

Abbreviated Biography of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

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By Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Taye
Translated by Tib Shelf



INTRODUCTION

The *Abbreviated Biography of the Omniscient Lama and Great Vajra Holder Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo* honors the nineteenth-century master with a spiritual and historical list of his deeds and associations. This biography was composed by a close spiritual friend to Khyentse Wangpo, the renowned Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Taye (1813–1899), who composed it under the pen name “Guṇa.”

The biography, located in volume 1 of Khyentse Wangpo’s *Kabab Dun*, begins with a note from the author that, for him, even just saying Jamyang Khyentse’s name is difficult—such is Jamgön Kongtrul’s respectful posture toward his teacher and friend, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. The initial section of the text is presented mainly in a temporal light, attributing mundane qualities to Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, such as charisma and reputation, that any influential spiritual leader can possess. However, those aspects are not what makes an individual’s life a liberating one, as the biography proclaims. The biography continues with Khyentse Wangpo’s all-inclusive acceptance, integration, and support of the diverse traditions of the noble lands of India and Tibet: from Nyingma to Bön, Abhidharma to Prajñāpāramitā, Geluk to Jonang, and Mahāmudrā to Dzogchen, the biography succinctly contains it all.



ABBREVIATED BIOGRAPHY OF JAMYANG KHYENTSE WANGPO

By Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Taye

Namo guru!

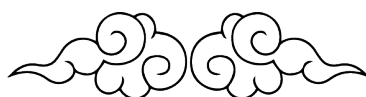
Your supreme name, difficult to utter,
Is Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo!
In all the worlds, including the gods',
Your fame shines brilliantly,
And those with bejeweled crowns
Bow down to your lotus feet.

You are the sovereign of the complete teachings
Because you are the sole refuge of all beings.
You benefit all whom you encounter with the enlightened activities you possess,
And your qualities make possible the impossible—how marvelous!

Appearing with your charisma and reputation
Generates amazement in the minds of the innocent.
But these are not the qualities of an excellent being's perfect liberation.

The four elements are immensely powerful; take earth for example.
Yet, they do not compare to all-encompassing space.
It is the same when comparing the liberated lives of the doctrine holders
in the Land of Snows
With your extraordinary, marvelous, and outstanding life of liberation.
How long would it take those with a hair tip of your understanding
To plumb the depths of your [399] ocean of experience?

You were not swayed by the power
Of solicitation, intelligence, wealth, and the like.
Through your inherent and cultivated qualities,
You became the chief of all traditions of the victors in the land of Tibet;
Solely in this way and in this world,



You possessed the liberated lifestyle of a second Lord of Sages.

The ten great pillars¹ that support the exegetical tradition,
 The eight great chariots² of the practice lineage,
 The maturing empowerments and the essential liberating instructions
 Of these traditions that are in the Land of Snows—
 You brought them to their perfection
 Through listening, contemplating, and meditating

From non-birth, you displayed the manner of birth.
 From non-transference, you displayed the manner of transference.
 Similarly, although you reached the conclusion of all things to renounce and realize,
 You displayed training in skillful means as a disciple.

The tantras, divisions of meditational practice, oral tradition, and treasure tradition
 All belong to the three yogas of the Early [400] Translations.
 You accepted these traditions as your own inheritance
 And established vast flowing networks of maturation and liberation.
 By the karmic propensities of your enlightened resolve,
 The timeliness of your disciples,
 And your unraveling of the vajra seals according to the ḍākinīs' prophecy,
 Precious earth treasures, mind treasures,
 Pure visions that shine in the mind, the aural lineage,
 Recollected teachings of previous lives,
 Rediscovered teachings of previous masters,
 And previously known precious treasures of the profound teachings,
 You opened these anew for fortunate ones
 And became the wheel-wielding monarch of all knowledge holders
 Of the Ancient School, the great secret root teachings.

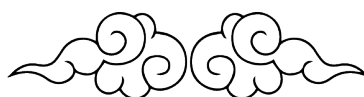
Muchen Cakrasaṃvara and Gyaltsab Sempa Chenpo³
 Were in actuality Khenchen Dorje Chang.⁴
 Tartse's⁵ relatives conferred empowerment to you,
 The great regent of the three secrets of body, speech, and mind.
 The scriptures of the primary forefathers
 And the auxiliary textual systems of Ngorchon,
 Gangkarwa, and Tsarchen and his heir⁶—



You mastered all their instructions.
 The deities and lamas cared for you,
 And you established all disciples in the realm of Khecara.
 You left an immense legacy for the teachings
 And were an unrivaled lama of the Sakya tradition,
 The singular ornament of the teachings.

Dagpo, Chenga, Karmapa,
 Drigung, Tak, Drukpa, and so forth⁷—
 You took [401] the essential nectar of their instructional advice,
 Obtained the actual lineage of blessings,
 And attained the empowerment of indestructible primordial wisdom.
 You established revulsion, the foot of meditation,
 Developed devotion, the head of meditation,
 And donned conscientiousness and compassionate activities,
 The armor of a sentinel of mindfulness.
 Obtaining the sign of heat of the four practices of the path of skillful means,
 You beheld the abiding nature of the vajra body,
 And realized the great mahāmudrā of the path of liberation.
 Thus, phenomenal existence arose nakedly as the dharmakāya.
 The border between your meditative equipoise and post-meditation was destroyed
 As your mind and appearance merged as one.
 Free from any sense of difference between distraction and attentiveness,
 You perfected the dynamic energy of the yoga of one taste
 In which acceptance and rejection of the two truths do not exist,
 Resulting in your becoming the king of all realized practitioners
 Of the Kagyu tradition, the essence of the teachings.

Yoga Tantra teachings, such as *Splendor*, *Peak*, and *Space*,⁸
 Are as rare as gold these days.
 Having received them all, you took up their practice.
 Through the Anuttara generally—and particularly,
 The maturation and liberation of *Hevajra*, *Cakrasaṃvara*, and *Guhyasamāja*
 And the commentaries of those tantras—you enacted the two benefits.
 Followers of Butön and Dölpopa,⁹
 To all their scriptures, you extended your reverence.



By stringing along the thinned
 Golden cord of the excellent tradition,
 You scaled to the peak of all lineage holders
 Of the clarifier of the teachings, Jo Zhal.

Through exposition, debate, and composition,
 You polished the rich textual traditions of the scholars of the noble land and Tibet—
 The two great charioteers¹⁰ and their successors,
 Including the general texts, advice, and pith instructions
 Of the Teacher [402] found in the instructions
 Of the seven deities and scriptures,¹¹
 And, in particular, the Kadampa of the new traditions,
 The view of the noble tradition of the Madhyamaka,
 The Prajñāpāramitā of the Mahāyāna,
 The subtle Vinaya conduct of the Hīnayāna,
 And the mother of all teachings, the *Abhidharmakośa*.
 By liberating a cache of fearless confidence,
 You are a majestic, mountain-like geshe
 Of the Gandenpa, the lord of the teachings.¹²

The spiritual and temporal affairs of the Shen tradition,¹³
 You perceived their preservation as a cause
 For expanding the benefit and well-being of the teachings and beings.
 The holders of the Yungdrung Bön tradition,
 You highly praised and uplifted them,
 And so glorified those who preserved the teachings.

Furthermore, since benefitting and providing comfort
 To even a single sentient being
 Is said to be the activities of a buddha,
 You never belittled them
 With the arrogance of erudition or accomplishment.
 Like a mother, you were close to all the philosophical traditions;
 Like a father, you praised all who possessed qualities;
 You saw the meek as your own children.

Thus, I have told the story of your realization in brief,



*So that the shortsighted can differentiate your unique and marvelous qualities
From those of other individuals.*

By this excellent deed, may all beings [403] follow your life of liberation—

The life of an omniscient lama and lord—

Fulfill all your wishes, and spread enlightened activities in every direction.

COLOPHON

Not only did the precious and omniscient lama personally promise to be a holder of the Buddhist traditions, he was also commonly perceived as an eminent preserver of his own teachings. He perceived me, a lowly clod of dirt with the name of Guṇa,¹⁴ as gold; I was thereby fortunate enough to receive the bestowal of the extraordinary nectar that is the story of how his experiential realization came to be. On account of this experience, I faithfully and respectfully attempted to articulate a small portion. May it be the cause for attaining in every life to come this excellent lama's three secrets and enlightened activities, in the very same way.

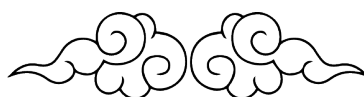
May virtue increase!

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¹ These are ten individuals who supported the exegetical lineages, which are emphasized in the monastic colleges (bshad drwa): (1) Tönmi Sambhoṭa (thon mi sam+b+hoTa, b. 619?, BDRC P5788), (2) Vairocana (bai ro tsa na, eighth century, BDRC P5013), (3) Kawa Paltsek (ska ba dpal brtsegs, eighth century, BDRC P8182), (4) Chokro Lu'i Gyaltsen (cog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan, ninth century, BDRC P8183), (5) Shang Nanam Yeshe De (zhang sna nam ye shes sde, mid eighth–early ninth century, BDRC P8205), (6) Rinchen Zangpo (rin chen bzang po, 958–1055, BDRC P753), (7) Dromtön (or Dromtönpa) Gyalwe Jungne ('bron ston rgyal ba'i byung gnas, 1004–1064, BDRC P2557), (8) Ngok Lotsāwa Loden Sherab (rnog lo tsA ba blo ldan shes rab, 1059–1109, BDRC P2551), (9) Sakya Paṇḍita (sa skya paN+Dita kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182–1251, BDRC P1056), (10) Gö Khugpa Lhetse ('gos khug pa lhas btsas, eleventh century, BDRC P3458).



² These are: (1) the ancient translation tradition, or Nyingma (snga 'gyur rnying ma), (2) the tradition of precepts and instructions, or Kadam (bka' gdams), (3) the tradition of the path and result, or Lamdre (lam 'bras), (4) the tradition of the transmitted precepts of Marpa, or Marpa Kagyu (mar pa bka' brgyud), (5) the tradition of the transmitted precepts of the Shang Valley, or Shang Kagyu (shangs pa bka' brgyud), (6) the traditions of pacification and severance, or Zhijé Chö (zhi byed gcod), (7) the tradition of vajra yoga, or Dorje Naljor (rdo rje'i rnal 'byor), and (8) the three adamantine states, or Dorje Sum Gyi Nyendrub (rdo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub).

³ This refers to Muchen Sempa Chenpo Könchok Gyaltsen (mus chen sems dpa' chen po dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, 1388–1469, BDRC P1034).

⁴ Jampa Kunga Tenzin (byams pa kun dga' bstan 'dzin, 1776–1862, BDRC P3513).

⁵ The Forty-Fourth Ngor Khenchen, Jampa Namkha Chimé (ngor mkhan chen 44 byams pa nam mkha' 'chi med, 1765–1820, BDRC P2526).

⁶ There are three main sub-schools that stem from the Sakya tradition. The Ngor (ngor) tradition is held at Ngor Ewam Chöden Monastery (ngor e waM chos ldan dgon, BDRC G211), founded in 1429 by Ngorchén Kunga Zangpo (ngor chen kung dga' bzang po, 1382–1456, BDRC P1132). The Dzong (dzong) tradition is held at Gongkar Chöde Monastery (gong dkar chos sde, BDRC G3509), founded in 1447 by Kunga Namgyal (kun dga' rnam rgyal, 1432–1496, BDRC P3183). The Tsar (tshar) tradition is held at Dar Drongmoche Monastery ('dar grong mo che, BDRC G1KR1565), 7 founded circa 1550 by Losal Gyatso (blo gsal rgya mtsho, b. 1502–1566/1567, BDRC P786).

⁷ “Dagpo” refers to Dagpo Lhajé Sönam Rinchen (dwags po lha rje bsod nams rin chen, 1079–1153, BDRC P1844), better known as Gampopa; “Chenga” refers to Chenga Dragpa Jungne (spyān sna grags pa 'byung gnas, 1175–1255, BDRC P132); and “Karmapa” refers to the Fourteenth Karmapa, Tegchok Dorje (karma pa 14 theg mchog rdo rje, 1798?–1868?, BDRC P562).

⁸ *Splendor* is dpal mchog dang po zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i rtog pa'i rgyal po (*Śrīparamādyanāmamahāyānakalparāja*); *Peak* is rgyud rdo rje tse mo (*Vajrasāṅgikharatantra*); and *Space* refers to the Vajradhātu maṇḍala taught in the first chapter of the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha*.

⁹ Butön Rinchen Drub (bus ton rin chen grub, 1290–1364, BDRC P155) and Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen (dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan, 1292–1361, BDRC P139).

¹⁰ Nāgārjuna (klu sgrub, second century, BDRC P4954) and Asaṅga (thogs med, c. 320 – c. 390, BDRC P6117) are known as “the two creators of the traditions of the two chariots” (shing rta'i srol 'byad gnyis). These two traditions are “the system of vast conduct” (rgya chen spyod pa'i srol) and “the system of profound view” (zab mol ta ba'i srol), attributed to Asaṅga and Nāgārjuna, respectively.

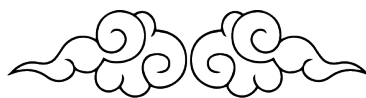
¹¹ The deities and scriptures of the Kadampa school consist of four principal deities and the Tripiṭaka (Three Baskets). The four deities are (1) Śākyamuni Buddha (thub pa), (2) Avalokiteśvara (spyān ras gzigs), (3) Acalā (mi g.yo ba), and (4) Tārā (sgrol ma). The Tripiṭaka (“Three Baskets”) is composed of (1) the Basket of Discipline ('dul ba'i sde snod, vinayapiṭika), (2) the Basket of Discourses (mdo sde'i sde snod, sūtrapiṭika), and (3) the Basket of Abhidharma (chos mngon pa'i sde snod, abhidharmapiṭika).

¹² Geshe is commonly translated as a spiritual friend or mentor (dge ba'i bshes gnyen, kalyāṇamitra), and within the main Mahāyāna tradition, a spiritual friend is understood to be a necessity for spiritual progress toward enlightenment. In this case, however, geshe, which is a contracted form of the Tibetan, is an honorific title for an individual who has completed the monastic curriculum of the Gandenpa tradition, more commonly known as the Gelugpa tradition.

¹³ rgyal gshen mnyam chags rten 'brel here is the Bönpo version of the more well-known chos srid zung 'brel, or the combination of religion and politics. Thanks to Geshe Tri Yungdrung for this clarification. In both the 2013 and 2014 editions, the orthography of gshen is spelled with a ba prefix. Shen (gshen) is a familial name that marks the connection with the Bön tradition, which this passage concerns.



¹⁴ This is a pseudonym of Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Taye ('jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas, 1813–1899, BDRC P264).



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