

I: “Prophecies Arisen from Experience” by the 5th Karmapa Dezhin Shegpa – a translation



The following is a translated excerpt from Chapter 16 of *The Biography of the 5th Karmapa Dezhin Shegpa*. It is an old-style, devotional biography, which is evident in its metaphoric tone. The translators have tried to preserve the original flavour of the writing in these translations. In the Tibetan original, the writing is not separated into verses and paragraphs as it is here. A photocopy of the Tibetan woodblock print can be found in Appendix D-1. (All footnotes are mine.)

One night, Karmapa was in the jewelled garden² without ever departing from the Dharmadhatu³ mind. Through the ear consciousness of his wisdom, Karmapa Dezhin Shegpa heard a human voice in very sad supplication; it was an appeal to him for help. He tried to identify the voice through his wisdom mind. At first, he thought it might be someone just outside on the grounds. He opened the window to check, but saw no one. Concentrating more deeply, he realised that the plea was coming from one of his earlier disciples, who was in the area of Wog Min Sachod Karma, or Karma Gon in Kham in east Tibet.⁴

Karmapa continued to concentrate in order to learn more, and came to understand that the disciple was Shen Yeshe Nyingpo, who had studied and practised under him since the age of eighteen, and who had received the entire oral transmissions of the Kagyu Lineage.

At the time, Shen Yeshe Nyingpo was meditating in a cave. Suddenly, a young woman wearing white shorts appeared to him. She told him that he should engage in sexual union. She also predicted that he would go to a land of nirvana.⁵ Then she disappeared.

Because Shen was practising the pure Vinaya⁶ discipline, he interpreted the vision to be a disruption to his discipline. With great devotion and in tears, he called out Karmapa’s name hundreds of times.

Miraculously, quick as a bolt of lightning, Karmapa appeared riding a snow lion, in the sky outside of Shen’s cave. When Shen saw Karmapa in the moonlit sky, he was overcome by the sheer fervour of his devotion, and fainted for a short time. When he recovered, he prostrated himself on the ground.

Karmapa then spoke these words:

“Why did you cry out for me in such a sad voice? There is no one who calls, and no one being called in self-liberating Mahamudra. There is nothing to focus on, no obstacle in non-dualistic Maha Ati.”

Shen Yeshe Nyingpo offered prayers to the Buddha. He then told Karmapa of his vision, which he thought might be an obstacle to his Vinaya conduct.

Karmapa responded:

“Don’t worry. You don’t understand what is poison, and what is medicine. Your vision is a dakini’s⁷ prediction that your hereditary line will continue. It means the time is now ripe for you to go into tantric practice. In the past,

² A metaphor for Karmapa’s room at Tsurphu Monastery.

³ A state of mind that is in non-dualistic meditation.

⁴ Karma Gon is situated thousands of miles from Tsurphu Monastery.

⁵ Nirvana is an enlightened state.

⁶ Vinaya is a code of conduct that consists of 253 commitments of which abstinence from sex is one.

⁷ A dakini is a female non-human yogi who engages in tantric practices.

your predecessors' work greatly benefited sentient beings.⁸ Moreover, due to the wishes that you have made to the Buddha, your hereditary line will continue until the end of the world.

You are a descendant of a great line of Indian Buddhist masters, such as Tsamaripa, and Drombhipa. Your ancestors later came to Tibet. You are also related to Garlon, the minister of Songtsen Gampo, and another minister, Shubu Palseng. The lineage branched out into many lines. One of them, who belonged to a very high caste (among the five highest), came to Kham (east Tibet). The famous lama, Sergyi Nyima Lhadar was of this lineage. His line passed to the yogi, Bon Dorje Gyaltzen Pal Drub, who attained siddha⁹ in his lifetime.

One day, the amrita¹⁰ in Bon Dorje Gyaltzen's kapala¹¹ turned white and red. Thinking it dirty, the yogi's monks tossed it outside. A horse happened to lick this amrita, and in the next instant, it took to the sky. Then the yogi-lama appeared, and mounted the horse in midair. They flew together to Mount Meru.¹² In this way, the yogi Bon Dorje Gyaltzen demonstrated that he was enlightened.

Yogi Bon Dorje Gyaltzen had a son, Shen Bon Dharma. Their line continued through 21 generations altogether, and included three kings as well as many who achieved enlightenment. Great stories have been told and written about them.”

This was how Karmapa described Yeshe Nyingpo's ancestry to him. Karmapa then continued:

“Up until the 21st generation, all members of this line were mahasiddhas¹³ with many tertons¹⁴ among them.”

(Biographer's note: The details concerning these mahasiddhas are contained in the collection of the 5th Karmapa's books. Therefore, there is no need to recount them here.)

“The name of the 22nd descendant was Kunga. From Shen Kunga up until you, Shen Lama, all of you supported the Buddha-dharma and helped other sentient beings in their quest for enlightenment. Shen Lama, you are a very special person.

It is in your genes that neither weapons nor poisons can harm you. As described in the dharma doctrines, you have the special “Seven Brahma Charya gene.”¹⁵ The gene carries such blessings that you will not fall into the lower realms.¹⁶ Even though you now intend to be a monk of the Vinaya, it would indeed be beneficial for sentient beings should you continue the

⁸ By “sentient beings,” the 5th Karmapa is referring to living beings that are trapped in the cycle of suffering, those who have not attained enlightenment.

⁹ Siddha means one who has attained a high level of enlightenment.

¹⁰ sacred liquid

¹¹ skull cup

¹² In Buddhist cosmology, Mount Meru represents the center of the universe, believed to be the abode of gods and deities.

¹³ Maha means great, while Mahasiddha describes a siddha who has achieved great level of enlightenment.

¹⁴ A terton is usually an accomplished Buddhist master who finds and reveals hidden Buddhist teachings and treasures.

¹⁵ The Seven Brahma Charya gene is believed to be the result of sustained pure conduct for seven generations.

¹⁶ The lower realms are the “animal,” “hungry ghost,” and “hell” realms.

special legacy of your hereditary line. Therefore, listen to me, and propagate your line.”

Karmapa’s right hand touched Shen Yeshe Nyingpo’s head, and he began to give his predictions for the future:

“Listen, my disciple Yeshe Nyingpo, it is very rare to encounter the secret Vajrayana methods, which are like flowers in the sky. It is wonderful that you should come to meet them now.

The dialectical dharma will continue anywhere, and at anytime. The fruitful supreme dharma¹⁷ did not happen in the past and it will not happen in the future. This was said by the great Ogyen.¹⁸

Buddha Kashyapa did not teach the Tantra; neither did the hundreds of millions of Buddhas in the past, nor will the future Buddhas teach it. The great Tantra was contained in the Buddha Shakyamuni’s Dharma.

By the practice of logical dharma, one will be enlightened after many aeons. But the fruition of the dharma of Tantra will offer up enlightenment within one lifetime. Therefore, you should practise the Tantra.

In order to release the knots of the nadis¹⁹, you should employ the karma mudra practice. Acquire the help from the wisdom dakini to accelerate your attainment of enlightenment.

Don’t allow your hereditary line to be cut off. Help it to carry on as it did in the past. Keep this in your heart.

I will tell you now what will happen in the future:

The reincarnations of the Black Crown holder will continue until the 25th generation. This was predicted by Ogyen.

According to the dakini’s prediction as told to me, the Karmapas will continue until the 25th reincarnation. At that time, the activities of the one called “Karmapa” for the welfare of living beings in this world, will come to an end. He will go to the land of Sambhogakhaya²⁰ for the sake of other sentient beings.

However, in every universe, Karmapa’s emanations will continue like rain for the benefit of sentient beings. Keep this in mind.

From now on, in the successive Karmapas the turning point will be the 16th, same as the 17th, the general Buddha Dharma including the Karma Kagyu doctrine will be like horseflies at the end of the season.²¹

The line of the sky-appointed emperors of the East will end. Any outsider will try to take over that country.

Faraway invaders will flood in from the east and the north. Tibet will be encircled in a ring.

The reign of the king of central Tibet will come to an end.

¹⁷ Dialectical Dharma are methods to attain enlightenment through philosophical theories, advice, and explanations. The Fruitful Supreme Dharma are methods that directly engage one in the fruit or result of the Dharma, as opposed to methods that lead one gradually towards enlightenment.

¹⁸ The great Ogyen refers to an eighth-century Tibetan saint known as the “the Lotus-Born One.” He is also called Guru Padmasambhava, Guru Padma Jungney, or Guru Rinpoche. See Chapter 4 for his predictions.

¹⁹ The source of the fruitful dharma is said to be associated with the nadis, which are inner subtle channels or veins in the body that are not physical in nature.

²⁰ One of the three aspects of manifestations of a Buddha in order to benefit sentient beings. It is perceptible only to highly realized beings, who have vowed to lead sentient beings out of the suffering realms, called bodhisattvas.

²¹ This means very weak, like horseflies at the end of their life cycle.

Whatever you do will be considered wrong.
Those to whom you speak will contradict you.
Good conduct will vanish and the bad will abound.
The moving machines of the faraway invaders will fly in the sky, watching over the land.
When such bad conditions are happening, no happiness or peace of mind shall be found.
Even then, do not succumb to the agony.
Never be separated from the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha²².
Remain in the hidden places and practise Mahamudra!²³

As Karmapa Dezhin Shegpa was speaking those words, Shen Yeshe Nyingpo was walking around him and prostrating himself. When Karmapa had finished speaking, Shen Yeshe Nyingpo asked:

“Ema!²⁴ Victorious, omniscient Karmapa, you who are like a second Buddha, when these bad times are occurring, what will happen to this seat?²⁵ What are the best ways to reverse these negative conditions? How many beings will guide the fortunate students? What changes of decline and growth will take place at this seat founded by the noble Dusum Khyenpa (the 1st Karmapa)? I request you to please tell me what to accept as beneficial and what to reject as negative everywhere in this country.”

The noble one Dezhin Shegpa said,

“Yeshe Nyingpo, listen!
From now on until the 14th same as the 15th (Karmapa) who has the name Vajra (or Dorje), this seat will grow and flourish.
Afterwards, the Buddhist Doctrine will decline in general. And this seat will (decline) in the same way.
However, due to the power of the vast aspirations I have generated, this seat will not be empty until the doctrine of the Victorious One ends.
This seat will cease to exist only when the entire Buddhist Doctrine ceases.
Until then, there will be alternate periods of decline and growth.
From here, in a lower part of Dokham²⁶ called Derge²⁷, in a place of the ten virtues²⁸, a king with (exceptional) karma will sustain the Doctrine.
During his reign, happiness will prevail in the whole of Dokham. Upon his passing away, Derge will decline.

²² *The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are referred to as the “Triple Gem.” Sangha in this context refers to the assembly of realized/enlightened beings. In general, sangha depicts a monastic community, or a community of people who practise the Dharma.*

²³ *The essential view, and meditation of the Karma Kagyu School.*

²⁴ *An address that conveys a sense of wonder, much like the colloquial “wow!”*

²⁵ *Karma Gon Monastery*

²⁶ *Dokham refers to a general area in eastern Tibet where lords and local kings ruled over separate, small tracts of land.*

²⁷ *Derge here refers to the kingdom of Derge in East Tibet. The king of that territory was Chogyal Tenpa Tsering (1678-1738), who built the biggest library in Tibet.*

²⁸ *The ten virtues are cultivated as a means to purify the self, to accumulate positive causes and to help one to live an unobstructed life. The ten virtues are: 1. integrity 2. patience 3. vigilance 4. renunciation 5. transcendental wisdom 6. compassion 7. determination 8. power 9. generosity 10. truthfulness.*

At that time in his country, a monastery with the name “Pal” will be built.
And an emanation²⁹ of “Dro Gon Rechen”³⁰ will take charge.

At that time, two individuals who resemble the sun and the moon will appear at the same time. Their names will have the initials Ka and Kha. And those associated with them will not return (to samsara).

In the place called Gomde,³¹ a fragment of Avalokiteshvara’s light will, in secret, manifest as the king of Gomde.

During his time, there will be happiness there.

Upon his passing, Gomde will decline.

In the area of Dokham Sarmo Gang, an individual with (exceptional) karma, endowed with the complexion of the autumn moon, will appear, his mind perfect within the unchanging Dharmadhatu.

He will lead all associated with him to (the realm called) Lotus Light.

Upon his passing, Dokham will decline.

At this seat called Sala Chodpa (Karma Gon), a manifestation of an arhat³² will come, wearing an orange dharma robe.

All connections with him will be meaningful.

Upon his passing, he will dissolve into the expanse of Vimalamitra’s enlightened mind.

In the line (of Karmapas) with the name, Vajra, the one called Mikyo,³³ is a perfect Buddha in human form, unparalleled and beyond description.

By his great mind, the flourishing of Buddha Dharma will be prolonged. It will continue two thirds longer in time than it would have otherwise.

In the successive line of Karmapas, during the latter part of the 16th Karmapa’s life, and at the beginning of the 17th, the emanation of one who has broken Vajrayana vows, a lama who has the name of “Natha” will appear at this seat of Karma Gon.

By the effect and power of that wrong wish, the Karma Kagyu Lineage/Doctrine (will be) nearly destroyed at that time.

At that time, someone who has made wishes in the past, an emanation of Guru Padmasambhava’s mind/heart will appear from the west.

He has a circular line of moles on his chest and a wrathful temperament.

From his mouth come wrathful words, or the mantra of the wrathful deities.

He has a dark complexion and two eyes bulging, or prominently shaped.

That one (he) will defeat the emanation of the one who has violated the Vajrayana vows.

Through that person, the region of Tibet will be protected for some time, during which there will be some happiness like having a glimpse of the sun.

Here is what will happen in the country of Tibet.

²⁹ The emanation is believed to be the 8th Situ Chokyi Jungney (1700-1774).

³⁰ Dro Gon Rechen was a disciple of the 1st Karmapa Dusum Khyenpa.

³¹ A kingdom of Nangchen

³² An arhat, or lohan in Chinese, is one who has attained personal liberation from the endless cycle of birth and rebirth, but has not yet reached complete enlightenment. In the passage, the name of that arhat’s manifestation was Khenchen Tashi Wozer.

³³ The 8th Karmapa Mikyo Dorje

Even if great beings manifest as the Buddha's doctrine is declining, it will be difficult for happiness to arise since the aspirations of evil have come to fruition.

In Central Tibet, the king will lose (his power) and an evil emanation will manifest as a minister coming from Kongpo.

Central Tibet will be in a state of warfare, and its government will fall.

Many faraway invaders not previously there will suddenly cover the land in great numbers.

People will be deceived by evil in these bad times.

They will take no interest in the dharma while consumed by suffering.

Everywhere – be it in the upper, middle, or lower parts – there will be fighting everywhere.

A flow of blood will spring forth from the battlefields.

Due to these disputes, agitation and fighting, a place of harmony and happiness will not be found.

Because of poverty and forced labour, a place of riches and ease will not be found.

Due to torture and imprisonment, a place of liberty will not be found.

It is not that the Triple Gem,³⁴ the Three Roots, and the Protectors will not be able to generate blessings.

Rather, conflict will arise from the collective karma of living beings, by strong and evil aspirations, and by the decline of the times.

At that time, the sacred dharma of the secret Mantrayana will be powerful and it will rapidly bring blessing.

From the speech of the great Ogyen (Guru Padmasambhava), when the flames of bad times are rising, so will the power of Mantrayana soar like flames.

Therefore, you should practise accordingly.

Moreover, the activity holder of the Buddha of the three times, as well as the protector of the Kali Yuga³⁵ beings, Guru Padma Jungney³⁶ is the only one.

You should meditate on him above your head³⁷, and supplicate to him.

There is no better remedy than this.

Drop the many discriminations of “needing this” and “not needing that.” This is the most reliable and it is enough.

It will not deceive due to the blessings of the Triple Gem.

Your belief should be unshakeable as a rock.

Be free of all doubts.

Any good that you do will bring about the fitting result, just like sunlight that enters according to the size of the window.

³⁴ *The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha*

³⁵ *The Age or Period of Vice.*

³⁶ *Guru Padmasambhava*

³⁷ *This refers to a meditation practice where one visualizes Guru Padmasambhava appearing above one's head, and mentally focuses on the visualized image.*

Therefore, think of all sentient beings as your parents, and continue to repay their kindnesses.”

Karmapa then taught Shen Yeshe Nyingpo the very special methods of meditation called “Placing at the Spot the End of Phenomena.”

In an instant, Karmapa Dezhin Shegpa returned to his place in Tsurphu by using his penetrating wisdom, and without any physical effort.

Later, Shen Yeshe Nyingpo married an eighteen-year-old girl from the southern part of Kham named Sonam Lhamo. She possessed all the signs of a dakini, one of which was a blue mole in the centre of her forehead shaped like a half-moon.

Shen Yeshe Nyingpo practised the Vajrayana Tantra just as the 5th Karmapa had instructed. He and his wife had a son called Shen Dhawod, who had a son called Shen Rabzang, and he had a son called Shen Serwod Rabgye.

Shen Serwod Rabgye served the dharma activities of the Karma Kagyu very well. He built a house between two rivers. Ever since, the Shen family has continued as a line of lay practitioners.

(Biographer’s notes: There is a place called Chudo near Karma Gon in east Tibet. “Chudo” means the meeting point of two rivers. A family by the name of “Shen” resides there as this text is being written. Terchen Rinpoche and the 14th Karmapa Thegchog Dorje (1798-1868) both confirmed this family’s special lineage; the scribe Khenpo Ratna recorded their confirmation.)