



THE PRECIOUS TREASURY OF
PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS

Longchen Rabjam

THE PRECIOUS TREASURY OF
PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS

THE SEVEN TREASURIES SERIES

This series consists of the volumes written by Longchen Rabjam that, as a group, have come to be known as *The Seven Treasuries*. Although Longchenpa did not intend them to be a series, scholars traditionally treat them as such because of their interrelated themes.

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The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems

*A Treatise Elucidating the Meaning of the
Entire Range of Spiritual Approaches*



Longchen Rabjam

Translated by Richard Barron
(Lama Chökyi Nyima)



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Foreword

His Eminence Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche

The publication of Longchen Rabjam's *Seven Treasuries* should be a cause for rejoicing among deeply committed English-speaking Buddhists who aspire to realize the Dzogchen, or Great Perfection, teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism. Though there are many spiritual traditions in this world, Buddhism offers the deepest examination of what constitutes the root of samsara, and of how to deal with all levels of obscuration and attain liberation. Among Buddhist teachings, none are more profound, more capable of freeing the mind from its most subtle obscurations, than those of the Great Perfection.

Yet, because Great Perfection transmission leads to wisdom beyond words and concepts, the translation of Dzogchen texts presents tremendous difficulties. Some lamas have said that it is not even worth the attempt, that too much distortion results. I respect their opinion, but feel that those of us with the supreme fortune to have received authentic transmission from great Dzogchen masters have a responsibility to maintain the oral lineage, including the translation of texts, as well as the mind-to-mind lineage of realization. If we eschew this work, the precious Great Perfection teachings will remain inaccessible to some excellent Western practitioners who have potential as meditators but who do not know Tibetan. An avenue for the flourishing of the transmission will be cut off.

I am also gravely concerned about the translations of Great Perfection texts produced by Westerners who know Tibetan but who rely solely on scholarly knowledge, without recourse to teachers. Intellectual understanding alone, without the ripening process that takes place under the direction of qualified Dzogchen teachers, will certainly result in misguided translations, perpetuated in misguided meditation by those who base their spiritual practice on such translations. But again, if qualified

Dzogchen masters refrain from working on translations because they fear imperfect results, can they lament when even more erroneous translations are published?

The translator of these texts, Richard Barron (Lama Chökyi Nyima), has truly mastered both literary and spoken Tibetan, but his deeper understanding is based on an extended retreat under the guidance of His Eminence Kalu Rinpoche, on a number of six-week Dzogchen retreats, and on listening to and translating the teachings of many eminent lamas. He has translated other Great Perfection texts and sadhanas, notably Dudjom Lingpa's *Buddhahood Without Meditation*, under my direction. He thus brings more capability to his work than mere theoretical and intellectual competence.

While we have not necessarily produced flawless translations, we have confidence in this groundbreaking attempt. It should be understood that works of this kind are not casually read and easily comprehended. In fact, for most people, the texts are quite difficult to fathom; their meaning unfolds according to the depth of the reader's spiritual preparation. However, simply having these books in one's home is more valuable than having statues or stupas, for they are truly relics of the dharmakaya. Such holy works carry powerful blessings and are worthy objects of faith and devotion.

The project of translating Longchen Rabjam's *Seven Treasuries* is ongoing. We encourage anyone with knowledge and experience of the Great Perfection to contact us with suggestions, clarifications, or corrections, which we will consider for incorporation into future editions. May these precious texts illuminate the minds of all who read and venerate them.

Introduction

Venerable Tulku Thondup Rinpoche

All the teachings of Buddhism are contained in just one treatise:
The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems.

A treatise as sublime as this has never appeared before—
in either India or Tibet—

and it will never appear again. This I can assure you.¹

Paltrul Rinpoche

The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems (*Grub mtha' rin po che'i mdzod*) is one of *The Seven Treasuries* (*mDzod bdun*), the most renowned sacred treatises on Dzogchen composed by the omniscient master Longchen Rabjam (1308–1363).

Among these volumes, *The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems* and *The Precious Treasury of Wish Fulfillment* have long been studied in the sanctuaries of great monasteries and nunneries as part of the curriculum essential for mastering scholastic subjects and attaining meditative realization, as well as in the silent solitude of the high mountain caves of Nyingma yogis and yoginis.

The main focus and essence of *The Seven Treasuries* is Dzogchen, or Dzogpa Chenpo (Skt. *atiyoga*), the pinnacle of Buddhist teachings. However, *The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems* also elucidates in detail the philosophical views of the Hinayana, Mahayana (sutra), and Vajrayana (tantra) teachings of Buddhism.

Buddhism was born about twenty-six centuries ago in India, and Longchen Rabjam first briefly reviews the tenets of the five major phil-

¹ Abu Hralbo (Paltrul Rinpoche), *mDzod bdun la Ita bar bskul ba*, in *Paltul Sung bum*, vol. Ka, ff. 2a/3 (Sikhron Mirig Petrun Khang).

osophical traditions of the non-Buddhist schools of ancient India. The main thesis begins with the tenets of exoteric (sutra) or common Buddhism: the shravaka and pratyekabuddha schools of Hinayana, and the Chittamatra, Svatantrika Madhyamaka, and Prasangika Madhyamaka schools of Mahayana.

The master then expounds the tenets of esoteric (tantra), or Vajrayana, Buddhism in general and the four classes of tantra of the New Tantric, or Sarma, canon in particular. The new tantras are those followed by the Kagyü, Sakya, and Geluk schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Longchen Rabjam then analyzes the views of the three outer tantras: kriyatantra, charyatantra, and yogatantra, and especially the three inner tantras: mahayoga, anuyoga, and atiyoga from the Old Tantric canon. These are the tantras followed by the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. He explains the way in which each tenet is superior to the ones that precede it.

Dzogchen is based on three main principles: the basis (or ground), the path, and the result (or fruition). Self-arising wisdom, the absolute awareness of the ultimate sphere, is spontaneously present in all of us. So long as we are not enlightened, however, our wisdom is obscured by stains. That state is called "the basis." It is where we ordinary beings remain. Spiritual training that entails the two accumulations—those of merit and wisdom—purifies the emotional and intellectual stains of the basis. This process is called "the path." It is along this path that the *Treasury* guides us.

The perfection of this purification causes our own spontaneously present buddha nature to awaken and our buddha qualities to shine forth. This is called "the result," the goal of our attainment. From this perspective, the basis and the result share the same nature, although the basis is the aspect that is still obscured by stains, while the result is the aspect that is free of all stains.²

The primordial basis, self-arising wisdom, is itself free of the extremes of limiting concepts—existence, nonexistence, both, or neither. Its essence is emptiness, or openness, like the sky. Its nature is clear, like the light of the sun and moon. Its compassion, or power, is all-pervasive, like light. These three facets remain, indivisible, in the ultimate sphere, which is unchanging throughout beginningless time as the five aspects of buddha

² See Longchen Rabjam, *Grub mtha' rin po ch'ei mdzod* (Adzom ed.), ff.191b/4 and 185b/3.

wisdom and the three buddha bodies, or kayas. The essence as emptiness is the dharmakaya. The nature as clarity is the sambhogakaya. And all-pervasive compassion is the nirmanakaya.³

Readers might wonder, “Why do I need to study various tenets that focus on the accumulation of merit? I am interested only in wisdom, emptiness, and Dzogchen.” The reason is that although both merit and wisdom are indispensable for reaching and realizing the ultimate wisdom of Dzogchen, we must start our journey from where we are. If we still perceive mental objects with tight grasping, if we are still inflamed by negative emotions like greed, hatred, or jealousy, then we are largely ordinary people perpetuating the never-ending cycle of suffering that is the wheel of life. We need merit to first tame our afflictive mental states and emotions so that we may then concentrate on realizing the wisdom that destroys these at the root.

The accumulation of merit involves positive concepts such as virtuous thoughts, feelings, and deeds. To complete the accumulation of merit, we must follow the laws of karma, observe the three precepts, and serve all beings with compassion. The accumulation of wisdom is the realization of freedom from concepts, as well as the realization of emptiness and effortlessness. Buddhahood will be attained only through these two accumulations, and wisdom will be realized only with the support of merit.

Longchen Rabjam says:

So long as you haven't [even] suppressed your bad thoughts and purified your negative emotions, [views of] emptiness and effortlessness will not [yet] benefit you.⁴

In addition, he says:

If you have contempt for karma and favor mere blank emptiness, believing that dharma with “no effort” is the ultimate, then you are cheating yourself of the chance to train [make progress], as you will be rejecting the two accumulations. So train in the two accumulations; this is my heart advice.⁵

³ See *ibid.*, ff. 182b/4.

⁴ Longchen Rabjam, *Rang la gros su gdams pa*, in *gSung thor bu* (Adzom ed.), vol. 1, ff. 306/1.

⁵ Longchen Rabjam, *sNyung gtam sum bchu pa*, in *gSung thor bu* (Adzom ed.), vol. 1, ff. 357/4.

Paltrul Rinpoche writes:

[Realization] of the innate absolute wisdom comes as the result of having accumulated merit and purified the obscurations.⁶

Ultimately, we must unite the two accumulations, as Longchen Rabjam advises:

By observing the law of cause and effect in the state of emptiness, by preserving the three precepts through the realization of no effort, by serving beings through compassion that is free of concepts: train in the union of the two accumulations; this is my heart advice.⁷

To attain the two buddha bodies, dharmakaya (the ultimate body) and rupakaya (the form body), we must perfect the two accumulations. The master Nagarjuna, who codified the philosophy based on the Buddha's teachings on emptiness, explains:

The form body of the buddha is created by the accumulation of merit.

The ultimate body of the buddha is created mainly by the accumulation of wisdom.

Therefore, the two accumulations are the cause of the attainment of buddhahood.

So please always rely on merit and wisdom.⁸

The translation of all the volumes of *The Seven Treasuries* into English was one of the monumental projects envisioned by the late Dzogchen master Chagdud Rinpoche (1930–2002). The completion of four of the seven so far is a great contribution by Rinpoche's students to the fulfillment of his enlightened aspirations and is a great gift of blessings to all of us.

⁶ Paltrul Rinpoche, in *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung* (Sitron Mirig Petrun Khang, 1988), pp. 460/1.

⁷ Longchen Rabjam, *sNying gtam sum bchu pa*, in *gSung thor bu* (Adzom ed.), vol. 1, ff. 359/4.

⁸ Nagarjuna, *rGyal po la gtam bya ba rin po che'i phreng ba*, in *dBu ma rigs tshogs drug* (Buddha Educational Foundation, 2000), pp. 95/3.

As a humble devotee of the Omniscient Longchen Rabjam and his words of dharmakaya, I offer my heartfelt thanks to Chagdud Rinpoche for making this *Treasury* available in English. I also offer my gratitude to Lotsawa Chökyi Nyima, the Padma Publishing editorial and production teams, and all of the generous sponsors for making this historic translation project successful.

May the sunlight-like blessings of the Omniscient Longchen Rabjam, of all the lineage masters, and of the Dzogchen dharma protectors cause the flower-like hearts of compassion and wisdom of all beings to blossom, especially of those who may see, touch, hear, and enjoy the sacred words and profound meaning preserved in this precious volume.

Translator's Preface

The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems is the fourth volume to be translated in Longchenpa's *Seven Treasuries* series envisaged by the late Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche. The title of the work is slightly misleading, as only the third of the eight chapters discusses the tenets of Buddhist philosophy; the scope of this book is, in fact, much wider.

The structure of *The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems* is traditional. Longchenpa begins in Chapter 1 with a discussion of the coming of the Buddha into this world, interpreting this phenomenon according to various levels of Buddhist teachings. He uses the term "Buddha" to refer not merely to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, but to the totality of the three kayas, which is consistent with the Dzogchen teachings that remain Longchenpa's primary focus throughout *The Seven Treasuries*.

Chapter 2 examines the origin and development of the Buddhist teachings. It includes a discussion of the roles of teacher and student, for in spite of their complexity, the teachings were never meant to have a purely academic focus, but to entail a process of application and personal transformation.

Longchenpa continues to develop this theme in Chapter 3, perhaps the most challenging part of the book, in which he introduces the tenets of traditional systems of philosophy, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. The Tibetan understanding of the latter systems was based on Tibetan translations of Indian Buddhist commentaries, which tended to quote non-Buddhist authorities out of context and to present their tenets in a cursory and less than flattering light. Historically, Tibetan treatments of the Indian philosophical tradition have been confined to analyses of that tradition as it existed at the time of Buddha Shakyamuni and have been for the most part based on Indian Buddhist sources that cite non-Buddhist scriptures,

rather than on those scriptures themselves. It is nevertheless instructive to examine the perspective from which masters such as Longchenpa discussed traditional alternatives to the Buddha's message.

Turning his attention in the same chapter to the four major philosophical trends in the Indian Buddhist tradition, Longchenpa not only presents the tenets of each system, but also critiques the three lower schools, in each case from the perspective of the next stage in the development of Buddhist philosophical inquiry. His approach is to subject the view of a given system to a higher order of reasoning, so that one is led to more authentic conclusions concerning the ultimate nature of reality. In this sense, the progression from the materialist positions through the Chittamatra (Mind Only) system and culminating in the Madhyamaka (Superior) system serves as a model for the maturation of an individual's philosophical outlook.

Given that the philosophical underpinnings of Buddhist thought are never intended to be an end in themselves, in the remaining five chapters Longchenpa outlines the stages and principles of the "transcendent paths"—those that lead to some degree of insight and enlightenment beyond the confines of samsara. After examining the paths of the sutra approach (those of the shravaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva) in Chapter 4 and providing a general introduction to the Vajrayana in Chapter 5, he turns in Chapter 6 to the classes of Vajrayana teachings transmitted by the Sarma tradition (comprising those schools that developed from the tenth and eleventh centuries onward). During Longchenpa's lifetime, before sectarian conflict became a more prominent feature of the Tibetan cultural and religious landscape, there was a great deal of interaction between teachers of the various traditions; these flourished in the wake of new translations of Indian sources, a period that began with the great translator Rinchen Zangpo in the eleventh century. Longchenpa's primary affiliation was with the Nyingma tradition, in which he trained under a number of masters, foremost among them his main guru, Kumardza. However, earlier in his life, he also sought out such Sarma masters as the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé (1284–1339), of the Kagyü tradition, and the Sakya master Yakdé Panchen (1299–1378). In Chapters 5 and 6, Longchenpa draws on the knowledge he acquired during this eclectic period of his life.

The two final chapters of the *Treasury* concern the Nyingma teachings on the Vajrayana, according to the Nyingma model of the "three yogas":

mahayoga, anuyoga, and atiyoga. Chapter 7 provides an overview of these teachings, while Chapter 8 focuses on the transmission Longchenpa received from Kumaradza, the pinnacle approach of “the most secret and unsurpassable cycle” of teachings unique to the Category of Direct Transmission in atiyoga.

Throughout the text, Longchenpa cites a large number of scriptural sources, and where feasible I have attempted to locate the passages in the original texts and to give citations in the notes. The Sources Cited gives information on texts that are readily found in published collections, but given the Tibetan penchant for referring to a given text by more than one title, and even by what amount to popular nicknames, the identification of sources can often be problematic. Longchenpa quotes from memory, drawing on his years of study in monastic colleges, and so he occasionally cites a source incorrectly; where possible, I have noted the source in which a citation is actually to be found. Moreover, Longchenpa sometimes cites a verse from a lengthy scriptural source, making a search for the relevant passage extremely difficult; hence such sources are not cited in the notes.

Certain passages that Longchenpa quotes differ from those in texts that are currently in common use. It was only during Longchenpa's lifetime that Butön Rinchen Drup (1290–1364), who passed away in the same year as Longchenpa, made a systematic effort to catalog the works that were to be considered authentic teachings of the Buddha and thus established the “official” edition of the Kangyur, the Tibetan canon of the Buddha's words. In doing so, Butön chose certain translations of Indian sources over others, and even excluded entire groups of texts. In particular, he omitted all of the Nyingma tantras, none of which were included in the Kangyur until the Dergé edition was prepared under the more tolerant direction of the Kagyü master Situ Panchen Chökyi Jungné (1700–1774). Thus, it is possible that many of the sources cited by Longchenpa were never included in the official canon and are no longer available. As well, given that the Tibetan translations that became the standards were codified only during Longchenpa's lifetime, it is entirely possible that when he cites a passage that differs somewhat from the “standard” version, he is referring to an alternative translation that was omitted from the Kangyur and so never gained currency.

The language of *The Treasury of Philosophical Systems* is fairly straightforward, with one notable exception: that of Chapter 3, which presents the tenets of the four traditional schools of Buddhist philosophy.

Like philosophers worldwide, Buddhists developed their own highly specialized vocabulary and syntax for discussing the issues they deemed important. Added to this is the fact that Longchenpa wrote almost eight centuries ago and that he used a somewhat idiosyncratic style of argument in presenting these tenets. His treatment of the four schools presupposes a great familiarity with the subject matter on the part of his reader, and it has been necessary to augment the translation with endnotes to help guide the reader through the often intricate issues involved. I have adopted a somewhat free approach to rendering these passages, rather than translating so literally as to make them almost inaccessible.

As with the other volumes in *The Seven Treasuries*, the sources are three Tibetan editions of the text. Two are printed from wood blocks carved at Adzom Chögar in eastern Tibet in the late nineteenth century; one, based on the original blocks, was published as a photo offset reproduction in Gangtok, Sikkim, by H.H. Dodrupchen Rinpoche; the other was printed in the 1980s, by which time the blocks had been slightly reedited. The third edition is a photo offset of blocks carved at the printery of Dergé in eastern Tibet, published by Sherab Gyaltzen and Khentse Labrang.

The translation of *The Treasury of Philosophical Systems* has been a very challenging and rewarding process that began in 1987, when Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche first set in motion the project of translating *The Seven Treasuries* into English. Over the years, a number of Tibetan scholars and masters have contributed their knowledge to the task. I am grateful to the late Chagdud Rinpoche for overseeing the project, as well as for providing clear explanations of difficult passages. Others who contributed substantially to the accuracy of this translation were Yön-gé Mingyur Rinpoché, Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso, the late Khenpo Gyurmed Tingley, and Lama Sonam Tsering. Special thanks go to Khentrul Lodrö Tayé Rinpoche for his patient and insightful help. It goes without saying that any errors in this translation are entirely my own.

I am deeply indebted to the following people for their help in bringing this project to completion: Susanne Fairclough, for assisting with the translation; Robert Racine (Lama Orgyen Zangpo), for carefully reading and commenting on the text; Mary Racine, for editing and proofreading; and Linda Baer, for typesetting and production.