

Lama Yeshe

THE BLISS

HEART PRACTICE OF THE SIX YOGAS OF NAROPA

OF INNER FIRE



foreword by

Lama Zopa Rinpoche

EDITED BY ROBINA COURTIN AND AILSA CAMERON

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THE BLISS OF INNER FIRE



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Heart Practice of the Six Yogas of Naropa

LAMA THUBTEN YESHE

A Commentary on Je Tsongkhapa's

*Having the Three Convictions: A Guide to the Stages
of the Profound Path of the Six Yogas of Naropa*

EDITED BY ROBINA COURTIN
AND AILSA CAMERON

Introduction by Jonathan Landaw



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Contents

Foreword by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche vii

Editors' Preface xxi

Introduction by Jonathan Landaw 1

Prayer to the Lineage Lamas of the Six Yogas of Naropa 13

PART ONE THE SIX YOGAS OF NAROPA

- 1 Tantra and Inner Fire 21
- 2 The Six Yogas and the Mahasiddha Naropa 27
- 3 The Mahasiddha Je Tsongkhapa 31
- 4 The Point Is to Practice 37

PART TWO PRELIMINARY PRACTICES

- 5 Preparing the Mind 45
- 6 Receiving Initiation 49
- 7 Purifying Negativities 53
- 8 The Inspiration of the Guru 57

PART THREE GOING BEYOND APPEARANCES

- 9 Transforming Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth 67
- 10 Arising as a Divine Being 75
- 11 The Characteristics of Body and Mind 83
- 12 Unifying Relative and Absolute 89

PART FOUR AWAKENING THE VAJRA BODY

- 13 Hatha Yoga 97
- 14 Channels and Chakras 103
- 15 Blissful Syllables 113
- 16 Vase Breathing Meditation 121

PART FIVE DISCOVERING TOTALITY

- 17 Inner Fire Meditation 131
18 Good Things and Bad Things Can Happen 143
19 Simultaneously Born Great Blissful Wisdom 157
20 Becoming Vajradhara 165

PART SIX LIVING WITH INNER FIRE

- 21 Your Pleasure Is Your Responsibility 173
22 Never Forget Inner Fire 179

APPENDIX 1

- Sanskrit Pronunciation Guide 187

APPENDIX 2

- Table of Foreign Word Transliterations 188

APPENDIX 3

- Outline of *Having the Three Convictions* 193

Notes 196

Glossary 200

Bibliography 216

Suggested Further Reading 220

Index 222

Foreword

By Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche

The unimaginable secret qualities and actions of a Buddha are the objects of knowledge only of the omniscient minds of other Buddhas. Therefore, there is no way that ordinary beings could understand Lama Yeshe's secret qualities; they could only see his qualities in accordance with the level of their mind. However, since individual experience is one of the most effective ways of realizing that the essence of the guru is Buddha, I would like to remember again the wonderful qualities of Lama Yeshe that I did have the karma to see.

❧ THE QUALITIES OF LAMA'S HOLY BODY

Even people who had never met Lama Yeshe got a very warm feeling simply from seeing a photograph of him; they immediately felt he was someone who was very kind and concerned about others. I once sent an English pen friend, Audrey Cohen, a photo of Lama in a group of monks. Although I didn't explain which of the monks was Lama, Audrey wrote to say that she got a good feeling from seeing a particular monk in the back row; this monk was Lama.

Many people reacted in a similar way to seeing Lama's holy body. Even though many Tibetans did not know who Lama Yeshe was and had not heard of his background as a great scholar, simply seeing Lama made them very happy, and they often felt devotion arise towards him. Once when we were visiting Bodhgaya some Tibetans from Sikkim met Lama in the street and immediately sensed a holy purity in him; they felt that he must be a great bodhisattva. The meeting had such a strong impact on them that they asked some nearby monks who Lama was, but no one really knew. That same evening one of the Tibetans came to see me and explained how impressed they had all been by meeting Lama in the street. He had incredible faith that Lama was a great holy being.

Simply seeing Lama's holy body brought peace and joy to the mind, and a wish to see more of him. Even without being introduced to him, people naturally respected Lama. Even people who had not met the Dharma felt that Lama was different from ordinary people. When they met Lama, they sensed very particular qualities of purity and holiness; they felt not only that he was learned but also that he had a deep spiritual quality.

In the general view, Lama's physical aspect changed with the development of his mind. For several years before he passed away, he looked very light and very radiant. This was an expression of his tantric realizations. Those who were aware of the signs could recognize the outer changes that were evidence of his inner development, especially of completion stage tantric realizations.

Even when Lama was showing the aspect of serious illness, he would suddenly look so bright and magnificent that you could almost think that he had no sickness at all. Out of his great compassion, Lama manifested various aspects as needed to subdue different sentient beings.

☸ THE QUALITIES OF LAMA'S HOLY SPEECH

Lama's holy speech was like nectar, and its power is the personal experience of those who received teachings from him. Every single word came out of his bodhicitta; every single word was for others.

When other Tibetan lamas give a public talk in the West, where there are usually people who are completely new to the Dharma, they often speak on subjects with which they are familiar rather than on subjects the people in the audience need to hear. Lama, however, would not usually talk on any one fixed subject but would address the various problems, spiritual and mundane, of the people in his audience.

Like offering a smorgasbord, Lama would speak on one subject, then switch to another, then another, without there necessarily being a connection between the subjects. Even though they might not like all the foods served, everybody would find something they liked among the various dishes. No matter what their social class or level of education, everybody received an answer to their problems that suited

the nature of their mind. Even though they might have arrived with confused minds, they returned home extremely happy and satisfied. After an hour's talk from Lama, no one could walk away saying that they hadn't found the solution to their problems. This amazing skill is proof that Lama's holy action of teaching was Buddha's action.

It might appear to some people that Lama was simply telling many jokes to make people laugh, but those with a Dharma background appreciated how practical Lama's talks were. Someone who had been following Buddhadharma for twenty years and had heard many secret, profound teachings still found Lama's talks practical and beneficial. Lama's advice was not pie in the sky; it could be related to everyday life.

Some people came to Lama's lectures out of curiosity, just to see what a Tibetan lama looked like; they had no particular wish to receive teachings from a Tibetan lama or to study Buddha's teachings. Others came sincerely seeking peace of mind and some solution to the problems in their lives. From Lama's external appearance, they probably didn't expect him to have any methods to solve their problems. However, the more they listened to Lama, the more peaceful their minds became and the more they appreciated Lama's special qualities. Even someone with a mountain of pride in their own knowledge, which no one else could crush, would have their pride subdued by hearing Lama talk. They would naturally become more humble as a result of the teaching. At the same time, Lama himself had incredible humility, the quality of a learned person.

After Lama had talked for an hour, the people in the audience would realize that this Tibetan lama was remarkable, with extensive knowledge and many answers that they didn't have. During that hour they would be greatly inspired to learn more about Tibetan Buddhism; refuge in Dharma was actualized in their minds. Lama was unbelievably kind, because he planted the first inspiration to listen to the holy Dharma and then apply it in practice. From this inspiration comes enlightenment.

When Lama gave personal advice to his students, he would give each person exactly the advice they needed and make them extremely happy. Lama had an incredible ability to understand the various

solutions that suited the level of mind of each person. When he advised people, Lama didn't rely upon dice and scriptures; his predictions came from his own wisdom.

When Lama taught introductory courses on lam-rim, the graduated path to enlightenment, the people listening to Lama talk felt that they could almost transform their minds into the realizations of the path to enlightenment. For example, when Lama gave teachings on bodhicitta even for a few minutes, because of his own realization of bodhicitta, the people in the audience felt as if they had achieved the realization of bodhicitta. It gave no freedom for the selfish attitude to arise.

It was similar when Lama taught on tantra. A sign of having attainments of the tantric path is that a practitioner's teachings on tantra are very clear and very effective. This was obvious when Lama taught on completion stage practices such as the Six Yogas of Naropa. Just by hearing Lama's teachings on the Six Yogas and doing one or two meditations, many students had experiences. The clarity and the effect of the teachings proved that they came out of Lama's experience of the tantric path.

This is the essence of the small understanding that an ordinary being could have of the qualities of Lama's holy speech. After listening to Lama speak, people felt no doubt that he was a holy being, a great bodhisattva. Just as the rising sun dispels the darkness from the earth, through his teachings Lama dispelled the darkness of ignorance from the minds of so many people.

☸ THE QUALITIES OF LAMA'S HOLY MIND

Lama had a very open heart and mind; he was open to all traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and to all religions. He had a very broad view and was also very farsighted. There was nothing tight, closed, or limited about Lama's approach to life. He was not someone walking a narrow road.

Even though Lama didn't have a reputation for being learned, he was respected by lamas from all orders of Tibetan Buddhism. Lama had an understanding of sutra and tantra not only according to the Gelug presentation but also according to the Nyingma, Sakya, and

Kagyu views. He was knowledgeable not only about Tibetan culture but also about Western culture and philosophy, which he had studied seriously. Lama was not confused by words and external appearances that seemed to imply differences between sutra and tantra and the various orders. He would check the meaning behind the words to reach his own understanding, then concentrate on putting that meaning into practice. This was a particular quality of Lama Yeshe.

The actual essence of Lama's holy mind was great compassion, just as it is with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Lama was filled with great compassion, cherishing other sentient beings. You can understand Lama's great loving kindness from the way he took care of his students like babies. He was more than a mother, more than a father. Not only did he give teachings to his students, but he constantly encouraged them in their Dharma practice and helped them to solve their problems. Like a father, he would listen to all their problems and then give them personal advice as well as teachings. He wrote many letters each day, late at night, to give advice to students. Even though he had so many other things to do, Lama gave so much of his time and his life to solving the problems of his students and their families.

Lama would mix with people, entertaining them in whatever way made them happy and dissolving the tightness in their hearts. To make people happy he would go to the beach or to a restaurant. Because he did these things only to benefit others, they became causes for developing his own mind and realizations.

Lama told me that the whole point is to transform every action you do—eating, drinking, sleeping—into Dharma, so that your life becomes meaningful. Lama used to say that some beings even use their breathing to benefit others. Even though Lama didn't say so, I felt that he was actually describing his own qualities and experience, particularly his realization of bodhicitta.

Despite many doctors warning him of the seriousness of his heart condition, Lama was always extremely busy traveling, giving teachings, writing, reading texts, guiding the FPMT (Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition) Centers, and giving advice to students. When Lama was at Kopan Monastery, for example, even though he was concerned with giving guidance to all the Centers and

to individual students, he would teach the Kopan monks; take care of their food and clothing; supervise what was happening in the kitchen and library; water the garden—and he still found time to wash the dogs with mange. He would accomplish so much in one day out of the unbearable compassion he felt for suffering sentient beings.

From the first time that Lama had x-rays in Kathmandu in the early 1970s, the doctors kept on telling him that he would not live long. The first doctor told Lama that his heart condition was so serious that he had only one year to live. Many other doctors later gave a similar diagnosis. However, even with this life-threatening physical condition, Lama lived for many years, during which he traveled extensively and engaged in many activities. Lama dedicated his life to others.

An ordinary person with such dangerously poor health could not have lived so long nor achieved so much. Because of the unbearable compassion he felt for his students, Lama tried to live as long as possible to guide his students and help them make their lives meaningful. While he was alive, he dedicated all his time and energy to others, day and night. Lama was able to live even when physically the situation seemed to be hopeless because of the power of his great bodhicitta, his strong will, and his tantric realizations.

Another of Lama's particular powers was the great scope of his vision; he had the ability to make huge plans to benefit the teachings and sentient beings. Many people could not comprehend the scale of these works and felt that the projects were too difficult to accomplish. When Lama's plans were actualized, however, they proved to be highly beneficial for those who had carried them out as well as for many other sentient beings. Such great works showed the qualities of Lama's holy mind: his great compassion, great will, capability, and understanding. If Lama had not had such a brave attitude to work for others, besides the planning and accomplishing of such projects, even the thought of them would not have arisen.

For me, one of Lama's most amazing qualities was that while he was so busy guiding all the FPMT Centers and individual students, his own practice and realizations did not degenerate. Month by month, year by year, Lama's practice actually developed. This incredible capability is one of the main causes of my faith in Lama. When

Lama visited each Center, he would see all the students and advise them, as well as take care of the Center itself. While working fully for others, doing hundreds of things, Lama would still be able to do his own practice, and there was always development of his realizations.

In some ways, it looks as if Lama was born with realizations of the three principal paths: renunciation, bodhicitta, and right view. Lama showed early signs of renunciation of this life. When he was a young child and had been in Sera Monastery for some time, he went back home to visit his family. Seeing the sufferings and hardships of family life and the big difference between being a monk and living a worldly lay life made him appreciate the incredible benefits of living in ordination. By visiting his family home, Lama developed renunciation and had not the slightest interest in worldly life.

Even though it looks as if Lama was born with bodhicitta, according to what he actually said, it seems he generated bodhicitta while receiving a *Lama Chöpa* commentary from His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, the late Junior Tutor to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Lama, along with the great meditator Gen Jampa Wangdu, Geshe Lama Könchog, and thousands of other monks, including many learned geshe and high lamas, received the *Lama Chöpa* commentary. After hearing this commentary, many geshe left the monastery and went to the nearby mountains to meditate and lead ascetic lives.

When it came to the commentary on the lam-rim prayer in *Lama Chöpa*, Lama said that he didn't find anything new in the section on impermanence and death. Nor did he find anything special in the part on renunciation. But when it came to the section on bodhicitta, equalizing and exchanging self for others, Lama said that he felt very strongly that this was the real teaching of Buddha, the very heart of Dharma.

Lama said that while he and Gen Jampa Wangdu were receiving these teachings, they did not waste their time; every day they meditated immediately after the sessions. In the general view, it looks as if Lama generated the realization of bodhicitta at that time.

When Gen Jampa Wangdu came to see Lama at Tushita Retreat Centre in Dharamsala, they often teased each other. Lama always put down ascetic monks, saying that even though they might physically be living on high mountains, their minds were clinging to worldly

things. Lama would then say, “Oh, the whole world comes to me. I have everything and I enjoy it.”

Gen Jampa Wangdu used to say, “Training the mind in the three principal paths is ancient talk.” This meant that he had completed the realizations a long time ago. Lama would then reply, “Oh, I realized emptiness ages ago, when I was debating on Madhyamaka in the courtyard at Sera Je.” Lama said that he realized emptiness when he was a young monk in Tibet.

In terms of tantric practice, Lama’s main deity was Heruka Chakrasamvara. I didn’t know very much about scriptures when Lama and I lived together at Buxa Duar,¹ but even at that time, when Lama was studying Buddha’s rules of discipline, he was already reading many tantric texts. From the time that we came to Nepal from India in 1968, Lama read only tantric teachings, not so much on the generation stage of Heruka but on the completion stage. From time to time I would look at the texts he was reading. In 1975, on the second teaching tour to America, we stayed for a month in Madison, near Geshe Sopa Rinpoche’s house, to have a holiday. During that time, Lama was reading various tantric texts dealing with the clear light. This indicates that Lama was experienced in these practices and had these attainments.

One of Lama’s special qualities was that he never showed others that he was a great practitioner. Even to those close to him Lama did not show the external appearance of meditating. You never saw Lama sitting cross-legged in meditation posture for very long. He was either very active or relaxing. Lama, however, practiced very skillfully. Like Shantideva, he was a great hidden yogi. When Shantideva was at Nalanda, the other monks in the monastery thought that he spent his whole time doing only three things: eating, sleeping, and defecating. They did not think that Shantideva did any Dharma practice.

Like Shantideva, Lama kept his actual meditation hidden. Whether he was in the West or in the East, after lunch each day Lama would usually go to rest for one or two hours, but actually all those “naps” were meditation sessions. In the beginning I didn’t realize what Lama was doing and thought his rest was just like ordinary sleep; then gradually I realized that it was actually meditation. The

reality is that when Lama appeared to be sleeping at night and after lunch, he was practicing Dharma in a very skillful way.

I remember one day at Kopan when Yangtse Rinpoche's family came to visit us after lunch. Yangtse Rinpoche is the incarnation of a famous lama, Geshe Ngawang Gendun, who was one of Lama's teachers. Yangtse Rinpoche's father, Jampa Thinley, used to be in Lama's class in Tibet and was a close friend. Because of the visit, Lama didn't have time to rest after lunch, and after the family had left Lama said that he felt a great loss that he hadn't found time to rest. Lama appeared very sorry, like an ordinary person who had lost a big sack of gold. To someone who wasn't aware of Lama's hidden practice it looked as if Lama was clinging to the comfort of sleep. It didn't make sense to feel so sorry about having missed an hour of rest, especially for a Dharma practitioner.

Lama's "rest" had nothing to do with a physical problem or with karma and disturbing thoughts. It was to ensure the continuation of his realizations of the path. Once a practitioner has realizations, since the continuity of the experience needs to be maintained by meditating every day, even a few minutes of meditation becomes extremely precious.

The second last time that Lama was at Kopan, he went one day to rest in the small hut at the top of the hill. When he came back, Lama said, "It's strange. Normally I don't fall asleep, but this time I fell asleep for a few minutes and I dreamt that a powerful protector made offerings to me." This just slipped out, but it shows that when Lama rested after lunch he normally didn't go to sleep.

Also, Lama often said that it was important to eat foods such as curd, honey, garlic, and meat. I understood the reason for this only when I saw in Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo's *Collection of Notes* that meditators with realizations of the completion stage use these foods to develop the elements and drops in their body, so that they have stronger experiences of the clear light and strengthen the conditions for the illusory body. Lama ate these foods not to benefit his body but to develop his realizations. He was concerned not about external physical health but about inner mental health.

When Lama requested His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche for teachings on the Six Yogas of Naropa, Rinpoche advised him to request the

teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who had fresh experience of the practice. Lama received the teachings on the Six Yogas alone in His Holiness's private meditation room, which was a small, bare room. While receiving the teachings, Lama practiced and had many experiences.

Once in Dharamsala, when I had *lung*, or wind disease, Lama told me, "With achievement of bliss and voidness, there is no wind disease. There is no place for tightness if you have bliss in your heart." I think Lama was talking from his own experience. Great meditators, even when dealing with problems, experience no depression themselves because of their tantric realizations. I think Lama's realization of bliss and voidness overwhelmed the many problems he had to deal with in relation to the Dharma Centers and students. He was never depressed and was always very happy.

At the end of 1982, Lama taught the first course on the Six Yogas of Naropa at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa in Italy. From that time, even though he didn't normally travel with *thangkas* and pictures, Lama always kept a particular picture of Lama Tsongkhapa with him. It was a common postcard, but Lama told me that it was very precious, and in my ordinary view he seemed to have much more devotion for Lama Tsongkhapa. When he returned from the course, Lama told me, "While I was at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, I did Heruka self-initiation every morning before I taught the Six Yogas of Naropa. It seemed to benefit the students very much. Because I read many scriptures, the teachings were very effective, and many people had experiences." During that time, Lama was reading the section on the illusory body from the completion stage of Guhyasamaja in Lama Tsongkhapa's *Lamp Thoroughly Illuminating the Five Stages*, which contains the most extensive teaching on the illusory body. Lama then added, "At this time I developed incredibly deep devotion for Lama Tsongkhapa because of his profound teachings."

Jacie Keeley, Lama's secretary, also told me that during the course at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, she noticed one morning that Lama was crying just as he was about to begin his teaching on the Six Yogas. After Lama returned from giving the teaching, Jacie asked him why he had been crying. Lama said, "I saw my guru." It seems that Lama

saw His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, his root guru, who had passed away more than a year before.

Lama wrote a poem in praise of Lama Tsongkhapa's clear explanations of the illusory body. Lama said that he had been unclear about how to achieve the illusory body until he had read Lama Tsongkhapa's writings on the subject. He felt that it was only by the kindness of Lama Tsongkhapa that the practices of the illusory body had been clarified. Lama also wrote a commentary on the Six Yogas of Naropa, but he did not complete it.

In my view, Lama achieved the illusory body when he was at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa. I think so because Lama said that he had found incredible faith in Lama Tsongkhapa and because he then read texts solely on the illusory body, mostly from the Guhyasamaja Tantra. I relate Lama's devotion to Lama Tsongkhapa to the fact that Lama Tsongkhapa gave the clearest and most extensive explanations of how to achieve the illusory body.

When I looked through the texts that Lama took with him to Vajrapani Institute in mid-1983, when he taught the second course on the Six Yogas of Naropa, I found that they were all on Guhyasamaja and the illusory body. This indicates that Lama himself had achieved the illusory body.

Lama seemed to be able to read various texts in different rooms at the same time. When Lama was in retreat at Tushita Retreat Centre, for instance, he would have one text open in the retreat room, another open in the outer room, and yet another text open outside in the greenhouse. This reminded me of the stories His Holiness Zong Rinpoche told about meditators who had achieved the illusory body. While they were sleeping at night, they would use their subtle body to read and memorize many scriptures at the same time. I thought that Lama was able to read so many texts in such a short time because he did it at night with the illusory body. From the way Lama talked so confidently about the many actions that a yogi could do with their subtle body, I could see that Lama himself had this power.

When a new retreat house was being built at Tushita Retreat Centre, one morning a big fire suddenly started. The carpenters and other workers were trying to put the fire out with water, but everyone feared that it was burning out of control. At the time Lama was

having breakfast nearby on the roof of his house with his brother, Geshe Thinley. Lama didn't even stand up to look at the fire. He just sat in his chair, quite relaxed. The rest of us were very worried, but Lama was not worried at all. When I went to Lama, he said, "The fire isn't a big danger. It won't cause any harm."

Even though the flames were very big, Lama remained relaxed, and he mentioned the story of a Tibetan monastery catching fire during Lama Tsongkhapa's time. Lama Tsongkhapa didn't need water or a lot of people to help him. He simply sat where he was and used his subtle body to put out the fire. I felt that the story was related to Lama's own actions to stop the danger from the fire.

Lama Yeshe was a great tantric practitioner, a real ascetic meditator, even though he didn't live alone in a cave. Lama was a great hidden yogi. He was a valid base to be labeled "yogi" not because he could perform tantric rituals but because he had unmistakable realizations of clear light and the illusory body. He reached the stage of tantra *mahamudra*.



Not long before he passed away, when Lama was considering whether to have a heart operation, he said, "It doesn't matter whether the operation is successful or not. I have used myself as a servant to others. I was able to do enough, and now I am completely satisfied. I have no worries."

This is a great teaching for us; it is the essential teaching of Lama Yeshe and of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

As Shantideva says in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:²

May I become a protector for those without one,
A guide for those who have entered the path;
May I become a bridge, a boat and a ship
For those who wish to cross over.

May I be an island for those who seek one
And a lamp for those needing light,

May I be a bed for all who wish to rest
And a servant for all who want a servant.

This was Lama's main teaching and exactly what he practiced all the time. This is Lama Yeshe's essential biography.



This foreword has been compiled from various talks given by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, the heart-disciple of Lama Yeshe. When Lama Yeshe passed away in 1984, Rinpoche became the spiritual director of the FPMT, the international network of now more than 100 centers for the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism and other activities established by Lama Yeshe. Details of Lama Yeshe's life can be found in his published works listed in the back of this book.

Editors' Preface

The *Bliss of Inner Fire* combines the last two major teachings given by Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935–84), both commentaries on Lama Je Tsongkhapa's text *Having the Three Convictions*, itself a commentary on the Six Yogas of Naropa, a completion stage practice of Highest Yoga Tantra. Lama Yeshe's first teaching on the Six Yogas was given to 150 students at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, his center near Pomaia in Italy, during a three-week retreat-style course that began in mid-December 1982. In June 1983, Lama taught on the Six Yogas for two weeks to 100 students in another retreat-style course, this time at Vajrapani Institute, his center in northern California.

Lama Yeshe's main emphasis during both courses was on the practice of inner fire (Tib. *tummo*), the first of the Six Yogas. Lama said that covering all of the subjects in Lama Tsongkhapa's text was not his goal, and in fact he taught in detail only about a third of it. Before both courses, Lama gave a Heruka Chakrasamvara initiation, and he subsequently explained the inner fire techniques in relation to this deity.

During both courses, Lama gave an oral transmission of the text in Tibetan, interspersed with translations, experiential commentary, guided meditations, personal anecdotes, practical advice, jokes, pantomime, and much laughter. More than anything else, Lama wanted everybody to "taste" the practice of inner fire. He expected everybody to work hard and maintain a retreat regime. Between the discourses students meditated intensively on the techniques that had been explained, maintained periods of silence, and practiced the physical exercises associated with the practice. Again and again Lama stressed that he wanted everyone to act, to gain actual experience of inner fire, and not be content with mere intellectual understanding. He spent little time on the historical and philosophical background but was

painstaking in his descriptions of the inner fire meditation techniques and the various preliminary practices.

Following the Introduction we have included a prayer traditionally used to invoke the blessings of the lineage lamas of the Six Yogas of Naropa.

In Part One, “The Six Yogas of Naropa,” Lama inspires us to practice tantra, especially inner fire, the foundation stone of the entire tantric path. After giving brief but inspiring biographies of the mahasiddhas Naropa and Lama Tsongkhapa, Lama emphasizes the need to practice rather than intellectualize.

Part Two, “Preliminary Practices,” deals briefly with the preliminaries to tantric practice: the common Mahayana preliminaries (the meditations of the graduated path to enlightenment) and the uncommon preliminaries (the general practices of receiving tantric initiation and observing vows and the specific tantric preliminaries of Vajrasattva practice and guru yoga).

Part Three, “Going Beyond Appearances,” introduces the generation stage of Highest Yoga Tantra, which involves developing the divine pride and clear appearance of a meditational deity through training to transform the ordinary experiences of death, intermediate state, and rebirth into the pure experiences of a Buddha. In this section, Lama Yeshe also explains the characteristics of body and mind according to tantra, with special emphasis on understanding the absolute nature, or emptiness, of the mind.

Part Four, “Awakening the Vajra Body,” discusses the actual preparatory practices for inner fire: the physical exercises that make the body serviceable; meditations on the channels, chakras, and syllables; and vase breathing meditation.

Part Five, “Discovering Totality,” contains Lama’s experiential teachings on the process of generating the inner fire; the culmination of the practice, the development of simultaneously born great blissful wisdom; and, with a brief discussion of the other five yogas, the completion of the tantric path to enlightenment.

Finally, in Part Six, “Living with Inner Fire,” Lama Yeshe offers practical advice on how to bring the practice of inner fire into daily life.

We have chosen to accurately transliterate all mantras and syllables,

and a Sanskrit pronunciation guide (p. 187) has been included to aid readers. However, the essential advice is to pronounce mantras in the same way as the lama who gives you the oral transmission of the mantra. For other Sanskrit words, we have used a spelling that approximates their pronunciation. Interested readers can consult the table of foreign word transliterations (p. 188) for the actual transliteration of these words.



We offer our heartfelt thanks to Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, His Holiness Sakya Trizin, Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche, Khen Jampa Tegchog, Geshe Lama Könchog, Khijo Rinpoche, Geshe Tashi Tsering, Geshe Norbu Dorje, and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso for their patience and kindness in clarifying various technical aspects of the practices.

We also thank His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the transcript of whose teaching on Lama Tsongkhapa's *Having the Three Convictions* in Dharamsala in 1990 was invaluable, as were Daniel Cozort's *Highest Yoga Tantra* and Glenn Mullin's *Tsongkhapa's Six Yogas of Naropa*; Glenn Mullin for his innumerable editorial suggestions; Ven. Sarah Thresher and Alfred Leyens for transcribing material contained in the foreword; Ven. Helmut Holm for transcribing the Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa teachings; Paula Chichester and Roger Munro for transcribing the Vajrapani Institute teachings; Karon Kehoe for her earlier editing of these teachings; David Molk, Geshe Lobsang Donyo, and Samten Chhoshpel for their translation of the lineage lamas prayers and Khensur Lobsang Tharchin for his kind assistance in locating the text; Ven. George Churinoff, Ven. Thubten Samphel, Ven. Ngawang Jigdol, Ven. Connie Miller, Tubten Pende, Sonam Rigzin, Jon Landaw, Merry Colony, Robert Beer, Martin Brauen, and Jampa Gendun for their suggestions and help; Timothy McNeill and David Kittelstrom of Wisdom Publications; and Peter and Nicole Kedge, whose material support and encouragement helped us to realize the project.

May everyone who reads *The Bliss of Inner Fire* be inspired to seek a tantric master, enter the supreme tantric path, and quickly achieve

enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. May Lama Tenzin Osel Rinpoche, the reincarnation of Lama Yeshe, preserve the peerless teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa and complete the commentary on the Six Yogas of Naropa that Lama Yeshe began. As Lama said at the very end of the Vajrapani Institute course, nine months before he passed away, “If I am alive and you are alive, perhaps we will see each other again. The next time we will discuss in detail the illusory body, the dream experience, the clear light experience, transference of consciousness, and consciousness going into another body. These subjects are more profound and sophisticated. You should work now on what we have already covered, and we will pray that at some time we will do the rest of the Six Yogas of Naropa. If we cannot do them next year, we can do them next life.”

Introduction

by Jonathan Landaw

In 1987 Wisdom Publications brought out a volume by Lama Thubten Yeshe entitled *Introduction to Tantra*. In that work, a compilation of excerpts from numerous teachings given by Lama Yeshe between 1975 and 1983, the reader was offered a glimpse into the profound, and often misunderstood, world of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. With clear and inspiring discussions of such topics as the basic purity of the mind, the means for recognizing and overcoming our limiting thought patterns, the self-transformational techniques of tantric deity-yoga meditation and so forth, Lama Yeshe presented the tantric vision of totality in a form accessible to as wide an audience as possible. In that introductory work it was his intention to convey the flavor of these most advanced Buddhist teachings in such a way that spiritual seekers, regardless of their cultural background or religious affiliation, might be motivated to discover their own basic purity, fulfill their highest potential, and be of maximum benefit to others.

Included in *Introduction to Tantra* were a number of passages selected from the last two major teachings given by Lama Yeshe before his passing. These teachings had been delivered at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa in Pomaia, Italy, in 1982 and at Vajrapani Institute in Boulder Creek, California, in 1983. Their focus was the inner fire practices of Highest Yoga Tantra—the fourth and most advanced level of tantra—as set forth in the famed Six Yogas of Naropa and elucidated in Je Tsongkhapa’s commentary on the Six Yogas entitled *Having the Three Convictions*. The current work, *The Bliss of Inner Fire*, is an amalgamation of these two final teachings.

☞ SOURCE OF THE TEACHINGS

Although the practices of inner fire explained in this work can be traced back to the Six Yogas of the famed eleventh-century Buddhist

scholar and tantric adept, Pandit Naropa, after which they are named, we should not think that they were his creation. Instead, as is the case with all authentic teachings of Buddhist tantra, they ultimately derive from Shakyamuni Buddha himself, the so-called historical Buddha who lived 2,500 years ago (563–483 B.C.E.). However, as His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has stated in *The World of Tibetan Buddhism*,

We need not presume that all of the teachings of tantra were propounded by the Buddha during his historical lifetime. Rather, I think that the teachings of tantra could have also emerged through the extraordinary insights of highly realized individuals who were able to explore to the fullest extent the physical elements and the potential within the human body and mind. As a result of such investigation, a practitioner can attain very high realizations and visions, thus enabling him or her to receive tantric teachings at a mystical level. Therefore, when we reflect on tantric teachings, we should not limit our perspective by rigid notions of time and space. (p. 93)

Both Naropa—the Indian mahasiddha, or greatly accomplished one—and the Tibetan master Je Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) are numbered among the “highly realized individuals” referred to by the Dalai Lama and were, therefore, capable of receiving instructions on such profound practices as inner fire directly from the enlightened source.

The principal form that Shakyamuni Buddha assumes when presenting the advanced teachings of tantra is that of Vajradhara—the Holder of the Diamond Scepter—who is sometimes called the Buddha of the Tantras. In general, the blessings, instructions, and realizations of these tantric teachings come down to the present via two types of lineage: the distant and the close. The former is comprised of the successive guru-disciple relationships that link one generation with the next, the realized disciple of a particular master becoming mentor to disciples of his or her own. In terms of the tantric

teachings we are concerned with here, this generation-to-generation lineage, beginning with Buddha Vajradhara, includes such famous Indian mahasiddhas as Saraha, Nagarjuna, Ghantapa, and Tilopa.

As for the so-called close lineages, these come about in the more immediate manner indicated previously. In Naropa's case, he not only received tantric initiation, or empowerment, from his human guru, Tilopa, but was able to establish communication with Buddha Vajradhara directly; the Buddha of the Tantras manifested to him in the form of such tantric meditational deities as Hevajra, Heruka Chakrasamvara, and Vajrayogini. As for Je Tsongkhapa, he was not only heir to the lineage of Indian, Nepalese, and Tibetan masters that spanned the four hundred years separating him from Naropa, but he also received inspiration from Vajradhara through his own patron deity, Manjushri, the embodiment of the wisdom of all enlightened beings. Thus the teachings we know as the Six Yogas of Naropa, including the inner fire practices that are the main subject matter of this present work, should not be considered the later fabrications of Indian gurus or Tibetan lamas but are ultimately rooted in the enlightened realizations of Shakyamuni Buddha himself, passed down in unbroken lineages of realized practitioners to the present day.

☞ THE AUTHOR AND HIS STYLE OF TEACHING

Lama Thubten Yeshe began his Buddhist training at Sera Monastery, one of the three great institutions of learning and practice founded by Je Tsongkhapa and his disciples in the vicinity of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. After the Chinese takeover of Tibet in the 1950s, he completed his formal training at the Buxa Duar refugee camp in north-eastern India. Unlike most of his fellow monks at Sera, who confined their studies to the Gelug tradition founded by Je Tsongkhapa, Lama Yeshe was greatly interested in teachings by masters of all traditions. His open-minded, nonsectarian approach is attested to by the fact that while at Buxa Duar his own students included lamas from these various traditions.

The Buddhist education Lama Yeshe received had two major divisions. The first of these is called *sutra* and is named after those

teachings, or discourses—such as the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, or *Discourses on the Perfection of Wisdom*—in which Shakyamuni Buddha set forth the various aspects of the general path leading to full spiritual awakening. The course of study at the Tibetan monasteries included not only these teachings by Buddha himself but the commentaries on them by such Indian masters as Chandrakīrti (*Guide to the Middle Way*), Maitreya/Asaṅga (*Ornament of Clear Realizations*), Śāntideva (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*), Atiṣa (*Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment*) and many others. Through study, debate, and meditation upon these texts and the later commentaries on them by a succession of Tibetan masters, and through intimate exposure to the authentic oral traditions enlivening these texts, students at Sera and the other monasteries had the opportunity of gaining insight into and realization of the vast and profound meaning of Buddha's teachings.

With the foundation in moral discipline, logical analysis, compassionate motivation, insightful wisdom, and so forth provided by these sūtra studies, well-qualified practitioners were able to delve into the second of the two major divisions of their education: the profound study of tantra. The Sanskrit term “tantra” is applied to those advanced teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni/Vajradhara by means of which the full enlightenment of Buddhahood, the ultimate goal of all Buddhist paths, can be attained in the shortest time possible. Each tantra focuses upon a meditational deity embodying a particular aspect of enlightened consciousness; in Lama Yeṣhe's case, he received empowerment and instructions in such tantras as those of the meditational deities Heruka Chakrasaṃvara, Vajrayoginī, Vajrabhairava, and Guhyasamāja and studied the famous Six Yogas of Nāropa following *Having the Three Convictions*, a commentary based on the personal experiences of Je Tsongkhapa, as cited above. He received the lineage blessings of these practices from some of the greatest tantric masters of the day, including Kyabje Ling Dorjechang (1903–83) and Kyabje Trijang Dorjechang (1901–81), the Senior and Junior Tutors, respectively, of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (b. 1935).

Lama Yeṣhe did not merely study these profound tantric teachings, he put them into practice in extensive meditational retreats and in his

daily life. As became clear to many toward the end of his life, his main practice was that of Heruka Chakrasamvara, and he devoted much time and energy to gaining deeper and deeper realizations of this Highest Yoga Tantra. According to his heart-son and disciple, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, Lama Yeshe wrote privately about his own meditational experiences of both Heruka Chakrasamvara and the Six Yogas of Naropa and would often speak to Lama Zopa about clear light and bliss, the essence of these advanced tantric practices.

It is not surprising, then, that the last two major teachings Lama Yeshe gave were on the inner fire practices of the Six Yogas, through which the blissful experience of the clear light is attained, and that he opened each of these teachings with an empowerment into the tantra of Heruka Chakrasamvara. Nor is it surprising that the final practice he himself engaged in, up until his heart stopped beating, was that of Heruka Chakrasamvara. What is particularly inspiring, however, is that through his mastery of the blissful clear light consciousness dawning at the time of death, Lama Yeshe was able to pass away and be reborn in a state of full conscious control, even to the point of choosing as his future parents two students of his who had helped establish a meditation center in Spain called Osel Ling, the Place of Clear Light. Their son, Tenzin Osel Rinpoche, born in 1985, was recognized as the reincarnation of Lama Yeshe by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and is currently enrolled at Sera Monastery in South India, where a number of the great Tibetan schools of learning have been relocated.

Although the practices of inner fire belong to the most advanced branch of the Buddhist teachings, Lama Yeshe often presented them, in simplified form, even to his newest students. He did this to give them a taste of the inexhaustible treasure of blissful energy existing within each and every one of us right at the present moment. Although such blissful energy, by itself, cannot liberate us from the vicious circle of dissatisfaction and suffering, our ability to experience it directly—to “taste the chocolate,” as he would often say—can have a significant and beneficial effect upon us. Such an experience convinces us, as no merely philosophical investigation can, of the profound changes we can bring about simply by gaining control over our

mind in meditative concentration. The inspiration provided by such direct experience can empower our entire spiritual practice.

The courses in Italy and California, from which the material in this book has been taken, were run as meditational retreats, and Lama Yeshe's lectures were designed to guide and encourage the participants in their efforts to gain an actual experience, rather than a mere intellectual understanding, of what meditation has to offer. The emphasis was on clarifying the instructions of the Six Yogas, without an in-depth examination of their historical significance or philosophical basis. Because most of the course participants were already familiar with the necessary preparatory material through previous exposure to Buddhist teachings, the way was clear to focus single-pointedly on the step-by-step practices of inner fire itself. So, in a sense, *The Bliss of Inner Fire* is like a second *Introduction to Tantra*, opening up the world of Highest Yoga Tantra's advanced practices the way the earlier work opened up the world of tantra in general.

The present work, in addition to dealing with more advanced subject matter, differs from its predecessor in that it concentrates on specific technical aspects of tantric practice. As the reader will discover, *The Bliss of Inner Fire* offers detailed instructions on the various phases of inner fire meditation. This emphasis on meditational instruction makes the present work a valuable manual for those interested in engaging in serious and prolonged practice themselves. However, because many readers will lack the background necessary for a full appreciation of these teachings, it may be helpful to introduce Lama Yeshe's instructions with a few remarks about the tantric path in general and the place within this path of the yoga of inner fire.

☞ AN OVERVIEW OF THE PATH

To begin with, the ultimate purpose of all Buddhist teachings is to lead others to enlightenment, or Buddhahood. This fully purified and expansive state of consciousness is characterized by limitless compassion, wisdom, and skillful means; the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle, teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha stress that only by attaining such complete awakening of mind and heart can we fulfill our

own innate spiritual potential and, more important, be of maximum benefit to others.

As already stated, the Mahayana presents two interrelated approaches to this full and complete enlightenment: the more general path of sutra and the esoteric path of tantra. The sutra vehicle (Skt. *Sutrayana*) sets forth methods whereby the obscurations veiling one's innate purity of mind are gradually removed, like peeling away the layers of an onion. At the same time, the mind's positive qualities of love, compassion, wisdom, and so forth are gradually enhanced so that eventually one attains a state beyond the limitations of ordinary, egocentric consciousness.

The trainings in nonattachment, compassionate altruism, and penetrative insight so vital to Sutrayana practice form the foundation of the tantric vehicle as well. But Tantrayana—also known as Mantrayana and Vajrayana—is distinguished from Sutrayana by being a so-called resultant vehicle. That is to say, the qualified practitioner of tantra is empowered to take the future result of the path, the experience of enlightenment itself, as the very basis of his or her practice. In place of the ordinary, limited self-image, the tantric trainee cultivates the powerful vision of having already attained full enlightenment in the form of a particular meditational deity (Tib. *jidam*). All the elements of ordinary experience—one's surroundings, sensory enjoyments, and activities—are likewise viewed as having undergone a similar enlightened transformation. Everything is seen as pure and blissful, just as a Buddha would experience it. By training in this way it is possible to achieve the actual result of full enlightenment much more swiftly than by relying on the Sutrayana approach alone.

The theme of enlightened transformation pervades the vast scope of tantric teachings and practices. Energies and states of mind that are considered negative and antithetical to spiritual growth according to other religious paths are transformed by the alchemy of tantra into forces aiding one's inner development. Chief among these is the energy of desire. According to the fundamental teachings of Sutrayana, desirous attachment only serves to perpetuate the sufferings of samsara: the vicious circle of uncontrolled life and death, born from ignorance and fraught with dissatisfaction, within which

unenlightened beings trap themselves. Therefore, if one truly wishes to be free from this samsaric cycle of misery, it is necessary to eliminate the poison of desirous attachment from one's heart and mind completely. While the Tantrayana agrees that ultimately all such ignorantly generated desires must be overcome if freedom and enlightenment are to be achieved, it recognizes the tremendous energy underlying this desire as an indispensable resource that can, with skill and training, be utilized so that it empowers rather than interferes with one's spiritual development.

Of course, any path utilizing the powerful and potentially destructive energies of desire and the other delusions is dangerous indeed. If followed improperly or with a selfish motivation, tantra can lead the misguided practitioner into realms of mental and physical suffering of unimaginable enormity. That is why even though tantric techniques may be outlined in a book such as this, they can only be followed safely and productively under the watchful eye of a fully qualified tantric master, and only by those who cultivate a particularly powerful altruistic motivation, receive the requisite empowerments, keep purely their tantric pledges, and undergo the proper preliminary trainings. It is said that for those who do rely on an accomplished tantric master and observe the precepts of tantric practice purely, it is possible to reach the goal of full enlightenment within the space of one short human lifetime, even within a few years.

Not all the tantric systems have equal power in propelling their trainees along the path to enlightenment. Instead, tantra is divided into four progressive classes—(1) Action, (2) Performance, (3) Yoga, and (4) Highest Yoga—and it is only through the pure practice of a system belonging to the supreme class of Highest Yoga Tantra that full enlightenment can be attained in the swiftest possible manner. What chiefly differentiates these four classes from one another is the varying abilities of their respective trainees to utilize desire on the spiritual path. While followers of the lower classes of tantra can control and utilize only the less passionate levels of attachment—traditionally likened to the desire aroused when (1) looking at, (2) laughing with, and (3) embracing an attractive partner—the qualified practitioner of Highest Yoga Tantra is one who can channel into the

path of spiritual evolution energies as intense as those associated with (4) sexual union itself.

Harnessing desire in Highest Yoga Tantra is accomplished in two successive levels of practice: the evolutionary stage and the completion stage. The former, also known as the generation stage, serves as a preparation and rehearsal for the latter and involves, among other things, cultivating what are known as the clear appearance and divine pride of one's chosen meditational deity. For example, if one is following the tantra of the wrathful male deity Heruka Chakrasamvara, one practices overcoming the ordinary view of oneself as a limited, samsaric being and cultivates in its place the enlightened self-image of actually being this powerful deity. This not only involves gaining familiarity with the various qualities of Chakrasamvara's body, speech, and mind so that one can experience oneself as possessing these attributes, but also demands a degree of mastery in meditation upon ultimate truth: *shunyata*, or emptiness.

The subject of emptiness is too vast to go into in any great deal here. Suffice it to say for now that it involves ridding the mind of all falsely conceived, fantasized modes of existence arising from ignorance of the way in which things actually do exist. It is fundamental to all Buddhist systems of practice, whether sutra or tantra, to recognize that the limited, concrete view we have of ourselves and our surroundings is in the nature of ignorance and therefore the source of all suffering; all such misconceptions must be overcome if we are ever to achieve lasting liberation from samsaric dissatisfaction. As Lama Yeshe declared in *Introduction to Tantra*, "As long as we are burdened by these misconceptions, we remain trapped in the world of our own projections, condemned to wander forever in the circle of dissatisfaction we have created for ourselves. But if we can uproot these wrong views and banish them completely, we will experience the freedom, space and effortless happiness we presently deny ourselves" (p. 69).

As stated, then, the practice of tantra involves a combination of emptiness-yoga—through which all ordinary conceptions of oneself are dissolved—and deity-yoga—in which one cultivates the enlightened identity of a particular meditational deity. As the Dalai Lama points out in *The World of Tibetan Buddhism*, "A unique

characteristic of...Highest Yoga Tantra is that it employs in its profound path various meditative techniques that have corresponding similitudes not only to the resultant state of Buddhahood, that is, to the three kayas, but especially to the bases of purification on the ordinary level of human existence—for example, death, intermediate state, and rebirth” (p. 125).

These correspondences are outlined in the accompanying table and the significance of the three Buddha bodies (*kaya*) can be explained briefly as follows. The attainment of full enlightenment, or Buddhahood, is said to accomplish two purposes: those of oneself and those of others. With enlightenment comes the elimination of all obscurations of the mind, which are created by ignorance and produce suffering, as well as the enhancement of limitless beneficial qualities such as blissful awareness and universal compassion; this perfection of consciousness completely fulfills the practitioner’s own purpose for following the spiritual path. But such an extremely subtle, unobstructed, and fully evolved consciousness—the truth body, or *dharmakaya*, of a Buddha—can fulfill the needs of others only if it manifests in forms to which those not yet fully enlightened can relate. Therefore, with the compassionate motive to benefit others, there first emerges from the unobstructed sphere of *dharmakaya* the subtle enjoyment body (*sambhogakaya*), which only higher bodhisattvas can perceive, and then the grosser emanation body (*nirmanakaya*), which even ordinary beings can contact. It is through the guidance and inspiration provided by these two form bodies (*rupakaya*) that the purposes of others are accomplished.

THE THREE TIMES	MEDITATIVE VISION	BUDDHA BODY
Death/sleep	Clear light	Wisdom body
Intermediate state/ dream	Seed-syllable or shaft of light	Enjoyment body
Rebirth/reawakening	Meditational deity	Emanation body

During the evolutionary stage of Highest Yoga Tantra, the practitioner simulates the movement from death, through the intermediate state (Tib. *bardo*), to rebirth—which also corresponds to the movement from sleep, through dreams, to reawakening—in such a way that these three times are taken into the path and regarded as the three bodies of a Buddha. Although one contemplates deeply upon the increasingly subtle states of consciousness experienced during death and upon the transformations associated with the intermediate state and rebirth, these changes do not actually occur at this time. Instead, these evolutionary stage practices serve as a rehearsal for the actual transformations that take place only during the advanced levels of the completion stage. For it is during the completion stage that one gains control over the elements of the vajra body—the subtle channels, winds, and drops existing within the envelope of the gross physical body—and with this control comes the ability not merely to simulate the death experience but to bring about the actual transformations of consciousness occurring during that experience.

All completion stage practices are directly or indirectly associated with the meditative technique known as inner fire, the main subject matter of this present volume. Through mastery of inner fire, one can gain full conscious control over the vajra body and the ability to bring the mind to its most subtle and penetrating state: the blissful clear light experience. This extraordinarily powerful state of mind is unequaled in its ability to gain direct, penetrative insight into ultimate truth and thereby eliminate all afflictive states of mind.

Through the profound completion stage practices, the activities of one's body, speech, and mind become the natural resources of unprecedented spiritual growth as all forms of desirous energy are channeled into the path. Eventually one develops the ability to negotiate the hazards of death and beyond with complete awareness and control. And finally, at the culmination of the path, one attains the blissful state of unlimited awareness known as full enlightenment, spontaneously and effortlessly fulfilling one's compassionate intention to work for the welfare of all other beings. In this way the promise of one's inner potential for limitless compassion, wisdom, and skill is realized and one's life becomes truly meaningful.



This extremely brief summary of some of the major points of tantric practice should provide a context within which the following explanations of the inner fire teachings of the Six Yogas of Naropa can be more fully appreciated. For a more detailed discussion of these points, the reader is referred to the list of selected additional reading at the end of this text (p. 221). And those whose interest has been sufficiently whetted can do nothing better than search out reliable tantric masters for themselves and receive from them personal instruction in the entire range of sutra and tantra practices.

Prayer

to the Lineage Lamas of the Six Yogas of Naropa

Glorious and precious root lama,
Please sit on the lotus of my heart
And caring for me with your great kindness,
Bestow attainments of body, speech, and mind.

Heruka, pervasive lord of the mandala of great bliss,
Tilopa, who fully realized bliss and emptiness,
And Naropa, embodiment of Heruka himself,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Marpa, crown jewel of vajra holders,
Milarepa, who attained the vajra state,
And Gampopa, supreme within the vajra family,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Pagmo Drupa, great lord of living beings,
Jigten Sumgön, guide of living beings,
Rechungpa, who accomplishes the welfare of living beings,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Jampa Pel, lord of translators,
Sönam Wangpo, treasury of the Dharma's meaning,
Sönam Senge, expounder of language and logic,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Yang Tsewa, who beheld the meaning of the scriptures,
Butön Rinchen Drup, crown jewel of sages,
Jampa Pel, great sage and siddha,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Dragpa Wangchug, endowed with the eye of Dharma,
Omniscient Losang Dragpa, King of Dharma,
Great Khedrub Je, the supreme Dharma son,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Venerable Baso Chögyen, who has perfect intelligence,
Chökyi Dorje, who found total liberation,
Losang Döndrup, the great guide of all,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Sangye Yeshe, who destroys misconceptions,
All seeing Losang Chökyi Gyeltsen,
Damchö Gyeltsen, who has abandoned all delusion,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Wangchug Menkangpa, the secret yogi,
Nada, who manifests the great secret path,
Ngawang Jampa, holder of the treasury of secrets,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Yeshe Gyeltsen, the holy tutor,
Ngawang Tenpa, master of Buddha's entire teachings,
Yeshe Tenzin, guide to all of tantra,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Manjushila, manifestation of all Buddhas,
Maitri, who makes Buddha's profound teachings flourish,
Kelsang Tenzin, the great son of Buddha,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Having well realized that tantra's meaning is inseparable method
and wisdom,
And trained the mind with method, the profound vital points of
the path,
Skillful guide of living beings, Chökyi Dorje,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

By single-pointedly practicing in no one place,
 You became a supreme lord of siddhas who fully experiences the
 definitive meaning.
 Revealer of the path to the definitive secret, Padma Dorje,
 I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

You embody the gross and subtle channels, the dakas and dakinis,
 All root and lineage lamas, as well as the Three Jewels,
 O root lama Dechen Nyingpo,
 I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Chakrasamvara, all pervasive lord of great bliss,
 Supreme Vajravarahi, bestower of the four blisses,
 Dakas and dakinis who always enjoy great bliss,
 I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Life is impermanent, like lightning in the sky,
 And all good things gained in samsara must be left behind.
 Seeing this, bless me that my mind turns toward Dharma,
 And, exasperated, I develop the determination to be free.

My poor old mothers are exhausted by mental and physical pain
 Experienced for my sake over countless lifetimes.
 Bless me to develop the compassionate wish to free them and
 bodhicitta,
 And to transcend through the ways of a bodhisattva.

Bless me to develop constant and effortless admiration
 And devotion for the kind lama, root of all attainments,
 And to protect whatever vows and commitments
 I have received as I dearly protect my life.

With whatever appears manifesting as the mandala of the deity,
 Bless my mind to be ripened
 Through actualizing the experience of great bliss
 And realizing the nature of all things, free from elaboration.

By drawing the fresh winds through outer and inner methods
Into the central channel and igniting the wild one's fire,
Bless me to realize the simultaneously born bliss
That arises from contact with the melting kundalini.

Bless me so that the sleep in which my gross mind and breath
have ceased
Becomes the nature of the clear light of bliss and emptiness,
And that everything wished for arises without obstruction,
Such as illusory body emanation in bardo-like dreams.

Having attained the glorious bliss of simultaneously born clear light,
With the clear drop arising as the venerable deity and consort,
Having manifest the miraculous web,
Bless me to attain unification in this life.

If death occurs through force of karma,
Bless me to generate confidence to recognize the mother and child
clear lights,
And, arising in the bardo as the sambhogakaya,
Through miraculous emanations may I guide living beings.

Bless me to accomplish the concentration of transference of
consciousness,
From the path of Brahma, into space, to the pure land of the dakinis,
And to accomplish the yoga of entering
The abode of another's aggregates, just as I choose.

Cared for with compassion by Glorious Heruka and consort
As well as the dakinis of the three places,
May all outer and inner obstacles be pacified, conducive conditions
established,
And may I swiftly complete the two stages of the excellent path.

May all be auspicious!

☸ THE ABBREVIATED LINEAGE PRAYER

Great Vajradhara, Tilopa, Naropa,
Marpa, Milarepa, and Dharma Master Gampopa,
Pagmo Drupa, the Victor Drikungpa.
Supplication to the direct and lineage lamas.

You embody the gross and subtle channels, the dakas and dakinis,
All root and lineage lamas, as well as the Three Jewels,
O root lama Dechen Nyingpo,
I implore you to bestow upon me the wisdom of bliss and
emptiness.

In this very life, bless me to actualize
All the realizations of the glorious Six Yogas of Naropa,
These supreme instructions, combining hundreds of thousands
Of streams of the profound essential nectar of the father and
mother tantras.

PART ONE

The Six Yogas of Naropa



1. Tantra and Inner Fire

Lord Buddha taught the path to enlightenment at many different levels, in accordance with the variety of needs and capabilities of sentient beings. To give his most advanced teachings, known as Tantrayana or Vajrayana, he manifested in his esoteric aspect of Vajradhara. Tantrayana is the quickest vehicle to full enlightenment.

According to Lord Buddha's general teachings, known as Sutrayana, desire is the cause of human beings' problems, so it must be avoided. According to Tantrayana, however, this very desire can be used in the path to enlightenment. On the basis of strong renunciation, the great compassion of bodhicitta, and the right view of emptiness, tantric practitioners use the energy of their own pleasure as a resource and, in the deep concentration of *samadhi* meditation, unify it with the wisdom that realizes emptiness. Eventually this gives rise to simultaneously born great blissful wisdom, which in turn leads to enlightenment.

In tantra we are dealing with pleasure, not with pain. The person who is qualified to practice tantra is able to cope with pleasure, to experience pleasure without losing control, to utilize it. This is the essential characteristic of the tantric personality. Tantra does not work for people who are miserable, because they have no resource of pleasure to utilize.

In tantric practice, we work with the energy of our own human body. This resource is composed of six factors: the four elements (earth, water, fire, and air), the channels of our subtle nervous system, and the blissful *kundalini* drops that exist within the channels.¹ The human body is the gold mine of tantra; it is our most precious possession.

What we need is a skillful method to harness this powerful energy so that we can achieve not only more and more satisfaction in our everyday lives, but eventually the total satisfaction of full enlightenment. What we need is the practice of inner fire.

Inner fire is the first subject in the set of tantric practices known as the Six Yogas of Naropa. The other five are the yogas of the illusory body; clear light; transference of consciousness; transference into another body; and the intermediate state, or bardo. During this teaching, my main emphasis will be on the yoga of inner fire.

In Tibetan we say that inner fire is *lam kyi mang-do*, “the foundation stone of the path.” It is fundamental to the realizations of the illusory body and clear light—to the realizations, in fact, of all the advanced completion stage practices of tantra. I will discuss this in more detail later; but, in short, in order to achieve enlightenment we use the practice of inner fire to cause all the airs, or vital energies, within our body to enter, stabilize, and absorb in the central channel of our subtle nervous system. This leads to the experience of simultaneously born great bliss. This bliss—which is not mere sentimental pleasure but a profound experience beyond our ordinary imagination—is then unified with the wisdom that understands emptiness in a process that eventually leads to the union of the illusory body and the absolute clear-light wisdom, and finally to full enlightenment.

Inner fire is *tummo* in Tibetan, and the literal meaning of *tummo* is “brave female.” *Tum* means courage or bravery; *mo*, used in Tibetan grammar as a female modifier, represents the wisdom of non-duality. *Tummo* is courageous because it destroys all delusions and superstitions and female because it enables our subtlest level of consciousness to realize simultaneously born great blissful wisdom. This is the essential purpose of tantric practice, and inner fire can help us to achieve it.

Inner fire meditation really suits the Western mind because Westerners like to work with material, with energy. You like to play with it, fix it, change it, manipulate it. With inner fire you are doing exactly that; but the difference is that you are playing with your inner energy, your own pleasure resource.

Also, Westerners like instant satisfaction. It’s what you expect. Well,

inner fire gives you this. It is the direct path to enlightenment that you have heard about. It is a very simple process: very practical, very scientific, and very logical. You don't have to believe that inner fire brings bliss for it to work; you just do the practice and get the results.

The lam-rim, the step-by-step presentation of the path to enlightenment, brings satisfaction in a more religious way; inner fire is more scientific because actualizing it does not depend upon religious belief. If you act, the experience automatically comes. No customs or rituals are involved. With inner fire, you are dealing directly with your own inner reality; you are simply increasing the power of the kundalini and heat energy that you already possess. It is amazingly powerful, like a volcano erupting from within you.

The philosophy and methods of lam-rim are presented intellectually, and to some extent you can be intellectually convinced. But this conviction is like a cloud in the sky. When it is there, your spiritual practice is strong; but when the cloud disappears, you get discouraged, and your practice becomes weak. After being oriented towards lam-rim, when you hear that inner fire meditation is the fundamental path leading to the realization of enlightenment, you are suddenly in a new world.

Inner fire is the real chocolate! Whereas you may find it difficult to get results with other meditations, inner fire is a sensitive, quick way to convince yourself that you are progressing. It will surprise you. When you practice it you will think, "What else do I need? This is the only way." Other practices will seem second-rate. Sutrayana explains detailed meditation techniques for developing deep samadhi, but it has nothing to compare to inner fire meditation, which brings an explosion of nonduality wisdom, an explosion of bliss. Concentrating on a sensation or even on the Buddha is fine, but it can't lead you to the greatest realization of simultaneously born great blissful wisdom.

Inner fire is like the main door leading into a complex of hundreds of treasure houses. All the facilities for magnetizing realizations are there. Since it penetrates the very center of the universe of the body, it is incredibly sensitive in producing realizations. In fact, the superstitious, conceptualizing mind cannot count the realizations brought by inner fire. It is the secret key that opens you to *all* realizations.

Even if you could stay in samadhi meditation twenty-four hours a day for twenty days, Milarepa would say to you, “That means nothing! It does not compare to my inner fire meditation.” This is how he responded to Gampopa at their first meeting, after Gampopa had described his meditation experiences. There must have been a reason for Milarepa to say this. He was not just making propaganda, exaggerating the power of inner fire. He had no partiality and had given up all worldly competition. Milarepa was simply saying that even remaining for many days in a deep, undisturbed samadhi meditation is nothing when compared to inner fire meditation. Inner fire is incomparable.

Personally, I like inner fire meditation. I don’t claim to have any realizations, but I have tried it and I am convinced. Inner fire meditation will absolutely convince you too. It will change your entire notion of reality. You will come to trust the tantric path through this meditation.

We really need tantra these days because there is a tremendous explosion of delusion and distraction. Good things are happening in our lives, but many bad things are happening too, and we need the atomic energy of inner fire to blast us out of our confusion. In fact, without tantric practice, enlightenment is not possible.

In the beginning your inner fire meditation might not be successful. You might even have a negative reaction, such as an explosion of heat that drenches your body with sweat. However, I believe that even an imperfect result like this is still significant because it shows you the power of your mind.

It is said that anybody can do inner fire meditation. If you have never done it before, it might seem difficult, but it is actually simple. “How can I meditate like this?” you might think. “I am not a great meditator. In any case, I have created so much negative karma—how can I do advanced practices like these?” You should not think this way! You never know what you can do; you cannot always see your own potential. Perhaps you were a great meditator in a previous life. Right now your mind might be completely distracted, but one day your potential will suddenly ripen, and you will be able to meditate.

Look at Milarepa. I doubt that you have created more negative karma than he did; he killed many people when he was young. But

because of his inner strength, he was also able to develop perfect renunciation, perfect bodhicitta, perfect right view, perfect Six Yogas of Naropa. He said good-bye to samsara.

Milarepa is a good example for us. Look around in the world. Sometimes those who are successful at samsara, who create strong negativity, can also be successful at liberation. On the other hand, those who don't have success at samsara can't be successful at liberation either.

My point is that you never know what human beings can do. Be brave! Try as much as possible to do the inner fire meditation. Even if you are not completely successful, at least you will gain some experience, and that is good enough.



Let us dedicate our energy to all universal living beings, praying that they actualize the essence of tantra and discover the union of their own unsurpassed bliss and nonduality wisdom.

Dedication is important; it is not just a Tibetan ritual. Having created an atmosphere of positive energy within our minds, we make the determination to share it with others.

Think, "Now, and for the rest of my life, I will enjoy myself as much as possible and try to create a good situation around me by giving to others the best part of my divine qualities and blissful energy. May this joyful present lead to unsurpassed joyful realizations in the future."