folio 30

²⁸ *Ibid*: Folios 31- 35

²⁹ TPOS: Folio 36-37

cremated his body flared up in a last demonstration of his Tummo (*Gtum mo*) yogic prowess.³⁰ Following the cremation his corpse left relics imprinted with sacred syllables.³¹

The narrator of the biography leaves the reader at this point with a short supplication prayer which is filled with allusions to Tenzin Gyatso's sainthood. While the existence of an incarnation is currently unknown to me, for a rebirth to have been recognized would be natural, considering the progression of the narrative. In the introductory section, the author also mentioned a story about the Accomplished Jigme Kungrol (*Grub dbang 'jigs med kun grol*, d.u.), a student of The All-Knowing Jigme Lingpa (*Kun mkhyen 'jigs med gling pa*, 1729-1798) the Nyingma savant who revealed many Treasures and wrote extensive commentaries.³² Before his death Jigme Kungrol apparently prophesized he would be reborn in the East. While no direct allusion is made, the mention of this story in a section regarding manifestations of the Dharmakaya strongly suggests a link between Jigme Kungrol and Tenzin Gyatso, to the extent that Tenzin Gyatso may even be seen to be his incarnation. While this was not recognized in Tenzin Gyatso's lifetime, its inclusion in his biography suggests that he was from a long line of realized masters, which thereby elevates him from being a scholar-yogi to a realized Bodhisattva. This is a crucial point in this biography which otherwise is void of supernatural elements, as it creates a uniquely local Bhutanese saint, grounding him in the Hidden Land of the Elephant Cliff (*Glang brag*), which was inhabited by both Tenzin Gyatso and Jigme Kungrol, while also tying him to a prophesied Bhutanese destiny.

Tenzin Gyatso contributed a great deal to Bhutanese Buddhism through his own efforts. He received his early education at Bumthang, which reoccurs in accounts of this era in Bhutan as something of an intellectual powerhouse of

³⁰ *Ibid*: Folio 38

³¹ *Ibid*: Folio 39

³² *Ibid*: Folio 7

the times. He also maintained a close relationship with the Royal Family and the hierarchs of Bhutanese Buddhism, becoming himself a Vajra Master while also serving as an attendant to his uncle Ngawang Chokyi Wangchuk in his role as the Je Khenpo. His life story is an intriguing suggestion of the face of Bhutanese Buddhism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in its depiction of his spiritual, educational and economic realities. *The Play of the Siddha* adds some intriguing information to the realities of trans-Himalayan lineage education in the period, and suggests that rather than being a peripheral agent in such lineages, Bhutan acted in its own way as a centre as well.

Excerpts from the translation

[1] *Glorious Lama The Excellent Tenzin Gyatso's Liberation Story, known as 'The Play of Siddha'*³³

.....

[6] ...

The refuge protector of all the realms, the master of the essential practice lineage from the doctrine of the Victorious Ones, Our Lord of the Mandala, is known as the Accomplished Tenzin Gyatso, who is universally famed, and whose glorious enlightened activity pervades all the Pure Lands.

Thus this primordially great narration [will] begin with a brief teaching, followed by the goodness of the biography in the middle, and then finally the goodness at the end, a perfect finishing to conclude the three sections.

³³ This translation contains excerpts from the original 41-page u can manuscript of *The Play of the Siddha*. Additional terms in square brackets have been added to aid smoothness in reading. Explanatory footnotes have also been added in several places, along with suggestions for further reading. Practices and texts have been included in English with their Tibetan titles in circular brackets. Tenzin Gyatso is often referred to as 'Je Lama' in this biography as well, or 'Lord'. The following translation has received invaluable criticism and comments from H.E. Gomchen Chewang Rinzin Lama and Kalzang Dorjee Tagchungdarpa. My thanks to them both.

To begin with ... Earlier Our sublime Cyclic Protector has throughout immeasurable numbers of kalpas [7] obtained complete enlightenment and the Dharmakaya (*chos kyi sku*; Dharma Body) from self-interest. Due to [his] infinite compassion that is without object, for the interest to benefit others, [he] appeared again in the Rupakaya (*Gzugs kyi sku*; Form Body), taming whoever needs to be tamed starting with this long suffering world, through to all the infinitely vast Pure Lands, and particularly the sublime land of India and the realm of Tibet, dealing with each accordingly in the appropriate way through [his] miraculous recollection powers simultaneously benefiting others by understanding their level. As for childish individuals like myself, who remain enclosed and choked in the Self, [I] am not capable of writing a good introduction.

During the 13th Sexagenary Cycle (*rab byung*; 1747- 1807), facing towards the centre of Bodhgaya in India, there was a heart son of the essential Great Perfection (*Rdzogs chen*) doctrine holder, the Accomplished Jigme Kungrol (*Grub dbang 'Jigs med kun gro*, d.ul)³⁴ who was known as Sangye Gyalstan (*Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan*). In the Hidden Land (*sbas yul*) of the Guru [Rinpoche], in one of [the Guru's] practice places [that was known as] the Elephant Cliff [*Glang brag*] [Sangye Gyalstan] practiced the primordial Cutting Through (*Khregs chod*) and spontaneous Leaping Over (*Thod rgyal*) techniques of The Great Perfection when signs manifested of progress on the path [of practice]. He lived out his life in happiness, living many years... When his life was at an end [he said], "In a future life [I will] appear to the East, at the retreat centre of Dechen Choling (*Bde chen chos gling*) where to a crowd of people who are endowed with merit [I will] teach the [8] general and specific way of practicing the path of the mantra."

The Rupakaya establishes its display in the dharmadhatu,

³⁴ Jigme Kungrol was one of the four main students of The All-Knowing Jigme Lingpa (*Kun mkhyen 'Jigs med gling pa*, 1729- 1798).

although due to habitual tendencies, only advanced students realize the magical display from the Revered Teacher through [his] radiant speech.

Secondly, the good bit in the middle is related. Through former aspirations and the power of compassion, the mind [of Sangye Gyaltsan] was reborn in that situation. As well as the Northern part of the Himalayas where Orgyan the 2nd Buddha [ie. Guru Rinpoche] visited, there are also hidden lands in the world that are full of his blessings. [One such place is] in the realm of the glorious manifestation of Avalokitesvara, the Drukpa ('*Brug pa*) Rinpoche Ngawang Nampa Gyalpa (*Ngag dbang nam pa rgyal ba*³⁵), in the realm rich in the four medicinal herbs, east of the centre is the well-known supreme Paro (*Spa gro*). In the upper part of the land was a place known as Kazhilungchen (*Ka bzhi lung chen*). It was in this place that the Lord [Tenzin Gyatso]'s father dwelled, a good-natured man with the character of a sage, known as Sonam Dongrub (*Bsod nams don grub*). [9] As for [Tenzin Gyatso's] mother, she was a woman of peaceful presence who was endowed with authentic dharma interest, and was known as Tashi Palmo (*Bkra shis dpal mo*). In that family there were six brothers and sisters (lit. 6 sprouts).

On the day of Saka dawa (*Sa ga zla ba*) in the Female Water Sheep year of the 15th Sexagenary calendar cycle (*rab byung*), [known as] 1883 in the Gregorian calendar, the revealer of the natural state took birth, and was given the name Sangay Norbu (*Sangs rgyas nor bu*) by his father.

In the year of the Male Iron Tiger (1890-1891), when [he] was about 7 years old....[His] maternal uncle, Ngawang Chokyi Wangchuk (*Ngag dbang chos kyi dbang phyug*), came to give him instruction [to become a] Khenpo (*Mkhan po*), and took him to [a place called] Dewachen (*Bde ba can*) in Bumthang (*Bum thang*). [There he] presented money and flowers to the precious Khenpo Damchos Gyaltsan (*Dam chos rgyal mtshan*)

³⁵ This is referring to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594- 1651).

[for] a hair-cutting ceremony.³⁶ [He] wore funeral garments to show that [he] was a [fit] vessel to [undertake] the commitment of the pure code of monastic conduct. [He complied with] discipline by offering prostrations and ceremonial scarves to a vast assembly of venerable sangha, and [then he] took his seat in the community. That lord was given the title of Ngawang Tenzin Gyatso (*Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho*). [10] After that, [he] began to study the alphabet, reading and writing along with his uncle while staying in his [uncle's] retreat house. After that [he studied] the subjects of dharma conduct and mandala rituals, which [his] mind and hand easily grasped because [he] studied diligently.

In the year known as that of the Male Wood Horse (1894), when that lord was about 11 years old, in the presence of Khenchen Rinpoche Jamyang Rinchen (*Mkhan chen rin po che 'jam byangs rin chen*, d.u) [he] took the novice vows, having listened well and carefully to the essence of [them]. From then, [he] entered a shedra (*shva dra*; monastic school) to [study] poetics and grammar, elocution, and the 30 Tripitaka, along with 'A Guide To Signs' and other general scientific and cultural topics. By that time [he already was] unlike the other children, and needed no reminding [or explanation], and [therefore] the teacher regarded him with great affection. Once, from the supreme protector Jigme Chogyal (*Jigs med chos rgyal*, d.u), [he] received the stages of the path of the glorious Drukpa Kagyu (*'Brug pa bka' brgyud*) school, listening carefully, as well as the empowerment for the development stage for 'The Assembly of Nine Deities, along with their Protectors and Retinues', and 'The Five Command Seals of the Profound Instruction', one after the other.

After that, at the age of 16 the lord himself went to Bumthang to study and practice the science of grammar. He studied hard with the teachers of that grammar school, [11] and one day the students all gathered. Three students headed by Je

³⁶ This means that he was taken to a monastery to become a monk.

Lama [Tenzin Gyatso] were chosen as the brightest students, and took to the road to visit the local dzong (*Rdzong*). There, in the presence of the owner of the dzong, the Great Sovereign Ugyen Wangchuck (*O rgyan dbang phyug*) gave each of those students a letter of support. The Great Sovereign bestowed an allowance on [those 3 monks before they went to] the place where the body imprint is seen in Bumthang

There, the Drikung Vajra Holder (*'Bri khung rdor 'dzin*), one endowed with knowledge of the Five Sciences was speaking. [Those students] bowed to him and presented a letter from their grammar school supporting their request to study with him. The Vajra Holder was held in high esteem as very gentle and kind of heart, and started [their education] with Sanskrit reading with commentaries. From that they moved on to the grammar texts translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan, as well as the joining of letters and so on. [Their Sanskrit education] was bestowed in stages, beginning from a detailed classification of the language, onto rules for conjunctions, and then commentarial explanations [which they] heard. Then [they studied] The Ka'lapa Sutra (*Ka' la pa mdo*) outline with 3-legged commentary, and [the Vajra Holder] offered [his] infinite knowledge. After great effort and with diligence [Tenzin Gyatso] kept in mind and mastered [those teachings]. [Following that they] concentrated painstakingly on many other texts, including 'The 5 Legged Text'³⁷ and Madhyamika and so on, along with the many conventional sciences, which [Vajra holder] bestowed in stages. An official invitation came from the Supreme Refuge, the 13th Dalai Lama Thubtan Gyatso (*Thub bstan rgya mtsho*), calling the Sublime Vajra Holder to the Medical and Astronomy College at the Potala Palace in Tibet to meet him. The Vajra holder thus saddled his horse [to leave].

Having listened to academic teachings [Tenzin Gyatso then] went to practice at the monastery of the Treasure Revealer of Zurmang Zilnon Namkhai (*Zur mang gter ston zil gnon nam*

³⁷ This is normally regarding poetry.

mkha'i, d.u.), remaining there to receive the Secret Empowerment of 'The Essence of Enlightened Activities', and saw the Lama's own Treasure discovery, a kilaya (*phur ba*).

At that time, a letter wrapped in silk came from Drubwang Shakya Shri (*Grub dbang Sha' kya shri*) with [his student] known as Artsa Lama Namgyal Paldan (*A rtsa bla ma nam rgyal dpal ldan*, d.u) for the Great Dragon King. One day [Tenzin Gyatso had the opportunity] for an interview with Artsa Lama. When Artsa Lama narrated just a fraction of Drubwang Shakya Shri's life story, [Tenzin Gyatso] spontaneously felt shivers and his hair stand on end with inspiration just from hearing it.

At that time, Artsa Lama was staying at the centre of the Omniscient Longchenpa (*Kun mkhyen Klong chen pa*, 1308-1363) in Bumthang, known as Tharpailing (*Thar pa'i gling*). There, having prostrated and paid homage to him [Tenzin Gyatso] requested the oral instruction for the Mahamudra preliminaries (*Phyag chen sngon 'gro'i zhal khrid*) [13] in stages to accumulate and purify [his being]. Later, [while Artsa Lama] resided there, [he also] heard in stages the main part of The Co-emergent Union of Mahamudra (*Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor dngos gzhi*) with instruction through personal experience, and also meditated.

At that time, the most high [King of Bhutan] had a discussion with Artsa Lama about taking some Bhutanese monks to attend Drubwang Rinpoche [ie. Shakya Shri]. Immediately, Je Lama [Tenzin Gyatso] hoped he could be one [to go, and] appealed to the one with the two siddhis Artsa Lama to request the King [for permission]. Immediately [he] met with [his] parents and relatives, and [though he] felt abandoned, as if he were going to another realm he made preparations [to leave]. Then Artsa Lama's attendant asked the King, who in turn sent a letter with gifts to Drubwang Rinpoche. [He also] offered many varieties [of gifts] to Artsa Lama. Je Lama [Tenzin Gyatso]... requested to be offered one complete set of robes which were necessary.

Following that, while attending Artsa Lama he went to visit the three great sites of Paro, including the Guru's meditation place Tagtshang (*Stag tshang*) and the Lion Cave (*Seng ge phug*) there.

Thus, [14] the Lord himself [Tenzin Gyatso] himself at the age of 18 in the year known as 'Endowed with Goodness', the Iron Male Rat Year (1900- 1901), arrived in Tibet. Initially, [he] went to the direction of Tsang (*Gstang*) to see the holy places in succession, in order to make offerings and pay respect. [He] especially went to the amazing thirteen monastic centres of the Glorious Drukpa (*'Brug pa*) [tradition], including the beautiful flower meadows of Ralung (*Ra lung*), the replica of the Dharma Lord's stupa made of gold that can clear the Three Realms, Tashi Gomang (*Bkra shis sgo mangs*), and other countless [specimens] of the three supports, to which [he] prostrated and made offerings with supplication prayers.

From there, Artsa Lama approached the northern directions, including Lhadrag (*Lha brag*)³⁸ and Riwozang (*Ri bo bkra bzang*), where [Artsa Lama and Tenzin Gyatso] resided for some months, and here [Tenzin Gyatso] received the successive empowerments and oral instructions for Chakrasamvara (*Bde mchog pad ma bdza*).

From there, [they travelled] on the main road through Central Tibet (*Dbus*), visiting the monastic centres of the Glorious Drukpas, including Namdrug Sewa Changchub Ling (*Gnam 'brug se ba byang chub gling*). There [Tenzin Gyatso] prostrated and made offerings to the countless examples of the three supports, including the Buddha statue and the Great Bodhisattva figure.

Following that, [15] [there] to begin with [he] prostrated and made offerings to Buddha Sakyamuni (*Jo bo Sha kya mu ni*), Avalokitesvara (*Thugs rje chen po*), the five naturally arisen images, and the plethora of other examples of the three

³⁸ A Sacred (*gnas*) site normally associated with the Bonpo tradition.

supports³⁹ dwelling at the Tulnang (*Phrul snang*- magical apparition) temple.⁴⁰ [He also] made supplications through offerings and prostrations to the Jobo image and other limitless precious supports imbued with blessings in the Jokhang (*Jo khang*) Vajra Ramoche. [He] also went to the Potala, Cagpori (*Lcags po ri*) hill⁴¹, and the Three Joyful Medicinal Trees.

At that time, [he] was invited to meet the Vajra Holder (*rdor 'dzin*), [who had been invited to Tibet] by the incomparable manifestation of Avalokitesvara, the leader of gods and men the 13th Dalai Lama Thubtan Gyatso, as one who was a lord of the five sciences, and was at the centre of a group of monks made Khenpo by the Dalai Lama. Two of the excellent lama's [Vajra holder] pupils also undertook the cultivation to become [fit] vessels for the Ten Vows, and received complete ordination as khenpo and celibate monks.

From there, [Tenzin Gyatso] pursued Artsa Lama to the northern plains (*Chang thang*), over many mountain passes, and then on with considerable difficulties to Amdo and Kham (*Mdo khams*), where [he ended up] at the [16] Grugu Retreat Centre (*Gru gu ri khrod*).⁴² There, [he] met the lotus feet of Siddha Rinpoche (*Grub dbang Rin po che*, ie. Shakya Shri), and paid respect of body, speech and mind through making prostrations. Seeing [Shakya Shri's] face, a natural devotion was immediately born [in Tenzin Gyatso]. From there, [he] entered the gate of the enormous compassion of Drubwang Rinpoche.

³⁹ 'Rten'

⁴⁰ This temple is located in Lhasa (*Lha sa*).

⁴¹ Site of an important medical college- this is interesting as it suggests he also studied medicine. The Three Joyful Medicine Trees mentioned next are presumably connected to this college.

⁴² This area is located in Lhathog in Kham. Shakya Shri originally took ordination as a novice monk at the Grugu monastery when he was a young man, and later after he married he continued as association with the meditation centre affiliated to the monastery. See Holmes, Forthcoming for more information.

To begin with, [Tenzin Gyatso] received empowerments from the sublime Lama's profound path. After that, [he] received the instruction through personal experience and pith explanation for the Co-emergent Union of Mahamudra that directly bestows the indestructible mind. In the daytime, [he] remained unwavering in meditation, and at night [he continued without] sleep, day and night without any break. At the same time, students from all over Amdo and Kham [came] to supplicate [him] in person.⁴³ [Drubwang also conferred on him] the old school empowerments for 'the Lotus of Chakrasamvara', with 'The Mother of Life Tsandali', and also oral empowerments for the Drukpa [Kagyu] subjects 'The Thirteen Chakrasamvara with Co-emergent Ekavira Without Consort'.

[In order to fulfil] the necessities of everyday life, [Tenzin Gyatso] would go alms gathering every month of the summer and autumn. When alms were offered, [he] would indiscriminately accept them and divide them. With this natural ability to undergo hardships, [he] remained content.

At Rinpoche's feet (ie. among his students) there were also the Khampagar Togden Mingrol (*Khams pa sgar rtogs ldan smin grol*, d.u), The Bhutanese Monlam Rabzang (*Smon lam rab bzang*, d.u), and many other students, whom [Tenzin Gyatso] supplicated.

[Shakya Shri] bestowed on [him] the profound instructions for the techniques of Naropa's Six Yogas (*Na' ro'i chos drug*), which [he] studied successively while also practicing meditation. Taught by Drubwang Rinpoche, [Tenzin Gyatso] improved his practice of generating the heat of Tummo (*gtum mo*), depending on daily notes [made from] oral teachings, and within [one night he] could dry a wet sheet 16 times, making the sheet every time thinner and thinner, and the ice nearby

⁴³ It is possible that this may be referring to students coming to supplicate Shakya Shri. However, given the context, and the fact it is Tenzin Gyatso's biography, this is unlikely.

him would melt and become water. [He] also had the signs of accomplishment in mastering the channels, essences, and winds (*rtsa thig rlung gsum*), to the extent that [he] could draw a skull cap worth of water up [his] urethra. Every month [he] would also fast, thinking of food as medicine, and in accordance with the Mahamudra [practice, he] would rely on a single grain for sustenance for 1- 3 weeks. Signs of the path that transcend explanation arose as [he] withstood this, as explained in the Biography of Drubwang Rinpoche. ⁴⁴

At one time, Drubwang Rinpoche and his son⁴⁵ went specifically to meet Mipham Rinpoche (*Mi pham rin po che*, 1846- 1912) at the Grateful Hawk Saddle Retreat Centre. Venerable Lama [ie. Tenzin Gyatso] and his students also went to attend him, [some] riding [horses] and [some] herding yaks. One day [while visiting there, Tenzin Gyatso] approached Mipham Rinpoche for an audience in order to create a spiritual connection. Mipham Rinpoche himself bestowed a detailed commentary on the ‘Guru’s Seven Line Prayer’, and afterwards, gradual steps of guidance were given by the senior Togden [ie. Shakya Shri].⁴⁶ [Mipham Rinpoche] said, “You are all extremely lucky to be in the presence of a supremely realized teacher [like Shakya Shri].” Je (*rje*) Lama [ie. Tenzin Gyatso] himself used to say [to the author] that from this, constant devotion to Drubwang Rinpoche arose. Consequently, after that [he] attended the Father Drubwang and son at Grugu Retreat Centre.

[Afterwards, Tenzin Gyatso] visited many spiritual places in Amdo and Kham, such as Khampagar (*Khams sgar*), Dzigar (‘Dzi sgar), Shechen (*Zhe chen*) monastery, Dzogchen (*Rdzogs*

⁴⁴ SSNT

⁴⁵ This may have been Phagchog Dorje, Shakya Shri’s main representative following his death, but the text says nothing to confirm this. It uses the term ‘*yab sras*’, which means ‘father and son’. It is also possible that it could mean all of Shakya Shri’s six sons, or more than one. The context adds nothing to suggest the number.

⁴⁶ The translation for this sentence is tentative.

chen) monastery, and so on, and met with the resident lamas, tulkus, teachers, and other holy beings, making spiritual connections with whoever possible.

Like that [he] received almost all the empowerments and scriptural transmissions from Drubwang Rinpoche [19], and meditated in each of his retreat centres. Due to the great kindness [of] the mandala [of Drubwang Rinpoche], Je Lama [Tenzin Gyatso] received and perfected the Path of Liberation Mahamudra, along with the Path of Skilful Means the Six Yogas of Naropa and all the other cycles of teachings. Finally, he prayed that in this and all his lives that Shakya Shri would not forget him and lead him to realization.

From there, Je Lama and some others all went together to Nangchen (*Nang chen*) There they visited the three supports and all the Lamas. Following that, they visited Riwoche (*Ri bo che*), Khyungpo (*Khyung po*) and Kongyul (*Kong yul*). Having travelled around all the snowy land, they then arrived at the single most renowned place, Tadrak (*Khra 'brug*). There he visited the power sites and the three supports and so on, and also all the sites in Central Tibet as well. He then visited Cagsirigug (*Lcags rtse gri gug*) on the Northern Plains via the way of Lhodrag (*Lho brag*), Mawochok (*Ma bo lcog*), Khothing Temple (*Mkho mthing lha khang*), Khar chu (*Khar chu*), Se kha (*Sras mkhar*), Dro wo lung (*Gro bo lung*), and so on, before arriving finally back in Bumthang.

[Upon arriving] immediately all of his elders together with Ugyen Wangchuck [20] met Tenzin Gyatso. The Great King smiled and bestowed wonderful gifts on him. From there, all of Je Lama's relatives also gave reciprocal support. He himself wanted to go into seclusion in the mountains and raise the victory banner of practice, but seeing his family was reminded of his responsibility to them. He went on the road home and gradually arrived. His mother Tashi Palmo along with all his brothers and sisters joyfully welcomed him, and cheerfully offered him tea and edibles to allow him to refresh for the remainder of his stay. By that time, his father the elder

Sonam Dongrub along with several of his brothers and sisters had exhausted their life spans and entered the path ahead [to the next life]. All aspects of the place had changed, and it bloomed upon his return.⁴⁷ Like that, he stayed for some months near his elderly mother, giving her affection and advice, such as to meditate on the deity of Avalokitesvara and visualize his mantra. From that, his mother and brothers and sisters all agreed to maintain him during several years of retreat, and granted him permission to go, while also preparing the [21] necessities of life.

Immediately, Tenzin Gyatso's mind generated delight and passed them all juniper garlands. In order for his meditation stability to improve [he decided to] go to a sacred site, the Hidden Land the Female Elephant Cliff (*Sbas yul glang mo brag*). That Lord had reached the age of 32, and in the year known as 'Good Virtue', the Wood Male Tiger Year (1914-1915), on the day of Saka Dawa during the waning moon, he entered a three-year retreat. Initially, he followed the profound path of Guru Yoga (*Bla ma'i sgrub pa*), followed by Chakrasamvara with Varahi (*Bde mchog dang Phag mo*) mantra recitations in succession. From that, for some time he practiced the Development Stage (*Bskyed rim*) to abandon mental constructs, and then The Blazing Inner Heat of Tummo (*Gtum mo*) blazed. During the first session of the day, he would practice the Illusory Body (*Sgyu lus*). In the night until the dawn, he would follow the path of naturally integrated clarity (*rang bzhin bsre ba'i 'od gsal*). During the evening session, the blazing and drip of the heat of Tummo would become indivisible. At midnight he would train in dreams (*rmi lam*) and luminosity (*'od gsal*). [As well as those], he would always put into practice Mahamudra practice. At night his body needed no pillow, as day and night became inseparable as he maintained diligent meditation practice. Without distinction between winter and summer, he would wear a single cotton cloth. Each month he would carry out the medicinal rejuvenation practice with only a single grain of

⁴⁷ Translation tentative.

sustenance. [22] Just as had been narrated in the life stories of his fore bearers in the White Lineage (*Dkar brgyud*)⁴⁸, he would study and practice. The Lord [Tenzin Gyatso] became like a jewel hidden at the depths of the ocean, his range of enlightened qualities expanding, and his inner being contained to others, only sometimes speaking. Signs of success on the path would emerge in order, and awakening was born where one became incapable of belief in the Self. Finally, at the age of 35, the Lord having reached the Fire Female Snake Year (1917- 1918) known as Pingala having realized the ultimate ends of the retreat untied the boundaries of the retreat. Following that, enlightened qualities effortlessly arose in him...

[Soon students began to gather] including Virtuous Palgi Ozer (*Dge dpal gyi od zer*), Virtuous Tashi Wangdu from Bumthang (*Bum thang pa Dge Bkra shis Dbang dus*), who one by one received initially the spoken instructions of the preliminaries, in order for them to continue to accumulate [them] and purify [their minds]. Following that they were offered the Co-emergence of Mahamudra instructions from experience. After that, [Tenzin Gyatso] would bestow the Path of Means, the 6 Yogas, and instructions through experience.

[Following that] the 10th Drukchen Jigme Chokyi Wangpo (*Brug chen Jigs med chos kyi dbang po*, 1880- 1934?) summoned him. Lord Drubwang Shakya Shri Jnana had moved in Tibet [23] to [the area of] Tsa'ri Kyiphug (*Tsa' ri Skyid phug*). Having arrived at the dwelling place of the Siddha [i.e. Shakya Shri], [Tenzin Gyatso] heard good news from the Siddha [that he would be giving teachings]. At once all the teachers and students began to prepare facilities and requisites [in order to receive teachings]. Soon after that, the students and teachers all together travelled from Bumthang, Kurtoe (*Bkur stod*), Tashiyangtse (*Bkra shis yang rtse*), Tsona

⁴⁸ This has been spelled as '*dkar*' here, instead of the more frequent '*bka*' found elsewhere in the text, in order to allude to the yogic lineage in Kagyu that is traced to the poet-yogi Milarepa (*Mi la ras pa*), who was known for his white cotton dress.

(*Mtsho sna*) and other areas to the Western Gate of Tsa' ri, Kyiphug. After arriving at the Great Vajradhara's dwelling, after lifting Drubwang Rinpoche's feet to their heads [in homage, the group] began preparation for a mandala offerings to show their respect. Drubwang Rinpoche bestowed khata (*kha bdags*; a white silk scarf used to express welcome or bestow blessings) on them, and good signs accompanied their prostrations to the lotus petal feet [of Shakyas Shri]. The Lord [Tenzin Gyatso] sat with him and made conversation, asking questions. ...Having made this connection with Drubwang Rinpoche, now not a single doubt remained [for Tenzin Gyatso]. [Tenzin Gyatso] sat on a cushion beside him, looking at the great kindness and compassion in [Shakyas Shri's] moon face, and enquired after [the Siddha's] health.

After that, Drubwang Rinpoche [24] joyfully taught all the profound dharmas of the glorious Drukpa [tradition], in such an excellent way that all students would be able to understand and realize them. For the further welfare of beings, [Shakyas Shri] set in place auspicious circumstances [for all beings] to know these profound teachings.⁴⁹ All of the vajra brothers and sisters present there felt their respect [for Shakyas Shri] to be greater than ever before, and again paid respect. For one day and one night, [Tenzin Gyatso] went to offer homage to and establish a dharmic link with the venerable Drukchen Jigme Chawang at the Sangngacholing Monastery (*Gsang sngags chos gling*). He also visited the Three Supports that were imbued with boundless blessings there, and then returned to Kyiphug.

At this point Drubwang Rinpoche was in good health and giving empowerments and instructions for countless numbers of the Old and New secret mantra (*gsang sngags gsar rnying*) practices. He also gave deep advice to students regarding his

⁴⁹ These 'auspicious circumstances' may allude to the empowerments he was giving students that would allow them to continue to propagate his teachings, and thereby benefit wider groups.

own Mind Treasure (*dgongs gter*) and Secret Oral Lineage (*Nyan brgyud gsang ba'i*). He gave copious advice, his mind blazing with splendour, and caused amrita to descend due to his words of experience and wisdom.

When there were intermissions in the teachings, [students] would visit [25] areas near to Kyiphug, such as the Turquoise Palace Lake (*Pho brang g.yu mtsho*), the Supreme Goddess Palace (*Pho brang skyogs mo*), and so on. [Tenzin Gyatso] circumambulated all the holy places consecutively.⁵⁰

Not long after that, Drubwang Rinpoche appeared to become ill.⁵¹ At the age of 67, during the fourth month the Year of the Female Earth Sheep (1919), [Shakya Shri] attained complete realization, and unimpaired signs appeared showing that he had gone beyond suffering. The students all gathered to perform a ganachakra as a memorial service at his cremation. At that time the Lord [Tenzin Gyatso] was asked to make a supplication prayer to express his reverence.⁵²

After that, [Tenzin Gyatso] travelled on to visit different places- Tashi Thongmon (*Bkra shis mthong smon*), The White Lotus Monastic College (*Pad dkar grva tshang*), Dorjeling (*Rdo rje ging*), The Mantra College (*Sngags grva*), Tagtse (*Stag rtse*), Dreulhay (*Dre'u lhas*) and so on, before returning to his own place. While he had been travelling he'd become quite worn

⁵⁰ For more on the sacred geography of this area and its history, see Huber, Toni (1999). *The Cult of the Pure Crystal Mountain*, Oxford [New York]: Oxford University Press.

⁵¹ The word 'appeared' here has deeper significance- sometimes in Himalayan Buddhist biography 'seemed to' or 'demonstrated' illness is also used. These terms are used as a biographical trope, as they support the idea that realized masters will only appear to become ill to the mundane world as a lesson to their students in impermanence, while ultimately their realization surpasses the dichotomy between life and death, and thereby also health and ill health.

⁵² Translation in this sentence is tentative. I have not yet found any supplication prayer to Shakya Shri written by Tenzin Gyatso, though others do exist that have been written by his sons and students.

out, and so went to live near his elderly mother.

[Tenzin Gyatso] then went to Bodhgaya in India as the attendant of his maternal uncle, Ngawang Chokyi Wangchuk to make supplications. [They also] visited Vulture's Peak (*Bya rgod phung po*), Nalanda (*Na' landa*), Varanasi (*Wa ra na si*), [26] Tsachokgrong (*Rtswa mchog grong*), and Lumbini (*Lu mbi ni*), in order to pay homage. While in Nepal, [they also] visited Swayambunath (*'Phags pa shing kun*), Boudhanath (*Bya rung kha shor*), Namu Buddha (*Stag mo lus sbyin*) and Yang la she (*Yang la shod*) to make prayers.⁵³ Following that [they] returned to their own land to refresh their health.

The Lord himself was by then 43, and the Year of Female Wood Ox (1925- 1926) entered into his second set of three year retreats at the Hidden Land of The Female Elephant Cliff (*Sbas yul glang mo brag*). While in retreat he [realized] the innermost essence of all the 84,000 Dharmas. He practiced the Swift Path of all the Buddhas that have awakened, Mahamudra, along with the Six Yogas of Naropa.

Meanwhile in Thimphu the learned teachers of the sangha had appointed [Tenzin Gyatso's] maternal uncle Ngawang Chokyi Wangchuk as the Vajra Master (*Rdo rje slob dpon*) and presented him with a khata. At that time, several students came to [study with Tenzin Gyatso], such as Sangay Dorje from Gyaling (*Gyad gling pa Sangs rgyas rdo rje*) and Rinchen

⁵³ In terms of chronology, it is quite possible Tenzin Gyatso was in Nepal at the same time as Shakya Shri's sons and students who were carrying out renovations on Boudhanath and Namu Buddha. Shakya Shri had sent the group to renovate Swayambunath in 1917, and had told his students that his final wish was to see the other two famous stupas of Kathmandu restored. They did so following his death in the early 1920s with sponsorship from the Lhasa Government, the Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan, and many other local sponsors throughout the Himalayas. The information given here in Tenzin Gyatso's biography though does not clarify if he was involved. My forthcoming PhD dissertation will contain more information about the renovations.

Drakpa from Lung nag (*Lung nag pa Rin chen grags pa*). Initially, [Tenzin Gyatso] gave them oral instruction in the preliminaries for them to accumulate and purify their minds. Following that, he bestowed Mahamudra [27] with instructions from his experience. Following this, he gave them the Six Yogas of Naropa instructions in stages.

Finally, having reached the age of 46, in the Year of the Male Earth Dragon (1928- 1929) he ended that three year and three month retreat. Immediately [he] went to enquire after his uncle, the venerable Vajra Master Chokyi Wangchuk, at Pung dzong (*Spungs rdzong*) and met him. He offered homage to the completely victorious venerable one. He also paid homage and made supplications prayers to the relics of refuge Ngagi Wangpo (*Skyabs mgon Ngag gi dbang po*) and the countless other examples of the Three Supports housed there. He stayed with his uncle for a few days, enjoying the tea and wondrous food on offer. He then requested leave and went to stay near his aged mother.

Desiring the way of life of a renunciant, he moved on to visit the border temple that pins down demons Tsuglhakhang (*Gtsug lag khang*), the Paro River Temple (*Spa gro skyer chu lha khang*), the Bumthang Maitreya Temple, the Guru's Practice site of the Tiger Nest in Paro (*Stag tshang*), the body imprint at Bumthang, The Lion Palace at Kurtoe (*Bkur stod seng ge rdzong*), and many others. In those places he practiced diligently [28].

At that time the victorious over samsara Je Khenpo (*Rje mkhan po*) abdicated to dedicate himself to practice in isolated places. The teachers and students of the sangha met with the Second King of Bhutan to discuss [the matter]. In the 16th Sexegenary Cycle during the Year of the Female Iron Sheep (1931- 1932), known as the Diverse Prajapati, uncle Ngawang Chokyi Wangchuk was empowered and raised to the Lion Throne to become to next successive arhat great Khenpo of the community Pung thim (*Spungs thim*). The Lord Lama to repay such great kindness accepted the responsibility...

The Lord [Tenzin Gyatso]’s own mother was by that point very aged and near death. At her time of death the Lord made a dedication prayer and aspiration that all the roots of her virtue would be fulfilled.

[Following her death Tenzin Gyatso] stayed for some years in a monastic centre serving his uncle, the Learned Khen Rinpoche, until a ripe age. While presiding over the Guru’s 10th day celebrations at Thimphu Dzong, Khenpo Rinpoche’s body [29] suddenly became agitated, trembling as though he was angry. He required medical treatment, and [Tenzin Gyatso] performed a healing ceremony for a prayer for his stability of life, though his condition continued to worsen. Rinpoche was 81 in the Year of the Male Iron Dragon (1941-1942) when he attained the dharmadhatu, and at the time of death stayed in thugdam (*thugs dam*), the Lord with him as his reminder. Immediately, the sangha all gathered in the monastery in front of countless examples of the Three Supports, and made detailed offerings, including the mandala offering of the Realisation of Complete Dharmadhatu which was conferred with many others. There the crematorium had been adorned with curtains and banners, with [Rinpoche’s] body placed in the middle, with offerings placed before it. Offering articles along with fire offering substances were prepared, and all the masters and disciples were invited to make up the Mandala of the Six Buddha Families, and around the corpse a fire offering was performed. Tea was offered with lunch at noon, and gifts were presented [30] to ensure the event was successful. Like that, the deeds that made up aspiration for enlightenment and attainment of the complete dharmadhatu culminated.

Following that, Dharma Lord Ngawang Thinley (*Ngag dbang ‘phrin las*) was elected as the next successive great Khenpo of the community and enthroned with examples of the supports presented to him.

The Lord himself [Tenzin Gyatso] went into retreat in the Eastern Blissful Accomplishment Place (*Shar bde chen grub*

pa'i bsti gnas). ...After establishing himself at the area known as the Virtuous Wisdom Lion (*Dge ye shes se ngge*) new students such as Rinchen Dargyay (*Rin chen dar rgyas*) and others appeared. They were taught initially the preliminaries with oral instructions for the purpose of accumulation and purification. Following that, they received instructions from [Tenzin Gyatso's] personal experience regarding Mahamudra in succession. Later, he successively bestowed the instructions for the Skilful Path of the Six Yogas of Naropa while more and more students gathered.

Furthermore, at that point [Tenzin Gyatso] was sent an official order to take up the responsibility of the Vajra Master (*Rdo rje slop dpon*) role at the glorious Drukpa community of Deba (*Lte ba*). Due to this need he went there at the age of 64 [31] during the year known as inexhaustible (*mi zad*), the Male Fire Dog Year (1946- 1947). At the Dewachan (*Bde ba can*) community of Pungthang (*Spungs thang*), Khen Rinpoche bestowed on him a kata and the title of the Vajra Master, and carried out the stages of enthroning [Tenzin Gyatso]... A joyful feast was had, with wild sweet potato (*gro ma*), saffron (*dri bzang*), a drink made from the essence of wish-granting petals (*dpag bsam 'dab bcud*), boiled rice and other wondrous food made with fresh crops all served. The hundreds of sangha gathered gave off a sweet scent of discipline and unanimously rejoiced. The jatakas in the tradition of the Glorious Drukpas were arranged and spoken, created excellent auspicious connections in all directions. The khenpos and students, along with the King and his entourage, and the teachers from many spiritual institutions...offered the rings of the Queen of Immortals (*Chi med dbang po*) along with many other divine garments and sublime gifts, along with a supplication prayer to his lotus feet. [32] At that time, Khen Rinpoche and the teachers and students of the sangha gathered to bestow presents, along with a ganachakra, and a feast was presented by the King and his entourage. The principality also each made offerings in the tradition of the feast....

Around this time, it seemed that the victorious doctrines of the Buddha in general, and in particular the glorious Drukpa teachings, has become degenerated, so [Tenzin Gyatso] gave teachings. To all the ones who came and asked for teachings, and the immature local people, he gave ripening and liberating empowerments⁵⁴ and bestowed liberating instructions on all. Due to his noble intention of bestowing maturing and liberating instructions from that area of the glorious teachings, a pleasant lotus grove, the smell of happiness pervaded all the directions, and remained in the area of that monastic centre.

Finally at the age of 68 the Lord [Tenzin Gyatso] [33] during the year known as that of appearance, the Male Iron Tiger Year (1950- 1951) was still in the role of the Vajra Master... He told all students and sangha to maintain a vast aspiration in order to maintain the glorious thunder clap of the dharma, and all the general and specific teachings of the Buddha, until the end of samsara...

[He was requested] to give empowerments for the Co-emergent Chakrasamvara, the Co-emergent Varahi, and also gave instructions on the main part of the Mahamudra preliminaries. Then he bestowed in succession the instructions from [his own] experience regarding the path of means, the Six Yogas of Naropa and auxiliary teachings, as well as the symbolic empowerment of the 15 Goddess Yidams. [34] [He also gave] the ripening empowerments for the great empowerment of the Protector Deity, and transferred the oral lineage of liberating instructions. [Students] also requested reading transmissions of the oral Mahamudra texts that had been translated from Sanskrit (*Phyag chen rgya*) and Gampopa's Collected Works (*Dvags po'i bka' bum*).

At the age of 73, the Lord Lama [Tenzin Gyatso] went into sealed retreat until he was 74.

⁵⁴ Translation tentative for sentence.

Students with particular temperaments that had the virtuous roots that had cause to ripen perceived Lama Rinpoche's body, speech and mind as being supremely virtuous when hearing him. [When he gave instructions], saffron robed holders of monastic discipline from spiritual institutions in Dewacan, Wangdu Phodrang (*Dbang 'dus pho brang*), Rinpung (*Rin spungs*) and so on would gather like swans on a lotus lake, along with faithful men and women from each district who were driven in their practice. [He] would teach all [of these people], from the eldest to the youngest, the Three Stages of the Path⁵⁵, and the Dharmas of all the Vehicles. He would bestow advanced stages of the path to liberation to the more advanced people, and then Tantra [35], whereby un-ripened people would become ripened through receiving an inspiring empowerment. Those who received [Tenzin Gyatso's teachings] venerated him. Following those, to all the more mature [students, he] gave [instructions] in the stages of the Development Stage (*Bskyed rim*) with explanation of the deities, before sending them to meditate. He then gave verbal instructions on the Completion Stage (*Rdzogs rim*) of the Primacy Deity, and the Liberation Path of Co-emergent Awareness of Mahamudra, encouraging his successors to persevere in their meditation. He then gave 'pointing out instructions' (*Ngo sprod pa*) regarding the method for recognizing successful signs on the path, as well as the practice of the Four Mahamudra Yogas (*Phyag chen rnal 'byor bzhi*). Among those individuals, many who were diligent arrived at the experiences of the Path of Skilful Method, the Six Yogas. These means of meditation could lead the mind and body to penetrate the round being of the Vajra Body. [Tenzin Gyatso also] pointed out the feeling of recognizing one's own basic state through a spontaneously born fruition. He [spoke] about the liberating wheels of the dharma, stage by stage, and the jewel of the Three Secrets. [He also said] that while enjoying life, [one should remember] the teachings and all glorious beings... Finally, in order to benefit those

⁵⁵ The Three Stages of the Path: Rudimentary, Intermediate, and Superior.

beings that needed to be tamed, [Tenzin Gyatso] made an aspiration that the students should realize [all of these teachings].

[36] When the Lord himself reached 84 years of age, to [the time] when it is said [one really] shines in the Year of the Male Fire Horse (1966- 1967), his appearance seemed slightly diminished. Many senior people enquired carefully after his health. Others performed healing ceremonies and prayers for the stability of his life, but as nothing good happened [people became] doubtful [about his health]. Word was sent to the Lord's own nephew, Tsewang Tenzin (*Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin*) who was practicing meditation in the Hidden Land of Sikkim (*Sbas yul 'bras mo ljongs*). He immediately took to the road in a great hurry to get to the great bliss accomplishment place [where Tenzin Gyatso was living].

In the Year of the Fire Horse (1967) during the waning days of the summer moon on the morning of the 24th the Lord [Tenzin Gyatso] bowed and seemed to become slightly weakened. The Lord took a sorrowful breath but appeared outwardly to be devoid of illness to those around him. On the following day of the 25th, to demonstrate to those who hold everything to be permanent [the reality of existence] the Lord Lama [Tenzin Gyatso] straightened up his body, and turned his eyes to the sky [37] and thereby expounded [silently] the means of passing beyond suffering. It seemed as though that sun of the general practice lineage had become overtaken by night, and those who had unclear understanding became saddened by the nirvana of the Mandala Protector Vajra Holder. From that day, for about seven nights [Tenzin Gyatso's] face remained unchanged and appeared more radiant than before. Outside, the sky was pure, and puffy rainbow-hued clouds took on the forms of deities. A pounding similar to that of a large drum resounded, and signs arose of that [Tenzin Gyatso] had attained the bardo (*bar do*) of the completely enlightened dharmakaya. Every day for seven days the luminous dharmakaya created signs with secret meanings. His students all gathered, and with great respect

and renunciation mind they carried out The Offering to the Guru (*Bla ma mchod pa*), along with the mandalas of Chakrasamvara and Varahi and cultivated an indivisible feast mandala ceremony along with supplications prayers and so on.

[38] Finally on the third day from the middle of the month [ie. around the 18th], a crematorium was arranged with canopies, curtains, presents, offerings and ribbons, with the Lord's body in the centre. A stove was built by qualified people, and sandalwood, aloe wood, and other good types of wood were arranged [for the cremation]. The sambhogakaya that was the precious remains was adorned with ornaments, and offered the feast implements in detail, along with the offering articles particularly for the fire offerings. Hundreds of sangha who had been liberated from passion gathered, both teachers and disciples, and performed the indivisible mandala of the Six Buddha Families making offerings and praise. As the fire offering of the White Clad Queen Panaravasni (*Rgyal yum god dkar mo*) was offered, immediately the remains glowed at the navel with the heat of Tummo, which grew gradually stronger, before [the corpse] burst into brilliant golden tongues of flame. The fire and other offering substances were all carried out in succession, and fulfilled with the appropriate supplications in the correct manner, and [39] were finally completed. On that day, the sky was pure aside from a cloud over the sun that appeared to be in the form of a deity, which remained there for all to see...

Following three days, [the assembled group] performed a ganachakra feast [in front of] the crematorium which had been bound. When the crematorium was opened, the remains were covered in relics (*ring bsrel*), both white and colourful, and all were cleansed using a cleansing vase of water in order to be put in [Tenzin Gyatso] Rinpoche's receptacle chest (*za ma thog*). The bones were cleaned with great reverence, and finally the skeleton was interred within a new stupa made at that monastic centre. Some teeth were taken as relics by monasteries as supports for the path, and in a pleasant grove

of holy images were inside a silver accomplishment stupa. Students also made statues as a mind support, with many offerings put inside... Most of all, that very Glorious Guru [who had attained] the realization of the [40] Four Bodies, and was a wisdom holder of the perfect essence, was supplicated by many different accomplishment communities.

Even though the content here has many virtuous qualities, for fear of too many words and conceptual constructs the middle section [of this piece] ends here.

The third section is the perfectly virtuous conclusion. In this realm the all compassionate Lord of the Dharma's completely luminous victory [has been described]. To the Lord of the Mandala Tenzin Gyatso's feet, until I reach enlightenment I will venerate you! The Lord's biography [is like] the luminous essence of ambrosia, gathered here like an immensely luminous Buddha field [in condensed form]. Stupid people like me cannot describe it appropriately, so I have just briefly [gathered] what was manifest. Everyone should practice virtuosity [as naturally] as the flow of a river [never ebbing], so that all beings as infinite as space may attain perfection. Similarly, dedicate the merit [which will act as] a garland of blessing condensed. May all beings swiftly meet this ocean without conceptualization of the Three Objects⁵⁶! May I also [strive for this], until I attain the essence of enlightenment, complete with obtaining the Eight Freedoms and the Ten Riches! [41]Glorious Protector Lama, please watch me with compassion. May the final supports of learning, contemplation and meditation remain, and may great devotion pervade all! I supplicate [you] to transfer the power of your blessings [to me, so that I] can attain the dharmakaya for the benefit of the self under the Bodhi Tree, and [have the] compassion that all sentient beings may attain liberation.

Thus, this was the rough biography of all the lineage mandalas of the all-pervading Lord of the Mandala Tenzin

⁵⁶ The Three Objects: Subject, Object and Location.

Gyatso in order to supplicate [him] and keep [him] in mind. Through [this work] may unflagging devotion be planted like a seed of liberation in the mind of [all] beings. [This has been written by] the follower [of the] Lord Protector [Tenzin Gyatso], the vinaya holder of the Buddha Tenzin Donkun (*Bstan 'dzin don kun*), in hope that all beings will be without desire. May all be auspicious!

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