

The Lineage of Chokling Tersar

*Compiled from the oral memoirs
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Manifestation of Damdzin, Chokgyur Dechen Lingpa.

Chokgyur Lingpa was the "manifestation," meaning the reincarnation, of King Trisong Deutsen's son, Prince Damdzin. Another of his former lives was the great tertön, Sangye Lingpa, who re-vealed the Lama Gongdü.

Chokgyur Lingpa was the last of the 100 major tertöns. He was the owner of seven transmissions and is regarded as the universal monarch of all tertöns. One of the reasons for this is that no other tertön has revealed a teaching that includes the Space Section (Longdey) of Dzogchen. There are several Mind Section (Semdey) revelations and all major tertöns have revealed the Instruction Section (Men-ngakdey), but only Chokgyur Lingpa transmitted the Space Section. This is why the Dzogchen Desum is considered the most extraordinary terma that he ever revealed.

Chokgyur Lingpa's consort was Dechen Chödrön and Padma-sambhava predicted that their three children would be emanations of the three family lords: Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and Vajra-pani. I don't like saying this, for it may sound like I'm bragging about my family line, but such a prophecy does exist. The Manjushri emanation was supposed to be Wangchok Dorje, the Avalokiteshvara emanation Tsewang Norbu and the Vajrapani emanation my grandmother, Könchok Paldrön.

Vimalamitra appearing in person, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo.

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo was an emanation of both Vimalamitra as well as Trisong Deutsen. It was predicted that Trisong Deutsen would take thirteen incarnations exclusively as tertöns and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo was the 13th incarnation. He is also regarded as an emanation of the master Jigmey Lingpa.

Vairochana actually manifest, Lodrö Thaye.

Jamgön Lodrö Thaye is considered an emanation of the great translator Vairotsana who, in turn, was regarded as an emanation of Buddha Vairochana.

These three masters - Chokgyur, Khyentse and Kongtrül - were connected to each other as 'mingled minds'. They were both teachers and disciples of one another. Chokgyur Lingpa regarded both Khyentse and Kongtrül as his teachers. However since Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo received the entire Tersar transmission from Chokgyur Lingpa, Chokgyur Lingpa can be considered as one of his teachers. Without question, Kongtrül accepted both Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Chokgyur Lingpa as his masters.

Khyentse and Chokling had received a prediction [from Padmasambhava] stating, "You possess the karmic continuity of being linked as father and son." The father was Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and the son Chokgyur Lingpa. Their minds mingled into oneness - meaning they had an identical level of experience and realization - like the torrential rivers of summer. That is the metaphor for their meeting, ex-changing pith instructions and awakening their full karmic potential.

Jamgön Kongtrül was enthroned by the other two as the authentic incarnation, the conscious rebirth, of Lotsawa Vairo-tsana. In this way, they assisted each other so that their mutual benefit for the Buddhadharma and all beings was similar to the sun rising in the sky.

When Samye was under construction, Guru Rinpoche, Vima-lamitra, Buddhaguhya and other great masters, along with their chief disciples such as Vairotsana and Yudra Nyingpo, all helped the teachings of the Buddha to flourish like the sun rising at dawn. At the end of this period of the Dharma, these masters returned in the form of Khyentse, Kongtrül and Chokling. In fact, during that time in the Nangchen and Derge provinces of Kham, as well as in Ü and Tsang of Central Tibet, tulkus of all 25 of Padmasambhava's close disciples were identified and recognized.

Once Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche told me, "The 25 disciples all appeared together, like a flock of sheep and goats running out of a barn. This was a portent that the time for Tibet's role as a 'field of conversion' for beings was just about to come to a close. Just like when these 25 disciples assembled at Samye in the early times, during the time of Khyentse, Kongtrül and Chokling, again these masters all returned in person. These 25 disciples appeared as masters with incredible experience and realization, learning and accomplishment. Their personal disciples and grand-disciples were equally amazing." That is what Dzongsar Khyentse told me about the simultaneous return of these three great masters.

Mighty Avalokiteshvara, Khakyab Dorje.

This refers to the 15th Karmapa, Khakyab Dorje. After Khyentse and Kongtrül, no one did a greater service to the Chokling Tersar than Khakyab Dorje. So deep was Samten Gyatso's trust in him that tears would often come to his eyes upon mere mention of his name.

Khakyab Dorje received the complete transmission of the Chok-ling Tersar from Samten Gyatso. At that time, there were still several terma arrangements, for liturgies as well as for empowerments, which had not yet been written. So, because some extremely important and profound instructions and empowerments still remained, Samten Gyatso requested Khakyab Dorje to compose them. It is an extremely great kindness that he accepted to compose these texts. He dictated them to Jam-pal Tsültrim who was an outstanding lama in his own right.

Samten Gyatso once told me that Khakyab Dorje was an inconceivably great master, describing his clairvoyant powers, signs of accomplishment and how he could perceive the three times as clearly as something placed in the palm of his hand. But, although Khakyab Dorje had unimpeded clairvoyance, he did not have complete control over his clairvoyance. For example, he would know both when some lamas were going to die and where they would be reborn without anyone requesting this information. When the

disciples responsible for finding the tulku would come to inquire about the lama, Khakyab Dorje would already have all the circumstances of the tulku's death and rebirth written down. In other cases, he could only see the circumstances of re-birth when a special request was made (on the part of the sangha) and some auspicious circumstance was created. In still other cases, he couldn't see anything; even when requested for help. He would try and say, "It's shrouded in mist." This, he said, was due to some problem between the dead lama and his disciples. If there was fighting and disharmony within the lama's sangha, the (whereabouts of his next incarnation would be indistinct) and shrouded in haze. He said, "The worst obstacle for recognizing tulkus clearly is disharmony between the guru and his disciples. In such cases nothing can be done and (the circumstances of his next rebirth) remain unforeseeable."

Magical display of King Jah, Tsewang Drakpa.

This line refers to Chokgyur Lingpa's son, Wangchok Dorje, who was also known as Tsewang Drakpa (Renowned Longevity). He was an emanation of Manjushri and is described here as "the magical display of King Jah," alias Chögyal Lungten Dorje, who was the recipient of the Eighteen Mahayoga Tantras.

Wangchok Dorje was still very young when he spontaneously recognized the nature of mind all by himself. Before he passed away, he had chanted hundreds of thousands of Manjushri mantras. Due to the power of his training, he developed an incredibly sharp mind and his insight left people speechless. But, when asked for clarification, he would say, "Don't ask me for mind teachings! I didn't get up on the roof by climbing one stair at a time. I'm the type who got there in one leap. Even if I were to describe the state that I train in, you wouldn't be able to grasp it. I'm not the kind of person who can guide you to the nature of mind."

In terms of his realization and where he was on the path and bhūmis, I have been told that Wangchok Dorje was on an even higher level than his father, Chokgyur Lingpa. In fact, he was supposed to reveal all those terms that hadn't been yet revealed and then insure their propagation. From his childhood on, he could see the magical script of the dakinis as if it was right in front of his eyes; he could transcribe it and any connected teachings at will.

People found him incredibly handsome; some even said he had the features of a god and that they had never seen anyone so beautiful. He was quite tall, very strong and had a noble bearing. His hair was very unusual; it had never been cut and was braided and wrapped around his head. It shone with a dark blue luster and when he washed it, it never tangled, even if he didn't comb it. This is known as the 'mag-netizing tiara', which means that his hair had never once been cut in his life and that a dakini was said to dwell in every strand.

Being the son and lineage-holder of Chokgyur Lingpa, Wangchok Dorje was supposed to have sons to carry on the lineage, but his life was cut short at the age of 24. Prior to that, they say he had many lovers, but since he was an accomplished yogi who had reversed the flow of the white essence, he never fathered a single child.

When Wangchok Dorje went to visit Paltrül Rinpoche he arrived with great pomp and circumstance, with a large following in tow. However, while staying there he became inspired upon hearing Paltrül's teachings. Paltrül Rinpoche would often speak about

being a child of the mountains, wearing the mountain mist as one's garments, and behaving like the great practitioners of the Kagyü lineage. Paltrül Rinpoche told Wangchok Dorje to follow their example, "To practice the true Dharma one should always take the lower seat and wear secondhand clothing. It is never said that one should put oneself above others while dressing up in brocade." Wangchok Dorje thought to himself, "That's fine with me!" He dismissed his entourage, shed all his brocade garments and began to wear a simple felt cloak instead. He also gave up women, took the vows of a novice monk from Paltrül Rinpoche and shaved off all his hair. But once his hair was cut off, he couldn't see the dakini script any longer. In order to transcribe the sign script, the syllables have to hover in your vision, but now they had become blurred, darted about and grew smaller and smaller. Soon he was no longer able to decode or write down any termas. He remained at Pal-trül's encampment for several years, but his splendor faded and he became just like any ordinary person. When he returned home he walked on foot with a staff in one hand, like a mendicant beggar, and had only a single yak as a pack animal. By then, he had become quite wan and frail. They walked all the way back to Dzongsar monastery from Golok in the northern part of Kham, where Paltrül's encampment was. But as they were approaching the monastery he fell ill. He died a few days later in Jamyang Khyentse's mountain retreat, the famous Fortress of the Gathering Place of the Sugatas.

When the news of Wangchok Dorje's death was brought to Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo he expressed great displeasure, "Damn! It was Padmasambhava's prophecy that this son of the Chokgyur Lingpa's was to spread the Chokling termas from the Chinese border in the East all the way to Mount Kailash in the West benefiting beings like the unfurling of an immense sheet of white cloth. Now everything is messed up!" And, expressing despair in typical Khampa fashion, he thumped his chest with his fists. "The auspicious coincidence didn't last," he said with a very morose expression. "He was supposed to be the one to uphold the remaining termas."

Incarnation of Yudra Nyingpo, Tsewang Norbu.

Tsewang Norbu (Precious Longevity) was the son of Chokgyur Lingpa and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's niece. Up until he was about 12 months old, an eagle perched on the roof of his parents' house every single day. Later, Jamyang Khyentse said that this was Shokgöma, the Eagle-Winged Goddess, who was one of the guardians of the Dzogchen Desum.

When the Dzogchen Desum was transmitted the very first time, 25 people were present. Kongtrül, Karmey Khenpo and, of course, Jamyang Khyentse were all there. As the Desum terma was the heart essence of Vairochana and Yudra Nyingpo was his foremost disciple in Kham, the incarnation of Yudra Nyingpo had to be the first to receive the empowerment. So, as soon as the terma was revealed, Khyentse wrote it down and then Chokgyur Lingpa conferred the empowerment on Tsewang Norbu who was no more than six months old at the time. This was even predicted in the terma itself. When Tsewang Norbu grew up, he remembered receiving the Dzogchen Desum. In his own words, "I will never forget lying there, in my basket, wrapped in sheepskin, between Chokling and Khyentse, and receiving the Desum empowerments. I can still remember it as clear as day."

Tsewang Norbu was regarded as extremely learned, almost equal to Karmey Khenpo; but he said this was merely due to spending his early years with Jamyang Khyentse. He said, "Staying with Khyentse when I was young made me a wealthy man - rich with teachings." He was also a bit eccentric and had a very direct yogi type of personality. During the first half of his life he was a monk, but Jamyang Khyentse and Kongtrül took back his vows and he became a ngakpa. He had two consorts but no sons. I have heard that he later said, "Darn! I totally missed out in this life; I didn't get to keep my monk's vows nor did I get any children by giving up my vows. I've been a total failure." Upon hearing remarks like this, other lamas would often be quite unsettled by his deadpan humor. Nor did he ever listen when a dignitary or high lama told him to do something. Khakyab Dorje asked Tsewang Norbu for the trans-missions of the Chokling Tersar, but was unable to force him to do it. Karmapa is Avalokiteshvara in the flesh and who wouldn't re-joice in giving him Chokgyur Lingpa's termas as an offering? But Tsewang Norbu never did.

Tsewang Norbu was also a disciple of Paltrül Rinpoche. Once in Kham, he went up the mountainside for a short stay in a cave with just a small bag of tsampa. One night there was a heavy snowfall and he was snowed in for six months. Word went around in Paltrül's camp that Tsewang Norbu had perished. Since it was assumed that he couldn't have survived, vir-tuous acts were done in his name. Six months later, when the snow began to melt, Tsewang Norbu walked into the camp. Someone asked him, "How is it you didn't starve to death?" He replied, "Why would I have starved to death? When I was thirsty I ate snow and when hungry I ate from my bag of tsampa. Everyday I ate a spoonful of tsampa. So why would I die when I had tsampa to eat and water to drink? People don't die when they have provi-sions, do they?" In other words, he wouldn't admit to a thing. The truth is he had attained mastery in yoga, and had full control over the channels and energies. Tsewang Norbu also had amazing clair-voyant powers, to such an extent that he frightened people.

Once at Riwoche, after conferring the empowerments of the Rinchen Terdzö, he continued to transmit the Chokling Tersar. At that time he told the lamas present - Tsikey Chokling, Neten Chokling, Samten Gyatso, and Tersey Tulku - "Don't search for my reincarnation! In my next life, I will work on my own for Chok-gyur Lingpa's teachings automatically. In no way shall you try to find him! Promise me that, all of you!" So the four of them had to swear not to look for his tulku.

Reincarnation of Shantarakshita, lord Mahapandita Ratna.

This line refers to Karmey Khenpo Rinchen Dargye. He was a reincarnation of the great pandita, Shantarakshita, who Tibetans commonly call Khenpo Bodhisattva.

Shantarakshita was from the Indian country of Sahor and was the very first master invited for the construction of Samye in Tibet. Karmey Khenpo was often compared to Karmey Chagmey in terms of caliber. He had his own seat at the great monastery Karmey Göñ in Kham and, even though he was a disciple of Chokgyur Lingpa, his background was Karma Kagyü.

Karmey Khenpo was an extraordinary master and looked like one of the six-teen arhats. He was a completely pure monk and never let meat or alcohol touch his tongue his entire life. He also said that his hand had never even grazed a woman. They also say he never

allowed a lie to cross his lips. Yet, even though he was so gifted and quite close to Chokgyur Lingpa, he still didn't have the fortune to receive the Dzogchen Desum in person. However, after the great tertön passed away, Karmey Khenpo did have a vision of Chokgyur Lingpa's wisdom-body and received the complete empowerments and transmissions then.

Karmey Khenpo was an incredibly great master. Even Dudjom Rinpoche was amazed by his writings and once told me, "It's so wonderful that someone like Karmey Khenpo could possibly exist in this world." He lived, I believe, into his early 80's and was then reborn as the son of Samten Gyatso's sister.

Display of Namkhai Nyingpo, venerable Dharma Ratna.

This line refers to Söntar Chönchok Rinpoche, a great renunci-ant meditator who spent most of his life in mountain hermitages, focusing on nothing but meditation practice without the dis-tractions of any mundane undertakings. He was an emanation of Namkhai Nyingpo, one of Padmasambhava's twenty-five close dis-ciples. Chönchok is the Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit name Dharma Ratna.

Chönchok Rinpoche was a close Dharma friend of Samten Gyatso, but at the same time they were also each other's guru and disciple. When clearing up doubts on experience, Samten Gyatso would ask Chönchok Rinpoche. My father, Chimey Dorje, re-garded Chönchok Rinpoche as his root guru. In fact, it is due to his great kindness that Chönchok Rinpoche is included in this supplication to the golden garland of masters in the lineage of Chokling Tersar.

Söntar Chönchok spontaneously became a notable realized master. During the latter part of his life, he attained perfection in his meditation training and reached what is called 'the collapse of delusion', the last of the four visions, and was said to have arrived at the stage of nonmeditation. Samten Gyatso told me that Söntar Chönchok had attained a level of realization that corresponds to the rainbow body and, though he didn't exactly leave in a rainbow body, his body did shrink quite a bit after he died - he definitely went beyond delusion. Apparently, when he passed away, there were lights and sounds, ringsel pills and some wondrous designs of rainbow lights in the sky - just like the great Dzogchen scriptures de-scribe. That's why even Samten Gyatso was amazed.

After Chönchok passed away, my father had a vision of him giving many profound instructions. I can still remember my father's respect and devotion upon merely hearing Söntar Chönchok's name mentioned. His devotion was so deep that he would get all choked up if he had to say his name.

Manifestation of Yeshe Tsogyal, Sukha Dharma.

This line refers to Chokgyur Lingpa's personal consort who was an emanation of Yeshe Tsogyal. She was known by the name Sang-yum Dechen Chödrön. In Tibetan, Sukha Dharma translates as Dechen Chödrön (Dharma Lamp of Great Bliss). She had two children by Chokgyur Lingpa, a son and a daughter. Her son was Tsewang Drakpa alias Wangchok Dorje, and her daughter, Könchok Paldrön comes next.

Blessed by Arya Tara, Ratna Shri.

This line refers to Chokgyur Lingpa's daughter Könchok Paldrön (my grandmother). She had three visions in which she met Jetsün Tara, as if in person, and reached perfect realization before she passed away.

Dechen Chödrön was a quite wrathful woman. Occasionally, she set her will against the great tertön, not seriously, but she was sometimes stubborn enough to start a quarrel. Someone later said that it was her obstinacy that caused her child to be born a girl, but I feel that Könchok Paldrön's life actually fulfills Pad-masambhava's prophecy.

She was taken in marriage by Orgyen Chöpel, a Vajrayana master of the Tsangsar family, with whom she had four sons and two daughters. From eldest to youngest, they were Samten Gyatso, Chimey Dorje, Lama Sang-ngak Rinpoche, Tersey Tulku, then Tashi Chimey and finally Rigdzin Paldrön. The continuation of Chokgyur Lingpa's terma teachings was primarily due to her having borne four sons who performed an immense service in propagating the lineage. This was all possible because she was an emanation of Vajrapani - which is something remarkable in itself.

Könchok Paldrön was a very profound meditator and the local people had deep trust in her. Often they would ask for some grains of barley, that she had blessed, to carry in a small amulet bag. They would also tie her protection amulets around the necks of their goats and sheep. Some people even tested whether her protection actually worked by shooting rifles at their goats. They would say, "Each time I hit the goat, after the impact it would cry out in pain, 'baaaaah!' but upon closer inspection, I could find no bullet wound anywhere. The amulet made my goat bulletproof and I'm not lying!" Actually, this was not such a bad quality, for it increased people's trust.

One interesting point is that her guru was her own son - Sam-ten Gyatso. He was the one who pointed out mind essence to her, so that she recognized it unmistakably. Samten Gyatso told me that he was amazed by her level of meditation. Near the end of her life, she had reached the level known as 'collapse of confusion' at which point there are no more dreams during sleep - the dream state is totally purified. In the scriptures, it is said that at a certain point the stream of dreaming ceases so that throughout day and night the continuity of luminous wakefulness is uninterrupted. She was quite amazing; people said that one's conceptualizing thoughts would immediately diminish the moment one entered her room, they simply quieted down. One would feel very lucid and quiet. It was extraordinarily palpable.

Könchok Paldrön was 70 or 71 when she died. There was a surprising amount of sindhura powder on the bones which remained after the cremation. I also heard that one of these bones had an image of Tara on it. Dzongsar Khyentse and other masters considered this image very important and I believe that Dzongsar Khyentse still has it in his possession.

Vimalamitra manifest in person, Samten Gyatso.

Tulku Samten Gyatso was Könchok Paldrön's eldest son. In terms of incarnation lineage, he is the fourth in the line of reincarnations of a great accomplished master by the name Tsangsar Ngawang Trinley. The first Tsikey Chokling once had a vision in which he saw that Samten Gyatso was an emanation of Vimalamitra. This is why he is mentioned as 'Vimalamitra manifest in person'.

Samten Gyatso was an invaluable upholder and advocate of Chokgyur Lingpa's terms, and was the one who undertook the task of compiling them. He sought out any teaching, wherever it was available, and thus received all the empowerments, reading transmissions and instructions of the Tersar. He received whatever Karmey Khenpo was in possession of, but the major portion he received at Riwoche in Kham from Tsewang Norbu personally, like 'a vase filled to the brim'. During these teachings, the important tulkus, headed by the three Jamgön lamas of Riwoche, would assemble in Tsewang Norbu's private chamber in the evenings to receive advice, clear up difficult points within their own experience and so forth. Samten Gyatso was there too, dressed as a simple monk, always humbly sitting in the back and taking the lowest seat. On one occasion, Tsewang Norbu said with glaring eyes, "Hey! The two of you think you are tulkus of Chokgyur Lingpa! You there, you think you are an incarnation of Chokgyur Lingpa's son, Tsewang Drakpa! You are all so proud! But that humble monk, Samten Gyatso, is not proud at all, and yet, when it comes to spreading the teachings, none of you three will be his equal! That monk will be the pillar to uphold Chokgyur Lingpa's teachings!" That is what Tsewang Norbu predicted one evening, in front of everyone.

Later, when Tsewang Norbu was about to go to Central Tibet, he came to Tsangsar Dzong, our family estate. One night, when he was with Samten Gyatso, Tsewang Norbu said, "We won't meet again in these bodies. Nevertheless, I entrust all my possessions to you." Then he gave everything he had - his clothing, brocade garments, ritual implements and so on - to Samten Gyatso. "From this day forth, this is all yours. We won't meet again in this life and even if we do, it won't make any difference."

Samten Gyatso gave the Chokling Tersar three times in Central Tibet. Many great lamas received the transmission then, including the omniscient Drukchen Rinpoche, Taklung Tsetrül Rinpoche and the three masters with the title Jamgön who resided at Jang Taklung. Later on, he went back to Kham and at the request of Nangchen Tsoknyi, the guru of the king of Nangchen, Samten Gyatso offered the complete Chokling Tersar transmission at Nangchen Tsechu Monastery. At Namgyal Tse in Surmang, at the sponsorship and request of Surmang Tentrül, many lamas received the Tersar transmission, including Tentrül himself, Surmang Garwang, Dzigar Kongtrül and others; all together there were eighteen major masters among the gathering of 300 lamas. After this, Samten Gyatso proceeded to Derge where he offered Jamgön Situ Rinpoche parts of the Tersar, including the Tukdrub cycle. At another point, when the son of the 15th Karmapa, the reincarnation of Jamgön Kongtrül Rinpoche, visited the seat of Chokgyur Lingpa, Samten Gyatso gave him several transmissions, most notably the empowerment for Tukdrub Barchey Künsel. These were the major transmissions Samten Gyatso gave, but, of course, he bestowed empowerments upon an untold number of lesser known lamas and practitioners.

Samten Gyatso was uncompromising about hiding his inner qualities; he would never mention a single word about them. All he would say was that he trained in the state of composure from the time he was eight years old. Nevertheless, he was a 'vajra holder endowed with the three precepts.' Among monks, he outwardly lived like a true shravaka and, from an early age, his tongue never touched meat or wine. Inwardly, his heart was full of the virtues of a bodhisattva - inconceivable great compassion and devotion. On the innermost level of Vajrayana, the 15th Karmapa said, "These days, Samten Gyatso is

probably the only person who has fully realized nondual awareness and holds the perfect, unmistakable view of the Innermost Essence of the Great Perfection."

I'm not just praising someone in my own family, like 'the lower lip praising the upper lip,' but, in all honesty, almost no other master living in Kham possessed such a high view and realization, nor such commanding presence and majestic brilliance. Within the kingdom of Nangchen, he became the greatest lama of his time - even the King accepted him as his personal guru. The king had been losing one son after the other, so both the Karmapa and Situ Rinpoche advised him to regard Samten Gyatso as his chief lama and adviser. Consequently, Samten Gyatso remained at the royal palace for three years and during this time no other prince passed away.

Perfector of the four visions, Chimey Dorje.

Next in age, after Samten Gyatso, was my father who was the fourth incarnation of a master named Tsangsar Sönam Yeshe.

After Wangchok Dorje died, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo predicted where he would be reborn. After he had done so, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo then asked, "How many sons does Könchok Paldrön have?" He was told, "She had one previously and this year she had another." Khyentse then ex-claimed, "Ah! This new child doesn't have a long life-span! You must re-name him Chimey Dorje! It will help to prolong his life." That is how old Jamyang Khyentse gave my father his name which means "Indestructible Immortality".

I have to admit that my father, in spite of being a tulku, was a bit of a rogue in his younger days. He would carry a long knife and rifle and go hunting all the time. He delighted in confrontations and a good fight. He was brave and incorrigible and no one in the area could get the better of him. And this was my father! You could say he had a taste for heroics and he didn't change his ways until he was about 22 years old. At that time, he was acting as Samten Gyatso's attendant when they went to meet Söntar Chönchok up on the mountainside. When they arrived at the door of the hermitage, Chönchok came out to greet Samten Gyatso and said, "Welcome, Rinpoche!" then looking around he asked, "Who have you brought with you?" Samten Gyatso replied, "He's the reincarnation of Dzongsar Sönam Yeshe." Chönchok exclaimed, "Ah, so the Sönam Yeshe incarnation has arrived!" and bowed down at my father's feet. Chimey Dorje tried to sidestep him, but Chönchok kept bowing in his di-rection expressing his deep respect. Finally my father thought to himself, "Oh dread! How can this lama have such pure perception of an evil-doer like myself? He has such devotion to my former incarnation that it makes no difference to him that I am dressed like a worldly person. How I have wasted my life until now! I have hurt so many people." So, due to the skillful intervention of this lama, Chimey Dorje had a complete change of attitude and said to Samten Gyatso, "Today, in front of this lama, I would like to promise to change my way of life and never repeat any of the evil deeds that I have done in the past." Samten Gyatso replied, "If you really mean it, then you should surely do so. But if not, what's the use in making promises that will only cause you grief later?" Chimey Dorje replied, "From this moment until I die, I will shed these mundane garments and will only dress and act like a lama!" From that day onward, my father turned into a gentle person. It is very hard to find anyone as mild-mannered as he was. I never even heard him scold a servant. He never once hit me, but

then I never went against his wishes - I attended him just like a servant would. For two years, I managed his household; before that, I was his cook and made him momos. Chimey Dorje requested meditation instructions from Söntar Chönchok and was given all the 'mind teachings' and oral instructions, as well as the pointing-out instruction to the awakened state, hence he re-garded Chönchok Rinpoche as his root guru. After Chönchok Rinpoche passed away, but before Chimey Dorje had been told, Chönchok Rinpoche appeared to him in a vision in the sky, riding a lion and imparting the oral instructions on meditation practice. My father told me, "From that day on, it was like a sun shining in a cloudless sky. This master was the kindest to me!" With that vision he had attained stability in nondual awareness.

Chimey Dorje had many such visions of various masters and yidam deities, but he didn't keep his premonitions to himself very much. For instance, before a person of importance arrived at his hermitage he would tell me that so-and-so was on their way. When I asked who had sent the message, he would say that it had just occurred to him and sure enough a short time later the person would arrive.

He carried out a vast number of practices and recitations from the perspective of Mahayoga. He used the Chö system as the framework, but the innermost core of his practice was Kunzang Tuktig and Chetsün Nyingtig. He would sometimes say to me, "How can there possibly be any difference between the view of prajnaparamita, which is the very nature of Chö, and the view of the Great Perfection? They are completely identical! Mahamudra, Dzogchen and Chö ultimately converge at the same state. There isn't the slightest difference, is there?"

My father was fond of going on pilgrimage and would often interrupt serious teachings with ceremonies and picnics. When he gave a reading transmission, you could hear each word distinctly so that at the end of a day of reading sutras aloud most educated people could remember what the Buddha had said to whom and where, and were able to re-tell it to others. It's interesting to note that when his body was cremated, they found his tongue lying, intact, in the ashes. Perhaps his tongue had been blessed in some way, for it would be hard to find anyone more articulate and with a voice that could project as far as his. When he chanted the Chö songs at his hermitage, they could be heard echoing across the entire countryside. He could read the whole Kangyur in three months, usually 1½ volumes a day and he gave the complete lung for it three times.

As Chimey Dorje had such a great voice, when he arrived somewhere new people would gather, from near and far, in order to listen to him. Of his many great qualities, one of the more obvious was his power of mantra which was probably a result of all the Mahayoga practices he did.

He was more famous for his powers to cure people than Samten Gyatso. Sometimes sick people were carried from as far away as a two or three weeks journey. Once every week he would do the Chö ritual and they would recover and then take leave. During the ritual the people had to lie down as if they had died, giving up all concerns and in his meditative state Chimey Dorje would then open his 'Chö eyes' in which he could see the karmic causes of their diseases and what remedies were necessary for a swift cure. He would state these aloud for all to hear. When people heard why and in what circumstances they had fallen ill, they were often astounded. Not everyone was cured, but the morning after the Chö ritual it would always be clear whether they would recover or not. He cured a lot of people in this way, received plenty of gifts of gratitude and was

regarded with deep respect. Ask any old person from my region, they all remember Chimey Dorje and his Chö practice. He died when he was about 63 years old.

Siddha of union, Sang-ngak Rinpoche.

Sang-ngak Rinpoche's full name was Lama Karma Sang-ngak Rinpoche. He was Könchok Paldrön's third son. He had extraordinary experience and realization. In terms of incarnation line, he was a rebirth of the tulku of Sertsa Monastery from the district of Gegyal Riwo, but Könchok Paldrön never gave her permission for the monastery to take him. He remained with his Precious Mother and was a tremendous help to her, serving her as cook and bursar. He never forgot what Könchok Paldrön taught him which was his greatest quality: perfect recall. He never forgot anything that he had learnt, which is quite unusual. And so, it was from her that he learned the entire tradition of Chokgyur Lingpa: the melodies for all the chants and the details of the various tormas, the tradition of which rested entirely upon the tertön's daughter. After Könchok Paldrön passed away, he spent much of his life in retreat.

Sang-ngak Rinpoche became a monk when still young and kept his vows with great purity. Outwardly he was a virtuous monk strictly adhering to the Vinaya, inwardly he adhered to the bodhi-sattva trainings, and, on the innermost level, the commitments of Secret Mantra. He lived the simple life of a meditator which was a very good life, indeed. He had amazing perseverance only sleeping a little bit at night. To be honest, I haven't met anyone who was more persevering, doing nothing but meditating. He kept a very low profile, had a very easy-going personality and was very honest. He was a fine hidden yogi.

After his mother passed away, Sang-ngak Rinpoche lived at Dzong-go with Sam-ten Gyatso and often acted as Samten Gyatso's assistant, serving him in many ways. Even though he too was a tulku, he never asserted himself as Samten Gyatso's equal. He received the pointing-out instruction and all the pith advice from Samten Gyatso. He never went to any other teacher about such matters and his main practices were Kunzang Tuktig and Chetsün Nyingtig, just like Sam-ten Gyatso. He had such respect for his older brother that he would never remain seated when Samten Gyatso entered the room. You rarely see that kind of behavior among siblings.

People told me that whenever Sang-ngak Rinpoche was the chöpön (shrine master) for Samten Gyatso during empowerment ceremonies, he was like a cat walking among offerings on a shrine, never clumsy, spilling anything nor tripping over anyone, no matter how busy he got. His footsteps never made a sound nor did he ever make noise in any other activity.

Sang-ngak Rinpoche didn't have many students and he never gave meditation instructions, unlike his brothers who were known everywhere like the moon and stars. Only after Samten Gyatso and Chimey Dorje had passed away could he be convinced to confer a few empowerments from the Chokling tradition. Slowly, his renown grew and people from all around showed more devotion to him because they started to appreciate that he had the pure lineage from Chokgyur Lingpa through his mother. In the end, people said that the transmission of the Chokling Tersar came to rest on him. He died at the age of 66.

Miraculous display of Wangchok Dorje, with the name Tsewang.

The fourth son and youngest of my uncles was Tersey Tulku (Tersey means 'son of the tertön'). He was the reincarnation of Wangchok Dorje who was an emanation of King Jah. After Wangchok Dorje died, the people at Chokgyur Lingpa's seat at Tsikey Monastery sent an inquiry to Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo asking where his rebirth would be found. Khyentse's immediate re-sponse was, "Previously they were related as brother and sister, now I wonder if they will be linked as mother and son." This turned out to be a clear prophesy as Wangchok Dorje's sister, Könchok Paldrön, later came to be his mother.

There are indications that even when quite young Tersey Tulku had many visions and received prophecies, but, being a hid-den yogi, he rarely spoke of them. He refused to write the outer version of his life story, let alone the inner one. It would be hard to find anyone more secretive than he was. About himself he said, "It is Jamyang Khyentse who said that I am the tulku of Wangchok Dorje and I don't want to say he was lying because he was definitely a master who sees past, present and future. He not only made the prediction but he verified it in writing as well. He also said that Wangchok Dorje's emanation-basis was King Jah. So, from that angle, I can't dispute being the rebirth of Wangchok Dorje. On the other hand, when I scrutinize myself and try to find any resemblance to these two masters, I don't see even as much as a mustard seed of qualities. As far as I am concerned I'm more likely the rebirth of a dog. I have no feeling of having been a mas-ter." I heard that he displayed miracles and had clear foreknowl-edge on several occasions, but he refused to confirm these himself. In this way he showed true integrity.

Once Tersey Tulku left Kham to go on pilgrimage in Central Tibet. He was a very strong man and carried his own provisions on his back. He brought two trusted attendants, each carrying a backpack. Unlike most travelers, they didn't have a single pack ani-mal; nevertheless they traveled everywhere, even to India. On his return he connected with his karmically destined guru, the great realized master Shakya Shri and came to live in his Dharma encampment. Shakya Shri wasn't his only root guru but his main one, as Tersey Tulku also had the Chokling Tersar lineage. For this and various other reasons, he didn't return to Kham for many years, living the unbound life of a lama-yogi.

Back in Kham Tersey Tulku's status had been equal to that of the Chokling tulkus in the sense that, during ceremonies at the main seats, his throne was level with that of the residing lama. Because of his status, at some point, the need arose for his presence in the Eastern monasteries. So, his mother and three brothers all went off to Central Tibet to get him and bring him back. Still, it took them three years to get him back in Kham. By then Tersey Tulku was suffering from an illness which forced him to walk with two canes and I heard it mentioned that this might have been a type of 'dakini punishment' due to taking monastic ordi-nation in his previous life.

Upon his arrival in Kham Tersey Tulku took up residence at Tsikey monastery. The lamas at Riwoche had great trust in him and also invited him there to give teachings. Then, after Samten Gyatso passed away, he was invited to give teachings at Dzong-go. Tersey Tulku had many disciples and was regarded as a very learned master. After Karmey Khenpo and Tsewang Norbu had left this world, it was Tersey Tulku who was the most knowl-edgeable and capable writer. He arranged many manuals for

empowerment and instruction, including an explanation of the deities in the Barchey Künsel cycle. No one compiled his writings after he died, but altogether there must have been enough to fill over 5 volumes. In particular, I remember an explanation of the deities for the Tukdrub Trinley Nyingpo which amazed whoever read it. I still haven't seen a surviving copy of that text, but who knows, someday it may still surface in Kham. He wrote the Zurgyen for Kunzang Tuktig and many other similar texts that are included in the Tersar. He did a lot of work to develop the practices found in the Tersar. All this despite never having undertaken any serious education. When someone has deep insight it is possible to be like a khenpo.

Dilgo Khyentse spoke of Tersey Tulku with a lot of affection. They were close friends and had exchanged many teachings so that they were one another's disciple. Tersey Tulku, on the other hand, would never describe himself as Dilgo Khyentse's teacher, but only as his disciple.

Tersey Tulku's main practices were Chetsün Nyingtig and Kunzang Tuktig. He was also very fond of a particular practice of Padmasambhava known as Guru Mahasukha, a mind treasure of Shakya Shri which he had received personally from Shakya Shri. He had incredible devotion for this master.

He died in his late sixties.

Accepted by Jamgön Lama, Khyentse Öser.

Now we have come to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, whose greatness really doesn't require my adding anything. Here, in the lineage supplication, Dilgo Khyentse mentions himself as "Accepted by Jamgön Lama, Khyentse Öser." The principal "Jamgön Lama" was Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche. To be "accepted by" this Loving Guardian (Jamgön) means that he regarded Dzongsar Khyentse as his root guru. Seen from the viewpoint of ordinary people Dilgo Khyentse excelled in his studies due to his outstanding intelligence and diligence, but in actuality, he was an emanation of both Vimalamitra and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, so what do I need to add? Such a precious master!

The one who first recognized him as a reincarnation of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo was Jamyang Loter Wangpo from the great Ngor Monastery in Tsang. Jamyang Loter Wangpo was one of the principal disciples of both Jamgön Khyentse and Jamgön Kongtrül and was a master of outstanding importance. Although Dilgo Khyentse was educated in the Sakya lineage when young, he was really nonsectarian (Rimey). The tulku was brought to Shechen Monastery where he entered the great Dharma college and this is why he is sometimes called Shechen Khyentse. The tulku was also verified by the Karmapa and by Dzongsar Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, who also enthroned him.

So, when Dzongsar Khyentse departed to the invisible realms, Dilgo Khyentse - affectionately known as Tulku Salgah - appeared and continued to shine like the sun for the Buddhadharma and all beings. It is said that the activity of the Khyentse incarnations is like the moon rising when the sun sets - when one of them dissolves back into the buddhafield of Akanishtha, another emanation appears, often a bit more brilliant than the previous one. When Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo passed away, Karmapa Khakyab Dorje saw in a pure vision that 25 emanations would appear as the identity of the 25 aspects of fruition - five each of body, speech, mind, qualities and activity; among these, there were

five principal incarnations. That is why we see so many reincarnations with the name "Khyentse". It is similar with Jamgön Kongtrül's incarnations.

In his day, Dilgo Khyentse was without equal in spread-ing the teachings of Khyentse, Kongtrül and Chokling. He came to be the guru of the entire world. Like the sun shining in the sky, his deeds and activity reached everywhere. Wher-ever he went, there would be a commotion. Some Nepalese people exclaimed, "Padmasambhava must have looked like that! He is so big!" His virtues were truly extraordinary! His eyes were so clear, his tongue so eloquent. He was unique, truly incredible. He was a master in the truest sense of the word. Those who have met him know what I mean.

This was my feeble attempt to briefly explain the stories of the lineage masters.

Realizer of the natural state, Urgyen Tsewang Chokdrub.

[Editor's note: Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche refrains from even mention-ing that Dilgo Khyentse has included him as the next master in the lineage.]

With undivided devotion, I supplicate one-pointedly
This garland of gold mountains, the root and lineage gurus.
Bless me with your compassion, may the two siddhis be realized!

In addition to introducing the lineage masters of Chokling Tersar, this booklet also serves as a sampling of the stories contained in Blaz-ing Splendor, Kyabje Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche's memoirs.

For more details on Chokgyur Lingpa's biography and termas, see Life and Teachings of Chokgyur Lingpa by Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche, Rangjung Yeshe Publications.

The Memoirs were translated by Erik Pema Kunsang. This commentary was compiled and edited by Michael Tweed.

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