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*Tibetan and Newar Studies in Honor
of Hubert Decleer*

EDITED BY

Benjamin Bogin and Andrew Quintman



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Cover image: Detail of a seventeenth-century painting of the Svayambhū stūpa in Kathmandu, courtesy of Anne Vergati. See plate 23. Cover and interior design by Gopa&Tédz.

The Excellent Path of Devotion: An Annotated Translation of Sera Khandro's Short Autobiography

Sarah H. Jacoby

SERA KHANDRO DEWAI DORJÉ (1892–1940) may have been the most prolific female author in Tibet prior to the 1950s. Her writings include several thousand pages of treasure revelations (*gter ma*), more than six hundred pages of biographical and autobiographical writings (*rnam thar*), extensive commentaries on great perfection (*rdzogs chen*) teachings, as well as large compilations of hymns (*mgur*), advice (*zhal lung*), and prophecies (*lung bstan*). She was one of only a handful of Tibetan women to write an autobiography and rare among Tibetan religious exemplars for being female. Despite her many extraordinary qualities, until recently her manuscripts and her memory have not spread widely, circulating only among a select group of her disciples based in the eastern Tibetan regions of Serta, Kanzé, and Riwoché, as well as in the Tibetan diaspora primarily among the disciples of Dūjom Jikdral Yeshé Dorjé Rinpoché (1904–87) and Jadral Sangyé Dorjé Rinpoché (b. 1913).¹

1. I never would have learned of Sera Khandro had I not met Jadral Rinpoché many years ago, a meeting that came about thanks to Hubert Decler and Nazneen Zafar. When I was an undergraduate enrolled in the School for International Training's Tibetan Studies Program in India, Nepal, and Tibet, Nazneen and Hubert suggested that the best place to pursue my research interests was Pharping, Nepal, with Jadral Rinpoché and his community. This essay is one of the many outgrowths of these auspicious connections, for which I am very grateful.

The translation included here of Sera Khandro's short autobiography has benefitted greatly from the generosity and wisdom of Tulku Thondup and Khenpo Sangyé (Thupten Lodrö Thayé), who have kindly and tirelessly answered my many questions. Additionally, the input of Hubert Decler, Christina Monson, and Heidi Nevin has made it a better work.

For ease of reading, throughout this essay I have written Tibetan words phonetically according to the convention used by Wisdom Publications. See the index at the end of the translation for correspondences between phonetic and exact Tibetan spellings of person and place names using the Wylie transliteration system.

In Tibet, Sera Khandro's works are just beginning to reach broader audiences through their publication in Tibetan almost a century after she wrote them. In 2009 through the efforts of the Golok Regional Government Office of Historical Manuscripts² under the main editorship of Ju Kalzang, a large collection of Sera Khandro's writings were published for the first time in China and made widely available in Tibet. This six-volume collection includes her short and long autobiographical writings, four volumes of revealed treasures, and one volume containing her commentary on Dūjom Lingpa's *Buddhahood Without Meditation* (*Ma bsgom sangs rgyas*).³ These recent publications now join the portion of Sera Khandro's works published in the Tibetan language in India during the 1970s and 1980s under the guidance of Dūjom Rinpoché, which include four volumes of mostly liturgical texts from her revealed treasures and the 248-folio biography she wrote of her main teacher Drimé Özer (1881–1924), who was one of the eight sons of the renowned visionary Dūjom Lingpa (1835–1904).⁴

Almost none of Sera Khandro's writings have been translated into English.⁵ In order to offer English-language readers a glimpse of Sera Khandro's life story as she wrote it, this essay includes a complete translation of Sera Khandro's short autobiography written in verse. This work is titled *The Excellent Path of Devotion: The Short Story of a Mendicant's Experiences in Response to Questions from My Vajra Kin*.⁶ It appears as the first text in the Cycle of Prophecies (*lung bstan skor*) section of Sera Khandro's guidance manual (*khrid yig*) on her treasure cycle titled *Secret Treasury of Reality Dakinīs* (*Chos nyid mkha' 'gro gsang mdzod*).⁷ In the colophon, Sera Khan-

2. Mgo log khul gna' rtsom bya ba'i gzhung las khang.

3. Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro, *Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro'i gsung 'bum*. Previously, Sera Khandro's commentary on Dūjom Lingpa's *Buddhahood Without Meditation* was also published in the PRC as a separate volume; see Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro, *Ma bsgom sangs rgyas zin bris*.

4. Sera Khandro's collected revelations are published in India as Bde ba'i rdo rje, *Zab gter chos mdzod*. The only published version of Sera Khandro's biography of Drimé Özer that I know of is Mkha' 'gro bde skyong dbang mo, *Dri med 'od zer nam thar*.

5. Two exceptions are a short biography of Padmasambhava Sera Khandro revealed as a treasure text (Zangpo 2002) and an excerpt from her long autobiography describing one of her treasure revelation experiences at Mount Anyé Machen (Jacoby 2013). At the time of this writing, another English-language version of Sera Khandro's short autobiography translated by Christina Monson is soon to be available, and my translation of Sera Khandro's long autobiography is forthcoming.

6. *Ku su lu'i nyams byung gi gnas tshul mdor bsdu rdo rje'i spun gyis dris lan mos pa'i lam bzang*.

7. The short verse autobiography (*Mos pa'i lam bzang*) appears in this location in both the Serta and Kanzé manuscript versions of Sera Khandro's collected treasure scriptures that

dro notes that she completed writing the text when she was thirty-seven⁸ in the earth snake year (1929) at a hermitage near Sera Monastery in Serta, now part of Kanzé Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, PRC. During this time, she was also in the process of composing a far longer autobiography, totaling more than four hundred folios, titled *The Biography of the Central Tibetan Woman Dewai Dorjé: A Chariot Leading to Renunciation and a Reliquary of Faith for Fortunate Ones*.⁹ Roughly half of Sera Khandro's long autobiography recounts events that occurred in her everyday life, such as conversations she had, journeys she undertook, teachings she attended, and so on. The other half details her vibrant visions of bodhisattvas, siddhas, and ḍākinīs in elaborate buddhahelds. In contrast, Sera Khandro's short verse autobiography translated here is suffused with visionary encounters with a range of extraordinary presences, including mother deities and ḍākinīs, non-human girls, famous female Tibetan masters of the past, protector spirits, and even Guru Padmasambhava himself, with only brief allusions to the events that were transpiring concurrently in her mundane life in Lhasa and Golok. If Sera Khandro's verse autobiography is the shortened version (*mdor bsdus*) of her life, then what we learn from this essentialized portrait is that more than the exoteric backdrop of her quotidian affairs, her esoteric visionary interactions formed the heart of her story of the self.

The prophecies these figures provide, at times inspirational and at times enigmatic, validate Sera Khandro's identity as a treasure revealer (*gter ston*), or one destined to extract the teachings hidden in the Tibetan earth and sky for the benefit of future generations by illustrious figures from the golden age

are available to me. It has also been printed (in Tibetan) in a privately circulating collection edited by Jadral Rinpoché that was sponsored by Christina Monson. For a published version of this verse autobiography, see *Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro*, *Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 5, 82–103. A version of the same text under a slightly different title (*Rang rnam tshig bcad ma ku su lu'i nyams byung gi gtam*) also appears in vol. 1, 548–68, but I cite page numbers from the former in this essay.

8. Sera Khandro recorded her age according to the Tibetan system, which I have transposed to align with the international convention. Hence, Sera Khandro wrote thirty-eight, but I give the age as thirty-seven.

9. *Dbus mo bde ba'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa nges 'byung 'dren pa'i shing rta skal ldan dad pa'i mchod sdong*. Two unpublished Tibetan manuscript versions of this long autobiography completed by Sera Khandro in 1934 are available to me in addition to the recently published version (2009) mentioned above. One is a 407-folio version lent to me by Jadral Rinpoché, and the other is a 526-folio version from a private library in Serta. These three versions of the autobiography vary only slightly; the differences in page numbers reflect handwriting size/publication font and not substantial differences in content. For a study of this autobiography as well as her biography of Dimé Özer, see Jacoby 2007.

of the Tibetan empire (seventh–ninth centuries), most often by the Indian tantric master Padmasambhava. Prophecies elucidate Sera Khandro's identity as an incarnation of the preeminent Tibetan ḍākinī Yeshé Tsogyal, Padmasambhava's Tibetan consort renowned for transcribing and concealing his teachings as treasures.¹⁰ Despite Sera Khandro's karmic inheritance as an emissary of the ḍākinis, her ability to produce revelations was not guaranteed but rather contingent upon a set of conditions or auspicious connections (*rten 'brel*). These conditions included being the proper revealer for a given treasure, going to the proper site for the discovery at the proper time, and having the appropriate companions present during the revelation process, including a consort (*thabs grogs*) and a doctrine holder (*chos bdag*)—a disciple who will maintain and propagate the newly revealed teaching. Many of the visionary interactions at the center of Sera Khandro's short autobiography concern the difficulties she experienced gathering these auspicious connections necessary for her revelations, challenges she gradually overcame with great efflorescence.

Sera Khandro's Life Narrative

In the following verses, Sera Khandro divides her life into five different phases: (1) her religious aspirations and obstacles during her childhood in Lhasa from birth through age twelve, (2) the difficulties of her departure from Lhasa and entry into Golok from age thirteen through seventeen, (3) her life as Gara Gyalse's spouse at Benak Monastery in Golok from age eighteen through twenty-seven, (4) her reunion with her root lama Drimé Özer from age twenty-eight through thirty-one, and (5) her life afterward based at Sera Monastery in Serta from age thirty-two to the time she completed the short autobiography when she was thirty-seven in 1929.

In her short autobiography Sera Khandro records that “I, Kunzang Dekyong Chönyi Wangmo,¹¹ was born in Lhasa, Tibet,/ into a wealthy

10. For a traditional Nyingmapa history of the treasure tradition, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991.

11. One of the most common names Sera Khandro used to sign her writings, meaning “The All-Good Bliss-Nurturing Queen of Reality.” The other name she often signed was her treasure name (*gter ming*) Dewai Dorjé (Blissful Vajra). She is popularly remembered in Golok as Üza Khandro, “Ḍākinī Lady from Central Tibet,” and in the Tibetan diaspora as Sera Khandro.

noble family of imperial rank."¹² In her long autobiography, she elaborates that she was born in 1892 to a father of royal Mongolian heritage (*sog po dbang gi dung rgyud*) named Jampa Gönpo and a Tibetan mother from the Nup (Gnubs) clan named Tsering Chönzom. She describes her birthplace as her family's estate named Gyaragashar (Rgya ra ga shar), located west of the Jokhang Temple in an area called Lumothil (Klu mo mthil).¹³ According to Sera Khandro's writings, her father was a "Chinese official" (*rgya dpon*), which most likely refers to his status as an official within the Qing dynasty and not his ethnicity, which she specifies was Mongolian. Her parents treated her affectionately and afforded her the greatest luxuries money could buy in turn-of-the-century Lhasa, but "they were political leaders who wanted power." As a result their intentions for Sera Khandro and her own religious yearnings were in conflict from her earliest years. Although her father refused her requests to dedicate her life to religion and ordered her to remain a householder, bodhisattvas, *ḍākinīs*, and *siddhas* appeared in her visions and dreams, nurturing her resolve to abandon worldly life and training her in tantric Buddhist practices.

The next phase of Sera Khandro's life from age thirteen to seventeen was a time of multiple hardships. In her short autobiography she doesn't elaborate on the specific problems she faced, but in her long autobiography she writes of the devastation she experienced when her father began arranging a marriage for her with the son of a Chinese district official (*rgya sdé'i dpon*) from Kyirong when she was only ten. Two years later her mother died and her father remarried. These events confirmed the decision she made at the age of fourteen to "abandon my homeland as if it were the demons' island." Her chance to escape the confines of her Lhasa life came when a group of traveling religious pilgrims from Golok headed by Drimé Özer sought shelter at her brother's residence. Instantly she felt great devotion for Drimé Özer and secretly followed his entourage out of the city, vowing to spend the rest of her life practicing the great perfection, the pinnacle contemplative practice of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism.

Sera Khandro left Lhasa with strong resolve, but the land of Golok to which she traveled proved to be a harsh environment in which to pursue her religious ambitions. Sandwiched between Kham and Amdo in an area that today straddles the border between China's western provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan, Golok is known not only for its many illustrious Nyingma

12. Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro, *Mos pa'i lam bzang*, 83. All quotations not otherwise footnoted in this introduction come from my translation of *Mos pa'i lam bzang* included here.

13. Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro, *Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1, 9.

masters but also for its history of aggressive warriors and banditry. With an average altitude of 13,000 feet and below-freezing temperatures most of the year, the majority of Golok's rolling grasslands and snow peaks are hostile to any livelihood other than nomadic pastoralism. During Sera Khandro's time there from 1907–40, Golok's severe climate and remote location at the headwaters of the Yellow River (Rma chu) aided the Golok people in maintaining their status as a polity that was largely independent from both the Dalai Lama's Tibetan government to their west and the Chinese government (first the Qing dynasty and after 1911 the Republican government) to their east.¹⁴

In the early twentieth century, Sera Khandro's birthplace of Lhasa and her chosen land of Golok shared little: their Tibetan dialects were mutually unintelligible, their political allegiance differed, and they lived, respectively, as urbanites in stone houses on the one hand and as nomads in yak-hair tents on the other. Given these cultural chasms, it is not surprising that members of Drimé Özer's religious encampment (*chos sgar*) viewed Sera Khandro's appearance amid their group with suspicion. As Sera Khandro succinctly phrased it, "Being an inferior woman of poor means, everyone reviled me in various ways." Though she had been a wealthy daughter of nobility in Lhasa, on the road to Golok she became a starving beggar, shunned by many in Drimé Özer's community for her difference from them, unable to converse in Golok-dialect Tibetan, and without family or friends to support her. Gradually, however, during this phase from age fifteen through seventeen, she picked up the Golok dialect while working for a local nomad family as a maidservant in order to earn the necessary resources to spend her winters in retreat. During these winters she lived near Drimé Özer's residence (*bla brang*) in Dartsang, a small nomadic settlement in the Washul-family-controlled territory of Serta that corresponds roughly with what is today Serta County in northwest Sichuan.¹⁵ There she dedicated herself

14. Golok was not a monolithic entity but rather a confederation of principalities divided into three main parts (Akyong Bum, Wangchen Bum, and Pema Bum), each of which contained multiple subdivisions. In the early twentieth century, some of these divisions did pay tribute to the Dalai Lama's Tibetan government, while others at times were forced to pay tribute to the Ma-family warlords who ruled Qinghai, but the region as a whole was remarkably successful at evading direct rule by any outside authority until its incorporation into the People's Republic of China in the early 1950s. For an essay on Golok history, see Jacoby 2010b. For more information on the battles between the Ma warlords and Goloks, see Don grub dbang rgyal and Nor sde, *Mgo log lo rgyus deb ther*, 272–92. Regarding a few Golok leaders' tribute to the Dalai Lama's government, see Lhawang 1994.

15. Though Serta shares close linguistic, genealogical, religious, and cultural ties with Golok, it was not technically a part of tripartite Golok but rather was an independent territory to its

wholeheartedly to the teachings that he and his brothers gave her on preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*), channel and wind practices (*rtsa rlung*), severance (*gcod*), and the great perfection.

Sera Khandro describes this early phase of her religious training as one of intensive focus amid ongoing social difficulties. In her long autobiography, she writes that she completed the full requirement of 100,000 prostrations in only seventeen days! Even so, some of her fellow Golok religious devotees “say I am an idiot who can’t tell the difference between good and bad, like a dog.” Lamenting her situation to the *ḍākinīs*, Sera Khandro prayed to abandon her “negative body” (i.e., female body) in exchange for “a [male] body endowed with the Dharma,” only to be reprimanded by them for displaying bias against femaleness. This as well as the other four instances in the translation below that Sera Khandro refers to her inferior female body (*skye lus dman pa*) reflect the very real constraints that went along with being a woman in Sera Khandro’s milieu. However, her mantra about being an inferior woman also served the rhetorical purpose of emphasizing her humility while she simultaneously accomplished the feat of being one of the few Tibetan women prior to the 1950s to eulogize her life in writing.¹⁶

The next phase Sera Khandro records of her life from the age of eighteen through twenty-seven mirrors the period in which, “following the orders of a lama from whom I received empowerment, I lived as a householder and exerted myself in worldly activities.” This lama from whom Sera Khandro had received teachings was Khangdong Wönpo Gönwang from the Kharnang area of Golok, and his orders were to live with a lama named Gara Gyalsé (Pema Namgyal, 1882/83–?), son of the treasure revealer Gara Terchen Pema Dundul Wangchuk Lingpa (1857–1910). He directed her to do this because she had a duty, he informed her, to preserve Gara Terchen’s treasure teachings. The Gara family’s religious community was centered at Benak Monastery, which is situated on the bank of the Mar River in what is today a few miles outside of the county seat of Pema, Golok. Sera Khandro writes little about this turbulent decade of her life in which she disagreed with her “life partner” (*tshe grogs*) Gyalsé, who criticized her treasure-revelation activities,

south. Given their close ties and the fact that Sera Khandro traveled frequently between the two regions without any mention of political hindrances, I refer to Serta as part of a greater Golok region, or simply as Golok in this essay. There is debate among Tibetans about whether Serta was traditionally a part of Golok; see Gser rta tshul khriims, *Dhal shul gser rta'i lo rgyus dang 'brel ba'i gtam*, 2006.

16. For an analysis of Sera Khandro’s repeated references to her inferior female body in her autobiographical writing, see Jacoby 2010a.

summing it up in the lines, “Half of what happened was for the sake of the Dharma, / and the other half was worldly, which caused me to experience suffering.” Part of this suffering was childbirth related; Sera Khandro gave birth to three babies during these years, only one of whom lived to adulthood: her daughter Yangchen Drölma (whom she also calls Chöying Drönma, 1913–?). The *ḍākinīs*’ elusive prophecies, which form the bulk of the verses encapsulating this decade, chastise Sera Khandro for “quarreling with her partner,” meaning Gyalsé, and “abandoning [her] consort,” meaning Drimé Özer. Although Sera Khandro writes that “negative circumstances swirled around me like the wind,” these obstacles did not thwart her many treasure discoveries during this period.

After Sera Khandro experienced a severe bout of an arthritic illness that left her unable to walk, Gyalsé “expelled [her] like an unwanted dog.” He sent her to live with her prophesied consort, Drimé Özer, for fear that she would die if she stayed with him. This adversity initiated what would become the happiest years of Sera Khandro’s life, from age twenty-eight through thirty-one. She writes that Drimé Özer “Took care of me and . . . uprooted the dark ignorance of my mind.” Practice in union with Drimé Özer led to Sera Khandro’s spiritual realization as well as her enhanced ability to reveal treasures.

Sadly, the joy of liberation soon met with the reality of impermanence when in 1924 a plague struck Drimé Özer’s religious community in Dartsang, Serta, causing the death of both Sera Khandro’s five-year-old son Rikzin Gyurmé Dorjé and Drimé Özer himself within a matter of days. Before the embers of Drimé Özer’s funeral pyre had cooled, the factions within Drimé Özer’s household who didn’t like Sera Khandro, namely those affiliated with his other consort Akyongza, expelled the deeply grieving Sera Khandro and her eleven-year-old daughter from their community. Sera Khandro was “left behind without a protector,” “without a partner or a home.” The one who stood up for Sera Khandro at this critical moment, viewing her as “[Drimé Özer’s] kind, supreme consort,” was Sotrul Natsok Rangdröl Rinpoché (1869–1935). He was a close disciple of Drimé Özer as well as an important and powerful incarnate lama from Sera Thekchen Chönkhor Ling Monastery in Serta. Sera Khandro came to be known by this name, meaning the *ḍākinī* of Sera, because Sotrul Rinpoché housed her at his monastery for several years.¹⁷

17. The Sera Monastery in Serta connected to Sera Khandro is unrelated to the famous Geluk monastery by the same name in Lhasa. Founded in 1736, Serta’s Sera Monastery became a nonsectarian monastery in the nineteenth century. Its name “Sera” derives from the toponym of the valley in which it was originally located in the western region of the Washul Serta

During this phase when Sera Khandro was based at Sera Monastery from the age of thirty-two onward, Sera Khandro wrote prolifically, authoring both a 248-folio biography of Drimé Özer and her own 400-plus-folio autobiography, all the while continuing to record many treasures. Additionally, along with two of her scribes, she undertook a major textual project editing, correcting, and copying the entire collected manuscripts of Dūjom Lingpa (22 volumes), Drimé Özer (18 volumes), and her own (4 volumes), a monumental task which she completed in 1933.¹⁸ Also during this highly productive yet sorrowful phase of her life at Sera Monastery, she began teaching widely throughout eastern Tibet, primarily “the profound Dharma of the father and son great treasure revealers,” meaning the revelations of Dūjom Lingpa and Drimé Özer. Additionally, she taught her own revelations and other important great-perfection teachings, such as Longchenpa’s *Heart Essence in Four Parts* (*Snying thig ya bzhi*). Her acclaim led her to be invited to many retreat centers and monasteries throughout Golok and Kham, including Sanglung Monastery (a branch of Dordrupchen Monastery), Tsang Gar in Damé, Anzom Gar, the Khandro Yangzong Vairocana Cave in Dzakhok, Riwoché, and many others. Her fame went beyond her own Nyingma religious lineage to include disciples from the Jonang, Kagyü, and Bön lineages. She taught those of high and low social standing, exhorting laymen and women to recite *mani* mantras and undertake fasting rituals (*bsnyung gnas*) as well as conferring empowerment on the king and crown prince of Lingkar, from whom she received royal sponsorship for some of her publication projects.¹⁹

After completing her short autobiography in 1929, Sera Khandro lived for another decade, during which her renown as a treasure revealer and as an important holder of the Dūjom lineage burgeoned. She died in 1940 at the age of forty-eight at Riwoché while residing at the estate of her disciple, the Riwoché Zhapdrung Tsewang Drakpa. Since that time, multiple Tibetan women and men have been recognized as her incarnations, some heirs to illustrious religious lineages and some born to ordinary laity, a fact that follows her own prediction according to Jadral Rinpoché.²⁰ In Golok figures recognized as Sera Khandro’s incarnation include Täré Lhamo

territory. For a history of Sera Monastery, see Jigs med bsam grub et al., *Khams phyogs dkar mdzes khul gyi dgon sde so so'i lo rgyus*, vol. 2, 353–61.

18. Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro, *Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1, 514.

19. The Lingkar (Gling dkar) royal family that patronized Sera Khandro probably refers to the royal family of Lingsang (Gling tshang), which was an independent kingdom near Degé whose rulers were associated with the Tibetan mythic hero Gesar of Ling.

20. Personal communication with Jadral Rinpoché in Pharping, Nepal, October 2004.

(1938–2002),²¹ the daughter of Dzongtrul Rinpoché named Lhacham Chökyi Drönma (n.d.),²² Khandro Rinpoché (b. 1954),²³ and Drimé Özer’s great-great-grandson Trinlé Tenzin (n.d.),²⁴ who is recognized as her speech incarnation. Additionally, in the Tibetan diaspora Jadral Rinpoché’s oldest daughter Semo Saraswatī (b. 1965) is widely recognized as Sera Khandro’s incarnation.

21. Pad ma ’od gsal mtha’ yas, *Jigs phun tā re mam thar*, 110. Pema Ösal Thayé, the author of this dual biography of Namtrul Jikmé Phuntsok (1944–2011) and Täré Lhamo, respectively, emphasized Täré Lhamo’s affiliation with Sera Khandro by quoting nearly the entire short autobiography translated here as part of Täré Lhamo’s biography. Almost half of Täré Lhamo’s biography consists of Sera Khandro’s short autobiography, although Pema Ösal Thayé omitted a few stanzas from the beginning where she wrote humbly about herself (specifically the section from “Despite this I myself am an inferior woman” to “Assembly of ḍākinīs who course in the ultimate sphere, grant me permission!”).

22. Pad ma ’od gsal mtha’ yas, *Deb chung a ru ra’i dga’ tshal*, 73. According to Tulku Thondup, Lhacham Chökyi Drönma died during the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution.

23. Personal communication with Khandro Rinpoché in Serta, 2005, and in Barkham, 2007. This is not the internationally known Mindrolling Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche but another woman with a similar name who is from Golok.

24. Personal communication with Trinlé Tenzin, Dartsang, 2004.

THE EXCELLENT PATH OF DEVOTION

*The Short Story of a Mendicant's Experiences
In Response to Questions from My Vajra Kin*

E ma ho! How wonderful!

In the *dharmakāya* realm, you are the Buddha Samantabhadra.

In the *sambhogakāya* realm, you are Great Glacial Lake, the buddhas of the five families.²⁵

As the *nirmāṇakāya*, you are Padmasambhava, the three protectors.²⁶

In the realm of disciples, you are the guide, teacher, and Dharma master.

I pray to you, Pema Lendrel,²⁷ protector residing on my [crown] cakra—
having ripened and liberated my mind stream,

please remain as the sovereign of the buddha family on my [crown] cakra
of great bliss

and bestow the experience of brilliantly lucid intelligence upon me.

Several great beings from the past

clarified in vajra prophecies that I am an illusory emanation of

the *dharmakāya* Samantabhadrī, *sambhogakāya* Vajravārāhī,

nirmāṇakāya Yeshé Tsogyal of Kharchen,

and the mind incarnation of her speech, Dorjé Shiwatso.²⁸

Despite this, I myself am an inferior woman,²⁹

with little insight and an ordinary body.

25. Great Glacial Lake (Gangs chen mtsho, Mahāhīmasāgara) is a cosmic buddha encompassing all of existence and the five buddha families within it, namely Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi.

26. Padmasambhava, the eighth-century Indian Buddhist master credited with spreading Buddhism in Tibet, is said to embody the three protectors—the bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi.

27. Pema Lendrel (Pad+ma las 'brel), "One with a Karmic Connection to Padmasambhava," is an epithet of Drimé Özer.

28. A single realized being can emanate incarnations of his or her body, speech, and mind, which can each respectively emanate body, speech, and mind incarnations, making nine possible emanations.

29. "Inferior woman" is a translation of *skye lus dman pa*, literally "low (or inferior) birth-body." Given that *skye dman*, "low birth," is a common colloquial Tibetan word for woman, I have included this valence in my translation. For a discussion of the term *skye dman*, see Aziz 1987, 79, and Diemberger 2007, 10–13.

Entirely lacking the good qualities of listening, contemplation, and
meditation,
I am forever tormented by the armies of laziness and distraction.

For such an inferior woman of unfortunate rebirth,
having a secret account of my excellent qualities
is impossible, like a lotus blooming in the sky—this everyone can see.

Yet two of my vajra brothers
have made such insistent appeals—so as not to refuse them,
I will elaborate a bit about the true story
of my current birth, the result of merit I accumulated in the past.
Assembly of ḍākinīs who course in the ultimate sphere, grant me
permission!

In a former life, in front of Śākyamuni I was Utpali.³⁰
In India I was Rolangderöl,
and in the presence of Padmasambhava I was Dorjé Shiwatso.
In the land of Khotan, I was the Nepalese lady Jangchup Drön.

Then, after successive rebirths,
I, Kunzang Dekyong Chönyi Wangmo, was born in Lhasa, Tibet,
into a wealthy noble family of imperial rank.
From my youth I was devoted to the Dharma and possessed the altruistic
intention to become enlightened.

Having seen the meaninglessness of the eight worldly dharmas,³¹
I constantly prayed to the Three Jewels.
As a result of that, when I was seven,
the ḍākinīs cared for me and blessed me, nurturing me like their
cherished child.

Venerable Tārā manifested in the form of a nun,
cared for me, and advised me on generating the aspiration to benefit others.

30. Utpali (spelled by Sera Khandro as Ut+pal ma) was a nun whose vow to be the first to see the Buddha Śākyamuni upon his descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, where he had gone to teach his deceased mother, was granted due to her great merit.

31. The eight worldly dharmas refer to being caught up in gain and loss, fame and infamy, praise and blame, and pleasure and pain.

Kunga Buma³² guided me through the door of the Dharma
by giving me refuge precepts and so forth, showing me the path to
liberation.

Although my parents were from a noble family and felt favorably toward
the Dharma,
they were political leaders who wanted power.
Because of that, having engaged in a mixture of worldly and religious
activities,
I maintained subjects and attendants for a few years.

Father ordered that I should live as a householder.³³
Tormented by excruciating suffering,
I prayed with fervent yearning to Padmasambhava, Tsogyal,
and the heroes and *ḍākinīs* of the ultimate sphere.
As a result I was able to repel these samsaric conditions.

When I was eleven, my karmic heritage awakened.
Sarahapa³⁴ cared for me, taught me the path of ripening and liberation,
and bestowed pith instructions on the fourth *cakra*.
He gave me this complete teaching as if it were a precious treasure.
Through practicing this, the obscurations of my channels and winds
diminished slightly,
and I made progress in the six signs of entering, holding, and dissipating.³⁵

Miraculous displays of substantial and insubstantial gods and demons
enhanced my realization, and I experienced the primordial wisdom of
awareness.
Having understood that the gods and demons were just appearances
of my mind,

32. Kunga Buma may be the fifteenth-century female treasure revealer whose name is listed as Kunga Bumpa (Kun dga' 'bum pa) in 'Jam mgon Kong sprul's *Gter ston bygya rtsa*, 395–97, but there were also others with this name.

33. This refers to the political marriage that Sera Khandro's father began arranging for her when she was ten, but she ran away from home at the age of fourteen before the wedding.

34. Saraha(pa) is one of the eighty-four great *siddhas* or "accomplished ones" of the Indian Buddhist hagiographical tradition, famous for his *dohās*, or rhyming couplets.

35. This refers to specific practices pertaining to manipulating winds within the channels of the subtle body.

there was no need to mentally fabricate a semblance of realization.
I looked after the gods and demons as if they were my disciples for a while.

When I was twelve, on account of my past aspirations,
I met the sovereign of siddhas Kukkuripa.³⁶
He introduced me to the pith instructions on removing obstacles related to
channels and winds.
Relying on the five cakras, he taught me
the secret Dharma of the stages of the path of outer and inner *mahāmudrā*.

Invoked by the loosening of the knot of channels in my heart,
the mother deities and ḍākinīs gave me an unerring symbolic prophetic
guide,³⁷
and I actually beheld the faces of Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyal.
The mother deities and ḍākinīs empowered me as their messenger,
prophesying that the time had come to benefit others.
They advised me on how I would gradually bring benefit to myself and
others, saying:

In the demonic land³⁸ of Eastern Tibet
await your consorts, doctrine holders, and disciples.
In a humble manner, skillfully guide them in the three lands.³⁹

They gave several prophecies and much advice like this.

36. Kukkuripa (spelled by Sera Khandro as Ku ku pa) is another of the eighty-four great siddhas. He is known for his love of his dog, who later manifested as a ḍākinī. See Robinson 1979, 128–30.

37. “Symbolic prophetic guide” is a translation of *brda byang*, a variant of the more typical term *kha byang*, which I translate as “prophetic guide.” Prophetic guides precede treasure revealers’ discoveries and can be oral or written predictions bestowed on them by Padmasambhava himself in some instances or by ḍākinīs and treasure guardians in others. They indicate details such as when, where, with whom, and how treasure revealers will discover their treasures. For more information on prophetic guides and the process of treasure revelation, see Thondup 1986, 137–38; Gyatso unpublished.

38. Specifically, Sera Khandro is comparing Eastern Tibet (Mdo khams) to the demons’ island (Skt. *cāmaradvīpa*, Tib. *srin po’i yul*), which is a subcontinent in Buddhist cosmology inhabited by *rākṣasa* demons, a group of humanoid cannibals found in many traditions of South Asian mythology.

39. The “three lands” (*yul gsum*) could refer to Amdo, Kham, and Central Tibet, but the prophecy leaves this open to interpretation.

I received empowerment in both [cycles] of the *Secret Treasury of the Dākinīs*.⁴⁰

The [mother deities and dākinīs] entrusted me with a symbolic prophetic guide foretelling what would happen, saying that in the future I would have the power to lead those connected to me to the naturally appearing pure realm of the Land of Dākinīs. They gave me a rendition of their pronouncements in symbolic written form.

Yudrönma actually befriended me and wrote down a symbolic prophetic guide regarding future occurrences. In particular, she advised me on how to examine bodhisattvas of the five buddha families and how to perform the activities of summoning, training, and ripening them.⁴¹

She gave me texts containing the symbolic writings of the awareness holders, [the Guru from] Copper Island in Oḍḍiyāna,⁴² and the dākinīs. Based on the pith instructions on the symbolic indications about the present and future that she bestowed upon me, I was able to benefit formless gods and demons.

Land deities who protect Tibet, such as Nyenchen⁴³ and so forth, provided what I needed and gave me a few treasures. However, I reconcealed the treasures for the well-being of Tibet.

At that time a nun stating that she was the fully-ordained monastic Kunga Buma said:

40. Sera Khandro's two major cycles of revelations that she discovered over the course of her life were the *Secret Treasury of Reality Dākinīs* (*Chos nyid mkha' 'gro gsang mdzod*) and the *Dākinīs' Heart Essence* (*Mkha' 'gro thugs thig*).

41. These bodhisattvas were the male consorts that Sera Khandro needed to attract and train in order to reveal her treasures.

42. This refers to Guru Padmasambhava, whose land of origin is called Oḍḍiyāna (O rgyan).

43. Nyenchen Thanglha is a mountain deity connected with a mountain range in Central Tibet south of Namtso Lake (Gnam mtsho). He is believed to be a powerful force that Padmasambhava bound by oath to protect Buddhism and has a special importance in Sera Khandro's life as the figure she claims was her real father instead of the "Chinese official" Jampa Gönpö.

Do you know the meaning of emptiness?
 If you don't realize the meaning of emptiness,
 though you may direct your body and speech toward virtue, the
 results will be limited.
 Thoroughly entangled in the tight bonds of self-cherishing,
 you will spend this life behaving with an equal measure of virtue
 and vice.
 The result of this will be that you will remain within the limits of
 cyclic existence,
 circling through the three upper and three lower realms.
 For this reason, don't let your eyes of insight be blind!
 Knowing what to accept and reject,
 put into practice the primordial wisdom abiding within you, the
 great secret of the mind.

I responded with the following words:

Yoginī arising as an illusory primordial wisdom display
 of Vārāhī, queen of the ḍākinīs of the three *kāyas*,
 I pray to you with undivided faith.
 I beseech you to show me the secret of my mind!
 Bless me that I may not remain within cyclic existence in this life,
 but that I may be like you, Venerable Lady!

When I said this, the Venerable Lady replied:

How wonderful! Listen, fortunate one endowed with spiritual
 training—
 I will teach you the pith instructions regarding the secret of your
 mind.
 First, to relax your body, speech, and mind:
 The key point of the body is to place yourself in the seven-point
 posture of Vairocana.
 The key point of speech is to remain silent, like a lute that has ceased
 to play.
 Making no effort to talk, let your breath naturally rest.
 The key point of mind is to remain in the state of uncontrived clarity
 and emptiness.
 The empty essence is *dharmakāya*, free from conceptual elaborations.
 Clarity is *sambhogakāya*, unobstructed natural radiance.

The projection and reabsorption of manifestations, whatever arises,
 is *nirmāṇakāya*.
 Awareness, inseparable from the three *kāyas*, is perfected at its basis.

For those of the highest capacity who have experienced self-appearing
 awareness,
 these pith instructions are supremely profound.
 For those of middling capacity whose minds rely on objects,
 the pith instructions on destroying mental constructs are necessary,
 starting from separating the three doors⁴⁴ up to [searching for] the ori-
 gin and dwelling place [of mind] and so forth.

Don't be a lazy child!
 Do not allow my profound pith instructions to dissipate—
 integrate them into your mindstream!
 That which is called "the view of emptiness" is nothing other than
 this.
 That called "awareness of the three *kāyas*" is just this,
 the great self-emergent primordial wisdom itself.
 You won't find a higher secret of the mind than this
 even if you search the three-thousandfold world system.
 Because your mind is the actual perfect buddha,
 don't go searching elsewhere for the so-called buddha.

Saying this, she disappeared like a rainbow in the sky.

I resolved to practice intensively in accordance with
 the ḍākini's instructions as long as I lived.

From age thirteen to seventeen years old,
 I endured physical and verbal hardships for the sake of Dharma.
 For nearly a month I went without a single morsel of food
 and yet did nothing that was not Dharma.

Ever since I was young I relied on
 the lama, the Three Jewels, and my tutelary deity.

44. "Separating the three doors" (*sgo gsum ru shan*) is an abbreviated reference to "separating saṃsāra and nirvāṇa of the three doors" (*sgo gsum 'khor 'das ru shan dbye ba*), which is a preliminary practice for great-perfection contemplation.

No matter how difficult my suffering was to bear,
 I perceived everything as the result of karma I had accumulated in the past.
 In this life, I thought, if I fail to accomplish the pure holy Dharma,
 I will have no way to repay the great kindness
 of sentient beings in general and my parents in particular.

With this in mind, I abandoned my homeland as if it were the demons'
 island.
 Enduring hardships with great determination,
 I was propelled by the force of my previous aspirations and karmic
 connections
 toward Eastern Tibet to the land of Golok.
 Being an inferior woman of poor means,
 everyone reviled me in various ways.
 Although I was empowered in profound earth treasures,
 my consorts and doctrine holders were hindered by other conditions.
 When I was tormented by many negative circumstances such as these,
 I presented a feast offering to the maṇḍala of ḍākinīs who course in the ulti-
 mate sphere
 and I invoked them with the following words:

Alas! Primordial wisdom ḍākinīs,
 don't rest your compassion in the peaceful expanse—
 look upon me with compassion, this woman with negative karma!

Although I acted in accordance with the ḍākinīs' predictions,
 it is difficult for me to benefit the teachings and beings.
 Beings of the degenerate age act perversely, deceived by demons.
 Those who act in accordance with the Dharma are as rare as stars in
 the daylight.
 Degenerate beings perceive the corrupt earnings obtained from the
 faithful as medicine.⁴⁵
 Unable to care for themselves, they deceive others [into thinking they
 can care for them].

45. This line is literally "They perceive food obtained from the corrupt livelihood of [collecting] harmful religious offerings as medicine." Offerings (*dkor*) donated to religious specialists by the faithful become harmful (*nag*) when their recipients consume them with self-interest and without the proper intention and ability to benefit others.

They take debt from dead bodies⁴⁶ and faith offerings from the living.
Disregarding karma and its consequences, they perform all kinds of
nonvirtuous acts.

When these true signs of the degenerate age appear,
how can someone like me counteract the decline of the teachings and
beings?

If I affectionately care for these wild people with their vastly wrong
views,
they respond with hatred.
If I behave in accord with the Dharma, they say I'm stupid.
Just like the Buddha taught, if I treat others as more important than
myself,
perceiving good and bad as equal and wearing the armor of patience,
they say I am an idiot who can't tell the difference between good and
bad, like a dog!

Those who scorn me with such insults
see me as lacking any good qualities.
Based on such criticisms and wrong views,
I can forget about benefitting beings; I am the cause of my own and
others' ruin.

Therefore I pray to discard this negative body
and be reborn in a [male] body endowed with the Dharma.
I will fulfill the wishes of the Guru couple,⁴⁷ and
following the *ḍākinīs'* commands I will strive to benefit the teachings
and beings.
Please consider this now, you who reside in the ultimate sphere of pri-
mordial wisdom!

On account of my intense wailing,

46. "Debt from dead bodies" (*gshin po'i ro dom*) refers to the karmic debt that religious specialists who conduct funerary rituals accrue if they accept offerings for saying prayers and meditating on behalf of a deceased person without actually being able to help that person. Those who can help the dead in their transmigration do not accrue karmic debt for accepting offerings, but those who deceive the dead and their loved ones pay heavy karmic consequences for their duplicity.

47. That is, Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyal (*gu ru yab yum*).

the emanation of the ultimate sphere, who shines as the ornament of the
ultimate sphere,
great mother and lady of the ultimate sphere, Kunsalma,
uttered the following in the secret symbolic language of the *dākinīs* who
appear in the ultimate sphere:

Eh, eh, ya!

The radiance of the jewel of the eastern sky, the sun,
dispels the darkness of beings without discrimination.
How is it that a messenger invoked by mother *dākinīs*
discriminates between a good and bad body?
This depends on your disciples and prayers.
Don't feel weary and sad!

From the time you were seven until thirteen,
you were able to benefit gods and demons a bit
by the power of your prayers in the past when you were Pema 'Tsokyi.⁴⁸
Don't be proud; this was the result of your previous karma.

From age fourteen to nineteen,
your karma will bring you many experiences of unbearable suffering.
Don't be discouraged! This will be the end of your [negative] karma.

When you reach the age of twenty through twenty-seven,
on account of the degenerate conditions of your region and disciples,
those with negative connections to you will far exceed those with positive
connections.

If you are able to persevere without doubts in supplicating
Padmasambhava and Mother Tsogyal,
from this time forward you will meet the appropriate consorts
and doctrine holders for your treasures.
You will gradually bring about great benefit for the teachings and for
beings.
Those with positive connections to you will gradually outnumber
those with negative connections.

48. Sera Khandro lists Pema 'Tsokyi, also known as Jomo Menmo (13th cent.), as one of her former incarnations in her long autobiography. Jomo Menmo was one of the two female treasure revealers out of the one hundred that Jamgön Kongtrul included in his *Gter ston bryga rtsa*, 378–84.

Once more, because those with either type of connection to you—
 positive or negative—
 are your disciples,
 abandon involvement with attachment and aversion, joy and sorrow.
 Your fortress of equanimity must not be weak!

For messengers appointed by the mother *dākinī*,
 everything depends on the Dharma of auspicious connections.
 Hence, it is very important to be careful regarding skillful means—
 whether you become a treasure revealer or not depends on you.

If you don't obey the commands of the ultimate-sphere *dākinī*,
 even though you are empowered in Dharma treasures, you will be
 beset with hindrances.
 You will be the one who brings undesirable karma upon yourself.
 Even though you are empowered in treasures, you will lose them due
 to other conditions.
 Having lost the Dharma due to others' influence, you will become a
 householder.
 Activities related to your own treasures will become obscured.
 How sad to behave in this way!

If you act in accordance with the advice of mother *dākinī*,
 in this lifetime you will definitely benefit yourself and others.
 Did you understand the symbols, young noble woman?
 I, emanation of the ultimate sphere, return to the ultimate sphere. *Ab!*

After saying this, her appearance vanished midair into light within the
 ultimate sphere.

From age eighteen through twenty-seven
 my happiness and suffering fluctuated like ripples on water.
 Half of what happened was for the sake of the Dharma,
 and the other half was worldly, which caused me to experience suffering.

In particular, following the orders of a lama from whom I received
 empowerment,
 I became a householder and exerted myself in worldly activities,
 but I was never able to please anyone.
 On account of this, I became fed up with cyclic existence.

When I longed to go to the Invisible Glorious Mountain Buddhafield,⁴⁹
 two beautiful girls from a nonhuman land
 adorned with various jewels uttered these melodious words:⁵⁰

How wonderful! Listen girlfriend—
 do you know the two of us?
 We two *ḍākinīs* with beautiful faces
 came from the Invisible Buddhafield
 to give you this clear message:

It would be excellent if you, friend,
 could come to the citadel of the very blissful *ḍākinīs*, wouldn't it?

In these bad times, people's minds
 have fallen under the control of demons, haven't they?

Don't quarrel with your partner!⁵¹
 The damage caused by the defilement of violated [commitment vows]
 will bring harm upon you, won't it?

The woman named Clarity⁵²
 will inspire you to be virtuous.
 Abandon attachment and aversion toward her.
 Let her be, okay?

49. This refers to Padmasambhava's buddhafield, the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, here referred to in Tibetan as *mi mngon dpal ri'i zhing*. "Going to the buddhafield" can be a euphemism for dying.

50. The meter of these two girls' message offsets it from what came before and what follows, as it switches from the nine-syllable classical Tibetan verse form in which Sera Khandro wrote all the previous verses to a six-syllable meter divided into three equal feet, and then back again to the nine-syllable line after their missive. According to Sujata (2005, 122), this meter of three disyllabic feet is typical of Central Tibetan folk songs (*gzhas*) and is also found in songs from both eastern and western Tibetan regions.

51. "Partner" (*grogs*) here refers to Sera Khandro's "life partner" (*tshē grogs*) Gyalsé. I refer to him as her "life partner," translating literally from the Tibetan, instead of "spouse" because Sera Khandro never mentions a formal marriage ceremony taking place.

52. "Clarity" (*gsal*) refers to Saldrön, the name of the woman Gyalsé took up with during his partnership with Sera Khandro. In some recent Tibetan editions of *Mos pa'i lam bzang*, it is misprinted as *dpal* but is consistently *gsal* in older manuscript versions of the work.

If the mule-colored iron snake from the south
 is honored on the crown of the dragon,⁵³
 not very long from now,
 you will receive the jewel of benefitting yourself and others,
 won't you?

If you cannot journey
 to our land this time,
 then through the inspiration of the man
 born in the horse year,⁵⁴
 the favorable condition of [meeting] the one named Vajra⁵⁵
 will come together in time, won't it?

For three years and three months
 give up having visitors.
 If you exert yourself in accomplishing your practice,
 during the unerring time of the ḍākinīs
 known as Sagadawa,⁵⁶
 he will mostly dispel [your obstacles], won't he?

If you thoroughly accomplish
 whatever work and activities you do
 in accord with the ḍākinīs' advice,
 you will be empowered
 in the banner of the two treasure teachings,⁵⁷ won't you?

We will tell you the meaning of the indications
 regarding what will happen in the future.

53. The exact meaning of this phrase remains elusive, as it is a prophecy meant to be understood only by a select few, but one possible reading of it is that the iron snake refers to Drimé Özer, whose birth year (1881) was the iron-snake year in the Tibetan calendar, and the dragon refers to Sera Khandro, who was born in the water-dragon year (1892).

54. This may refer to Gyalsé, who according to Sera Khandro's long autobiography was born in the horse year.

55. "Vajra" here is a symbolic name for Drimé Özer.

56. Sagadawa (*sa ga zla ba*) is the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar. The full moon on the fifteenth day of this Tibetan month is the holiest day of the Tibetan year, as it marks the time of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death.

57. The two treasure teachings are those of Drimé Özer and his father Dūjom Lingpa.

Not telling anyone else, keep this secret;
hide it deep in your heart.

After saying this, they disappeared like a rainbow into the expanse of
the sky.

On account of this, I became a bit sick.
Knowing this, the true incarnation of the great treasure revealer Karma
Lingpa,
Jikdral Chökyi Lodrö Rinpoché,⁵⁸
commanded me [not to go to the buddhafield] with a strict Dharma
commitment vow.
Hence, I had no way to follow the *ḍākinī*s' directive to go.⁵⁹

At that time, a monk dressed in the scholarly attire of a *pandita*
saying he was Guru [Padmasambhava]
came to the place where I was herding livestock
and asked three times, "Do you know me?"

I replied:

If you are the Guru,
you possess clairvoyance that knows the past, present, and future.
You perform inconceivable enlightened activities and have unimpeded
miraculous powers.
One who has found supreme accomplishment, chief among all
buddhas,
unsurpassed lama, to you I prostrate.

58. Jikdral Chökyi Lodrö Rinpoché (ca. 1876–1919) was a lama affiliated with Pelyul Dar-tang Monastery in Golok. Sera Khandro also calls him Gochen Tulku Jikdral Chökyi Lodrö, or Gotrul Rinpoché for short. In her long autobiography Sera Khandro writes of an important meeting with him in 1915 when she was twenty-three years old during which the respected lama recognized her as a *ḍākinī* incarnation of Yeshe Tsogyal. She also specifies that he was one of the four pillars or main doctrine holders who would uphold her treasure teachings. For a brief biography of him, see O rgyan brtson 'grus, *Dar thang dgon pa'i gdan nabs*, 392–93.

59. In other words, Jikdral Chökyi Lodrö Rinpoché forbade her to die. Sera Khandro's long autobiography contains a more detailed account of their conversation in which he urged her not to succumb to illness and depart for the buddhafield; see Bde bai'i rdo rje, *Bde ba'i rdo rje mam thar*, 194a5–6.

As soon as the appearances of this life wane,
 may I and all those connected to me
 attain enlightenment in the primordial expanse of the ultimate
 sphere of reality
 inseparable from you, Venerable Guru.

After I offered these words, the monk responded:

I am an incarnation without causes and conditions,
 spontaneously present and self-arisen for the benefit of sentient
 beings.
 I, this monk, have no purpose aside from benefitting beings.

Because Padmasambhava has attained the formless supreme form of
 the vajra body,
 ordinary beings are far away from [seeing] his face.
 But if faithful ones invoke him through the power of their former
 aspirations and devotion,
 they will always see Padmasambhava's face,
 hear his voice, and attain the blessings of his enlightened mind.

Since you also have a karmic connection [to me], we have met.
 But because you have abandoned your method consort and have
 doubts about mantra,
 you see me as a monk with an ordinary body.

Now, if you want to practice your share of treasure,
 a short distance south of here
 there is someone practicing treasures who is not me but is inseparable
 from me.
 He is a bodhisattva of the vajra family named Raśmi.⁶⁰
 If you join with this hero,
 the teachings of the two treasures will spread southward.

When the black iron snake enchants the belly of the dragon,
 the flock of swans will gather from all directions like a cloud.
 If the black crow does not rain down poison,

60. [Vima] Raśmi is the Sanskrit translation of Drimé Özer, which means Stainless Light Ray in English.

the turmoil of foreign invasions will be eliminated for sixty years.
 The sun of peace and happiness will shine for a while in Tibet.
 It is extremely important [to adhere to] the key points of time, signs,
 auspicious connections, and so forth as specified in your treasure's prophetic guide.

On account of his words, my perception was transformed,
 and I arrived in the feast row of pure *dākinīs*.
 From [them, whose voices resemble] the lute-like call of the *kalaviṅka*
 bird,⁶¹
 I received the middle prophetic guide of profound treasure Dharma.

Immediately after that Vima Raśmi looked after me
 and in the vicinity of the Seven Powerful Ladies⁶² at the western gate
 of the second snow mountain Machen Pomra,⁶³
 I removed the profound treasure *Secret Treasury of Reality Dākinīs*.

Also, from important sacred sites and minor ones, including
 Mōndrup Asha Stūpa,
 Chakri Ōmbar, Dong Dzongné,
 Kyung Draktsé, Pema Ritho, Drelzong, and so forth,
 I withdrew Dharma treasures from some and substance treasures from
 others.

During the time of these [treasure revelations], although many prophecies
 appeared,
 the auspicious connections were hindered
 on account of my disciples' corruption.

The profound Dharma endowed with auspicious connections and
 timeliness

61. According to Krang dbyi sun, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, vol. 1, 6, a *kalaviṅka* is a sea bird with a melodious call.

62. The Seven Powerful Ladies (Dbang phyug ma bdun) were the protectresses of the treasure Sera Khandro removed from their territory on the western side of Mt. Anyé Machen.

63. Machen Pomra is both the name of the powerful mountain deity who resides at Anyé Machen Mountain in the Golok region of Amdo and also a name for the mountain itself. The description "second snow mountain" could refer to its status as the second holiest mountain after Mount Kailash in western Tibet, but this is not clearly explained.

is like a bubbling spring that cannot be obstructed by solid ground;
although negative circumstances swirled around me like wind, I remained
fearless.

I met fortunate ones who were my Dharma lineage holders
and had the power to abandon activities associated with the eight worldly
dharmas.

From the age of twenty-eight through thirty-one,
present conditions and the ripening of my former karma led to
my partner [Gyalsé] abandoning me, expelling me like an unwanted dog.

Propelled by my severe unbearable illness,
Lendrel,⁶⁴ the refuge master and protector residing on my [crown] cakra,
took care of me, and by means of his Dharma treasury of ripening and lib-
eration teachings,
he uprooted the dark ignorance of my mind.
He opened the one hundred doors of the secret treasury of insight and pri-
mordial wisdom
and enriched me with the wealth of the good qualities of listening and
contemplation.
In particular, the inner dimension of primordial wisdom actually awakened
in me,
and I attained the path of liberation of the union of mahāmudrā.

By the power of this, on the outside, my renown among disciples expanded.
On the inside, the knots in the channels in my head and throat loosened.
Secretly, my realization of nonconceptual primordial wisdom
enabled me to write down and disseminate profound treasures, thus greatly
expanding the Buddhist teachings.
My ability to benefit beings as my disciples proliferated effortlessly.
An assembly of deities and ḍākinīs, Dharma protectors, and treasure
guardians
accompanied me like a shadow and provided me with favorable conditions.
I have recorded the prophecies and advice they gave me elsewhere.

64. That is, Drimé Özer.

On one occasion, upon the insistence of Drondul Pawo,⁶⁵
 I went to stay with him near Tongra Drakar in Trom.⁶⁶
 While I was there, four nonhuman girls
 with the faces of a tiger, lion, bear, and parrot⁶⁷
 said the following melodious words in unison:

Ha ya hi!

Listen, powerful yoginī—
 from the dākinī fortress at Tidro,
 Kunzik Yeshé Wangmo
 has sent you a clear message:⁶⁸

In the supreme holy site of Dorjé Drakzong
 at the vajra dākinīs' gathering place
 is the profound Dharma *Embodiment of Realization*,
 the heart-instruction of the dākinīs.
 Through excellent auspicious connections and timeliness,
 the one named Akṣa⁶⁹ will appear.
 The time will be the year of the horse.
 A protectress from far away, not nearby,

65. Drondul Pawo, or “The Hero Who Tames Beings,” refers to Drondul Pawo Dorjé (1842–1924), a famous treasure revealer from Anzom Gar located in Palyul County, Kham. In her long autobiography, Sera Khandro records that Anzom Drondul Pawo Dorjé sent a letter to Drimé Özer requesting her to visit him in 1923 when she was thirty-one and he was eighty-one years old.

66. Trom is the name of the region in which Anzom Gar is located, and Tongra Drakar is a sacred mountain in this area. Tongra Drakar is spelled three different ways in different editions of *Mos pa'i lam bzang*: Stong ra brag dkar (White Cliff Upper Enclosure) in *Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 5, 95; Rdo ra brag dkar (White Cliff Stone Enclosure) in *Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1, 561; and Stong ra brag dkar (White Cliff Hollow Interior) in *Zab gter chos mdzod*, vol. 4, 120.

67. The last animal, *smra mkhas*, literally “eloquent speaker,” is unclear but in her long autobiography Sera Khandro mentions a type of small bird with an eloquent voice (*smra mkhas byi'u chung*).

68. Like the clear message above conveyed by the two nonhuman girls from the Glorious Mountain Buddhafield, this clear message is in the same six-syllable meter divided into three equal feet characteristic of central Tiberan songs. After Sera Khandro asks, “Who are you all?” the lines return to nine-syllable meter for the remainder of the work.

69. The Sanskrit Akṣa(ra) is Gyurmé in Tiberan, or “changeless.” Based on a similar passage in Sera Khandro's long autobiography, Akṣa may refer to Akṣara Vajra, or Gyurmé Dorjé, which was the name of Anzom Drondul Pawo Dorjé's son.

will certainly give you your treasure.
 Because of its profundity, there will be great agitation.
 You must be careful about how you handle this.

If the groaning sound of the earth
 stirs up black clouds,
 the radiance of the all-illuminating maṇḍala of the sun
 could diminish.
 Don't lessen your insight pertaining to this.

Demon-hearted people
 will welcome you with pleasant words,
 but when a person named Speech⁷⁰ brings about
 a variety of undesirable and disturbing [events],
 it is uncertain what will happen.
 In time, new ḍākinī prophecies will arise
 containing definitive words about the future.

Do you understand? Do you understand, girlfriend?

In response, I asked, "Who are you all?"

But before I finished talking, something else woke me up,
 and the visionary experience disappeared into itself.
 Nevertheless, following the ḍākinīs' symbolic prophetic guide,
 I discovered profound treasures, wrote them down, and disseminated them.

At that time, a black man wearing white woolen clothes
 who said he was the King of Gojo⁷¹
 roared out the following in a terrifying voice:

You, strange lady,
 why did you come to this land? Where are you from?
 Don't stay here or we will have a fight.
 Now, while you are well, get away from here and go home!

Biting his lower lip, he displayed his rage.

70. *Sma*.

71. Gojo (Go 'jo) is a present-day county in Sichuan just southwest of Anzom's religious encampment.

I said to him:

I have never seen a strange person
with karma as bad as yours.
The Trom Valley is a pathway for all Chinese and Tibetans.
I never heard that you alone own it.

Nevertheless, I have no homeland and no parents.
I go alone wherever I please within this country.
I have no attachment to my body or wealth.
I distribute them as alms to the gods and demons, who are delusions
based on karmic perceptions.
I have eliminated pride over all of them, those with and without
forms.

I know that whatever arises and whatever appears are miraculous
displays of my mind.
I possess the instructions for destroying attachment to delusional
appearances and self-cherishing.
The mind and body of someone like you arises from circumstantial
conditions.
Beneficial and harmful alike, everything is the dynamism of the
dharmakāya,
the expanse of the realization of the primordially liberated unborn
great mother. *Phat!*

When I rested for a while in the ultimate sphere of purity and equality,
the great state of awareness and emptiness free from extremes,
this delusional appearance disappeared into the ultimate sphere like
a dream.

When I was thirty-two
because of my meager merit
the omniscient refuge master and jewel of my heart,
Pema Lendrel, departed to the *dākinīs'* land.⁷²

72. In other words, Drimé Özer passed away when Sera Khandro was thirty-two in 1924.

As for me, since that time I was left behind without a protector.
I was expelled, without a partner or a home, to a remote land.
Even so, I offended everyone's eyes like a thorn.

Only the heart son of my refuge master lama,
my vajra sibling Natsok Rangdröl,⁷³ said:

Since you are the supreme consort of the greatly kind one,
you cannot be exiled to a distant land.

He made me swear [to stay] by means of a strict Dharma commitment vow.
Hence I stayed at Sera Monastery for some years.

Like the refuge master had commanded me to do, I maintained, protected,
and disseminated
the profound Dharma of the father and son great treasure revealers.⁷⁴
I propagated the profound Treasures widely to everyone, near and far.
In particular, I gave karmically-destined ones, mainly my doctrine holder
Prajñā Raśmi,⁷⁵
their paternal inheritance of the two treasures.
In addition, innumerable fortunate ones
practiced the profound Dharma in secluded places.

By acting for the benefit of myself and others,
I maintained the teachings of the two treasures.
When the incarnation of my refuge master lama was enthroned,
my mental suffering subsided a bit.

Nevertheless, that an ordinary watchdog like me
is called a lion with a turquoise mane
stems from the kindness of the refuge master Wish-Fulfilling Jewel.
When I think about this, my sadness is unceasing.

73. This is Sotrul Natsok Rangdröl Rinpoché (1869–1935) of Sera Thekchen Chökhör Ling Monastery.

74. The great father and son treasure revealers refer to Düjom Lingpa and Drimé Özer.

75. That is, Sherap Özer, one of Sera Khandro's main disciples, who appears often toward the end of her long autobiography. He was associated with a Vairocana cave called Khandro Yangzong in Dzakhok.

When the all-illuminating sun maṇḍala rises,
I remember the body maṇḍala of the refuge master Wish-Fulfilling
Jewel.

When its light dispels the darkness in all directions,
I remember his good quality of unbiased compassion.
When from the sky's zenith it sets behind the western mountain,
I remember how the master himself came to protect us beings
and then how his physical body passed beyond misery.

When I see the vast expanse of the sky,
I think of his self-arising and spontaneously present body,
which appeared from the expanse of the *dharmakāya*, the pure basis
of the ultimate sphere.
Whatever symbols and signs I see, whatever arises,
I think of the refuge master Wish-Fulfilling Jewel.

Whatever hermitage or monastery I stay in, I miss my lama.
When I think about his oral instructions on practice, I miss my lama.
When I see my Dharma siblings after a long time, I miss my lama.
No matter what I think about, I miss my lama.
My guide and teacher, Pema Lendrel—I miss him.

Missing him, a perpetual stream of tears flows from my eyes.
Wearied by mental torment, my memory is deluded:
Although I continually relied upon him, it seems like it was for just a
second;
even though I've received many ripening and liberating teachings, it seems
like they lasted for just a moment.
When I recall what has happened, what grief I feel!

When I saw his face, I felt deep faith and devotion.
By just hearing his voice, I entered the path of ripening and liberation.
Through his mind's realization, he opened one hundred doors of the secret
treasury.
He brought down a rain of Dharma that accorded with beings' capacities,
thus liberating them from the perils of cyclic existence.
Having attained the supreme unsurpassed level of everlasting happiness,
he guided beings toward liberation in the primordial ultimate sphere.

His kindness is inconceivable and cannot be repaid.
Thinking about this, my mind is filled with anguish,

and lamentations about missing my venerable lama come forth.
 Nevertheless, in order to return the lama's kindness,
 I have cast my negative self-serving thoughts far behind
 and taught profound treasures to fortunate ones.

The activities of my body, speech, and mind accorded with the Dharma,
 and like a rhinoceros I maintained my practice in seclusion.
 Although I was empowered in treasures, I thought that I would not engage
 in treasure activities,
 that it was enough for a child to maintain her father's Dharma.

Regarding the locations of my profound earth treasures,
 the three sacred places of the body, the three sacred places of the mind,
 the three white cliffs, the three fortresses, the two hidden lands—
 these are said to be the locations of my treasures.

My profound Dharma [includes] the root, trunk,
 branch, flower, and fruit of the Dharma.⁷⁶
 The changeless treasures of enlightened mind are like the earth.
 The supplementary treasures of enlightened activities are inconceivable.

My treasure consorts include the supreme two, the excellent three,
 and the five great bodhisattvas belonging to the five buddha families.
 As for my doctrine holders, there are four sons who hold the lineage,
 eight supreme ones, twenty-five, one hundred, and so forth.
 In this lifetime, they will attain the results of the two stages.⁷⁷

Dākinīs provided prophetic guides, inner prophetic guides, quintessential
 prophetic guides,
 supplemental prophetic guides, and so forth that prophesied the
 circumstances
 including the appropriate times, signs, auspicious connections, and so
 forth in which I should reveal Dharma treasures.
 They predicted that the lands in which I would benefit beings
 numbered five

76. See Thondup 1986, 115, for Drimé Özer's elder brother the third Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpai Nyima's explanation of how various categories of treasures are analogized to the parts of a tree.

77. The two stages are the generation stage (*bskyed rim*) and perfection stage (*rdzogs rim*) of tantric meditation.

and, in particular, that my teachings would spread in the eastern and southern directions.

* * *

I have written this short root text about my treasures to fulfill the wishes of my fortunate disciples. For them, I have written about my enlightened activities in a manner that has great significance but little difficulty. How could secret excellent qualities manifest in someone like me, a simple and ordinary inferior woman?

Nevertheless, by the true compassion of lineage-holding lamas and the ripening of the fruit of the two accumulations [of merit and wisdom], for many lifetimes I was reborn in a body endowed with the Dharma, delighting the hearts of noble ones.

The sovereign of profound treasure, Pema Lingpa,⁷⁸ looked after me and infused me with the Dharma of ripening and liberation. By this, our connection from earlier times awakened, and I was empowered in a few treasures.

Then, in several successive births, I attained a bit of realization [from practicing] profound treasures. Even though I didn't want to look after an entourage of disciples, by the power of my prayers, I skillfully guided them.

Although my secret excellent qualities are minimal, [I wrote] this short story giving the gist of my life not to attract status or the eight worldly dharmas but so as not to disappoint my fortunate disciples.

By the virtue of writing down these lies, may the great beings who preserve the Dharma ever remain.

78. Pema Lingpa (1450–1521) was a treasure revealer and Nyingma religious hierarch from the Bumthang region of Bhutan. Sera Khandro lists Pema Lingpa as one of Drimé Özer's former incarnations in *Dri med 'od zer nam thar*, 7.

May outer and inner auspicious connections come together well, and
 may merit proliferate.
 May the troubles of the entire world and its inhabitants be completely
 dispelled.
 Once all the wars and famines of this misfortunate era have been pacified,
 may the profound treasure teachings spread in the ten directions
 and may the deeds and enlightened activities of those great beings who
 uphold these teachings expand.
 May the power and wealth of sponsors increase and flourish.
 May sentient beings become abundantly happy and practice the Dharma.

All beings having become my disciples,
 may they be welcomed by awareness holders, heroes, and *ḍākinīs*
 to the Palace of Lotus Light on *Cāmara*[*dvīpa*].⁷⁹
 While singing the Guru Siddhi hymn,⁸⁰
 may all be born in the *ḍākinīs'* land of *Oḍḍiyāna*
 inseparable from Pema Drondul Ling.⁸¹
 With minds indivisible from that of the Guru, may all attain buddhahood.

Colophon:

This concludes the account of "A Mendicant's Experiences." Though the name of the omniscient refuge master is difficult to express, I will do so for a specific reason: the sovereign of siddhas, the great awareness holder Gelek Palzangpo, had two direct disciples named Dönli and Rangjung, two vajra siblings who are holy Buddhist monks and sky yogis free from concepts. They both strongly urged me for a long time to write this along with offering me silver and a stainless silk scarf. My disciple the renunciate Sherap Özer also exhorted me again and again to write this by building supports for the three profound treasures and by [vowing] to spend his whole life in a

79. *Cāmaradvīpa* (*ṅga yab gling*) is the southwestern subcontinent in Indian cosmology and is here analogous to Padmasambhava's Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain buddhaheld, at the center of which is his Palace of Lotus Light.

80. The Guru Siddhi hymn is the famous seven-line prayer to Padmasambhava. Tulku Thondup's translation of it (Thondup 1995, 170–71) is as follows: "Hūm / In the northwest of the country of *Oḍḍiyāna* / Born on the pistil of a lotus / Endowed with the most marvelous attainment / Renowned as the Lotus-Born (Padmasambhava) / Surrounded by a retinue of many Khandros / Following you I practice. / Please come forth to bestow blessings. / Master Padmasambhava, please bestow attainments upon us."

81. Pema Drondul (Sangngak) Ling(pa) is another name for Drimé Özer, whom she also often called Wish-Fulfilling Jewel (*Yid bzhin nor bu*).

secluded hermitage and to do everything in his power to uphold and protect the profound Dharma. In particular, he offered his body, speech, and mind to his lama and [promised] to abandon non-Dharmic activity for a long time and to devote himself to practice. Additionally, my faithful disciples including Rikzang Gyurmé Trinlé and others begged me again and again [to write this]. So as not to disappoint them, I, Kunzang Dekyong Chönyi Wangmo, the lowest among all the group of disciples of the omniscient refuge master, wrote this when I was thirty-seven on the sixteenth day of the ninth month of the earth-snake year (1929) at Sera Monastery's secluded retreat place. My attendant, the Buddhist monk Tsultrim Dorjé, gathered the resources necessary to produce this text. May it spread throughout all of space and time, and may it bring good fortune! *Sarva mangalam!*

Tibetan Spellings

PHONETICS

Akyong Bum
Akyongza
Anzom Gar
Anyé Machen
Benak Monastery
Bön
Chakri Ömbar
Damé
Dartsang

Degé
Dewai Dorjé
Dodrupchen Monastery
Dong Dzongné
Dönli
Dorjé Drakzong
Dorjé Shiwatso
Drelzong
Drimé Özer
Drondul Pawo Dorjé
Düjom Jikdral Yeshé Dorjé
Dzakhok
Dzongtrul Rinpoché
Gara Terchen Pema Dundul Wangchuk
Lingpa
Gelek Palzangpo
Gojo
Golok
Gyalsé
Jadral Sangyé Dorjé
Jamgön Kongtrul
Jampa Gönpö
Jangchup Drön
Jikdral Chökyi Lodrö
Jikmé Tenpai Nyima
Jonang
Ju Kalzang
Kagyü
Khandro Yangzong
Khandro Rinpoché
Kanzé
Karma Lingpa

WYLIE TRANSLITERATION

a skyong 'bum
a skyong bza'
a 'dzom sgar
a myes rma chen
ban nag dgon (alt. ban yak dgon)
bon
lcags ri 'od 'bar
zla smad
zlar tshang (alt. gdar tshang, brda
tshang, brdar tshang)
sde dge
bde ba'i rdo rje
rdo grub chen dgon
sdong rdzong gnas
don li
rdo rje brag rdzong
rdo rje zhi ba mtsho
sprel rdzong
dri med 'od zer
'gro 'dul dpa' bo rdo rje
bdud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje
rdza khog
rdzong sprul rin po che
ngar ra gter chen pad+ma bdud 'dul
dbang phyug gling pa
dge legs dpal bzang po
go 'jo
mgo log
rgyal sras
bya bral sangs rgyas rdo rje
'jam gon kong sprul
byams pa mgon po
byang chub sgron
'jigs bral chos kyi blo gros
'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma
jo nang
'ju skal bzang
bka' rgyud
mkha' 'gro yang rdzong
mkha' 'gro rin po che
dkar mdzes
kar+ma gling pa

Khangdong Wönpo Gönwang	khang gdong dbon po mgon dbang
Kharchen	mkhar chen
Kharnang	mkhar nang
Kunga Buma/ Bumpa	kun dga' 'bum ma/ 'bum pa
Kunsalma	kun gsal ma
Kunzang Dekyong Chönyi Wangmo	kun bzang bde skyong chos nyid dbang mo
Kunzik Yeshé Wangmo	kun gzigs ye shes dbang mo
Kyung Draktsé	khyung brag rtse
Lingkar	gling dkar
Lhacham Chökyi Drönma	lha lcam chos kyi sgron ma
Machen Pomra	rma chen spom ra
Mar River	smar chu
Möndrup Asha Stüpa	smon 'grub a shwa mchod sdong
Namtrul Jikmé Phuntsok	nam sprul 'jigs med phun tshogs
Nyenchen (Thanglha)	gnyan chen (thang lha)
Pema Bum	pad+ma 'bum
Pema Drondul (Sangngak) Ling	pad+ma 'gro 'dul (gsang sngags) gling
Pema Lendrel	pad+ma las 'brel
Pema Lingpa	pad+ma gling pa
Pema Ritho	pad+ma ri mtho
Pema Tsokyi	pad+ma mtsho skyid
Rangjung	rang byung
Rikzang Gyurmé Trinlé	rik bzang 'gyur med phrin las
Rikzin Gyurmé Dorjé	rig 'dzin 'gyur med rdo rje
Riwoché	ri bo che
Riwoché Zhapdrung Tsewang	ri bo che zhabs drung tshe dbang
Drakpa	grags pa
Rolangderöl	ro langs bde rol
Saldrön	gsal sgron
Sanglung Monastery	gsang lung dgon
Sera Khandro	se ra mkha' 'gro
Sera (Thekchen Chökhör Ling) Monastery	se ra (theg chen chos 'khor gling) dgon
Serta	gser rta (alt. gser thar)
Sherap Özer	shes rab 'od zer
Sotrul Natsok Rangdröl	bsod sprul sna tshogs rang sgröl
Täré Lhamo	tā re lha mo
Tidro	ti gro
Tongra Drakar	stong ra brag dkar
Trinlé Tenzin	phrin las bstan 'dzin
Trom	khrom
Tsang Gar	rtsang sgar
Tsering Chönzom	tshe ring chos 'dzom
Tsultrim Dorjé	tshul khriims rdo rje
Üza Khandro	dbus bza' mkha' 'gro
Wangchen Bum	dbang chen 'bum
Washul	wa shul (alt. dbal shul)

Yangchen Drölma/ Chöying Drönma	dbyangs can sgron ma/ chos dbyings sgron ma
Yeshe Tsogyal	ye shes mtsho rgyal
Yudrönma	gyu sgron ma

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