

༄༅། །འདའ་དཀའ་མའི་རྡོ་རྗེའི་ཐོལ་སྒྲུ་ཐུར་ལམ་གཤམ་སྐྱེས།

**The Ladder of the Swift Path:
A Spontaneous Vajra Song on the Difficult
Moment of Passing**

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo



KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

This text includes Vajrayāna content. Please be aware that some Vajrayāna texts may only be fully understood and appreciated through receiving the necessary empowerments, transmissions, or practice instructions from a qualified teacher.

'da' dka' ma'i rdo rje'i thol glu myur lam them skas

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Khyentse Vision Project: Translating the Works of
Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This composition is an example of the rich Tibetan literary genre of spontaneous song, in which the composer demonstrates their profound realization and insight, right there on the spot, without deliberation. *The Ladder of the Swift Path: A Spontaneous Vajra Song on the Difficult Moment of Passing*¹ is notable in this genre for also being a condensation of a major section of one of the most important Dzogchen meditation manuals, Jigme Lingpa's *Yeshe Lama*.²

The *Yeshe Lama* is renowned in the Nyingma tradition for its comprehensive exegesis of the view, meditation, and conduct of Dzogchen, from the preliminary practices up to the paths of cutting through (*trekchö*) and direct crossing (*tögal*). The *Yeshe Lama* is also a compendium of *upadeśa*, or personal instructions, with practical guidance on how a meditator should work with their mind in relation to specific situations. The last part of the work is dedicated to priming the practitioner for their inevitable death and journey through the bardos, a range of transitory experiences that provide the Dzogchen practitioner with particularly powerful opportunities to attain liberation. It is this substantial part of the *Yeshe Lama* that *The Ladder of the Swift Path* encapsulates—in particular, the sections guiding the meditator through the bardo of the moment of death, the dazzling bardo of dharmatā, and the bardo of becoming, during the journey to a new embodied existence.

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo does not provide many details about the circumstances of this song. The colophon simply says that it was sung spontaneously in response to someone's exhortation, presumably a question about how to practice in the face of death. Unlike many songs and prayers, the verses are not presented in neat stanzas—a common Tibetan poetic convention in which each quatrain conveys a particular idea and is capped by a verbal action. In this song, each line contains seven or eight syllables, and they flow rather freely; some points are presented concisely, while others develop over many lines.

In the opening lines, Khyentse Wangpo supplicates his guru, thereby reflecting the core focus of the Vajrayāna that one's primary recourse in any situation is guru yoga. He then describes the attitude and visualizations common to the teachings of the practice of consciousness transference (*powa*), particularly regarding the pure land of Amitābha Buddha. This is usually considered the most reliable avenue to liberation at the time of death, as well as a way to avoid the tribulations of the bardos.

Next, he expounds on the bardo of death, particularly the progressive stages of dissolution undergone by the various energies in the ordinary body and the subtle body. These are topics found in many bardo guidebooks, including the famous *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Bardo Tödröl*)³ and Tsele Natsok Rangdrol's *Mirror of Mindfulness*.⁴

After this narration of the journey through the bardo of dying, the middle part of the song focuses on the bardo of dharmatā, in which reality expresses itself dramatically to a mind that is no longer limited by its former corporeal apparatus. During this bardo, the mind of the deceased undergoes further, extremely subtle processes of dissolution. An especially profound gateway to liberation opens for the practitioner who has achieved some acuity in the practice of Dzogchen, in particular the visions of the path of *tögal*.

Finally, the song offers consolation to those who may falter in the bardo of dharmatā and find themselves riding the momentum of karma toward the bardo of becoming or taking a new rebirth. At this stage, one draws from the reservoir of their Dharmic habits and aspirations. The door to the pure realms is still open, but even if one falters again, it should still be possible to secure an auspicious rebirth that allows resumption of the path to liberation.

ཐུར་ལམ་བེམ་སྐལ།

The Ladder of the Swift Path

ཨ་ཧྲོ།

a ho

A ho!

པ་སྐྱ་བཞིའི་དབང་ལྷག་དོ་རྩེ་འཆང་།།

pa ku zhi wangchuk dorjéchang

Father, lord of the four kāyas, Vajradhara,

དོན་རང་སེམས་དེ་བོར་དབྱེར་མེད་པར།།

dön rangsem ngowor yermé par

In reality inseparable from the essence of my own mind—

ཡིད་དད་བརྒྱའི་སྒོ་ནས་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས།།

yi dé gyé go né sölwa deb

I pray to you in a hundred ways with a mind of faith,

རྗེ་འདི་ལ་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཐོབ་པར་ཤོག།

ten di la jangchub tobpar shok

May I attain enlightenment in this very body!

ཡང་རང་གཞན་འཆི་ལ་ཉེར་སྤྱོད་གས་པའི།།

yang rangzhen chi la nyer chogpé

As you and others draw nearer to death,

ཅི་བྱ་གཏོལ་མེད་སྒྲོ་གས་ཀྱིས།།

chi ja tölmé kyo shé kyī

You will be tormented by the anguish of helpless uncertainty.

གདུངས་ཀྱང་ཐབས་གཞན་བྲལ་བའི་ཕྱིར།།

dung kyang tab zhen dralwé chir

Since other methods will elude you,

ཟབ་ལམ་གདམས་པའི་དབྱངས་གཅིག་ལེན།།

zab lam dampé yang chik len

Let me sing a song of instructions about the profound path.

ནམ་ཞིག་དུས་ལ་བབས་པའི་ཚེ།།

namzhik dü la babpé tsé

When your time eventually comes,

སྨི་གཙུག་བདེ་ཆེན་འཁོར་ལོ་རུ།།

chitsuk dechen khorlo ru

Immediately visualize, with devotion,

ངོ་བོ་དྲིན་ཆེན་སྒྲ་མ་ལ།།

ngowo drin chen lama la

Above the bliss cakra at the crown of your head

རྣམ་པ་མགོན་པོ་འོད་དཔག་མེད།།

nampa gönpo öpagmé

The form of the protector Amitābha,

སྐད་ཅིག་གིས་གསལ་གདབ་མོས་གྲུས་བཅས།།

ké chik gi sal dab mö gü ché

Who in essence is your guru of great kindness,

ལུས་ལོངས་སྦྱོད་དག་རྩ་ཡོངས་སུ་འབུལ།།

lū longchö gé tsa yong su bül

And fully offer your body, enjoyments, and virtues.

ཆགས་ཞེན་གྱི་འཁྲི་བ་བཅད་ནས་ཀྱང་།།

chak zhen gyi triwa ché né kyang

Cutting through the entanglements of desire and attachment,

ལྷུར་ལམ་འཕོ་བའི་གདམས་པ་ཡིས།།

nyur lam powé dampa yi

And using the instructions on the swift path of transference,

རིག་པ་རྫི་ཡིག་གི་རྣམ་པར་འཕང་།།

rigpa hri yik gi nampar pang

Project your awareness in the form of the syllable HRIḤ.

དབྱེར་མེད་དུ་བསྐྱེས་ལ་མཉམ་པར་བཞག།

yermé du sé la nyampar zhak

As it inseparably mixes with the mind of the guru, rest in equipoise.⁵

ཐབས་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རླུང་རྣམས་ཕྱིར་འགོ་ཚེ།།

tab shé kyi lung nam chir dro tsé

When you expel it with the winds of method and wisdom,⁶

གཤུག་མ་སེམས་ཀྱི་རོ་བོ་དང་།།

nyugma sem kyi ngowo dang

The essence of innate mind

ཕྱི་རོལ་གྱི་འཁའ་དབྱིངས་དབྱེར་མེད་བསྐྱེས།།

chi röl gyi khaying yermé sé

Mixes inseparably with the expanse of space outside.

ནམ་མཁའ་སྐྱམ་སྐྱུག་སྐྱབས་སུ་འདུག།

namkha sum truk bub su juk

Hold threefold space in the hollow!⁷

དེ་ཟབ་མོའི་ལམ་གྱི་བརྒྱད་ཐིག་ཡིན།།

dé zabmō lam gyi chü tik yin

That is the quintessence of the profound path.

འཆི་བ་ཞེས་སྐྱབས་བསྐྱེད་ཕུང་པོ་དེ།།

chiwa zhé dugngal pungpo dé

That bundle of suffering labeled “death,”

དོན་བརྟག་ན་མཉམ་བཞག་རྗེས་ཐོབ་ཅོམ།།

dön tak na nyamzhak jetob tsam

If you examine its meaning, is merely meditation and post-meditation. [586]

ཐོག་མེད་ནས་ད་ལྟ་འི་བར་འཁོར་ཡང་།།

tokmé né da té bar khor yang

Although we circle in saṃsāra from beginningless time until now,

བདེ་གཤེགས་སྤྱིང་པོ་ལ་སྐྱེ་འཆིས་དབེན་།།

deshek nyingpo la kyechi en

Buddha nature has no birth or death.

རྫོག་མེད་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ལ་གོམས་པས་།།

dorjé naljor la gompé

By cultivating the vajra yogas

སྐྱར་ལམ་གྱི་ཐེམ་ལ་འཛུགས་པ་རྣམས་།།

nyur lam kyi tem la dzegpa nam

Within the scope of creation and completion,

བསྐྱེད་རྫོགས་གྱི་རང་དུ་གྲོལ་བ་དང་།།

kyé dzok kyi ngang du drölwa dang

Those who climb the ladder of the swift path

དག་པའི་ཞིང་དུ་འཁྲིད་བྱེད་ཡིན་།།

dagpé zhing du tri jé yin

Are led to liberation and the pure realms.

དེ་ཕྱིར་སྐྱོ་གས་རབ་སྤངས་ལ་།།

dechir kyoshé rab pang la

Therefore, shake off your weariness

དགའ་དང་སྤྱོད་བའི་སེམས་ཀྱིས་སུ།།

ga dang trowé sem kyi su

And with a joyful and inspired mind

ལུབ་བདེ་བ་ཅན་དང་པདྨ་འོད་།།

nub dewachen dang pema ö

Direct your awareness to pure worlds and the inhabitants therein—

བེདྲུ་སྤྱང་ཞིང་ལ་སོགས་།།

baidurya nang zhing la sok

The buddha fields of Great Bliss and Lotus Light in the west,

དག་པའི་སྒྲོན་བཟུང་ལ་རིག་པ་གཏང།
dakpé nöchü la rigpa té
Lapis Lazuli Light, and the rest!

ལུས་ངག་ཡིད་གསུམ་གཡོ་མེད་དུ།
lü ngak kyi sum yomé du
With body, speech, and mind unwavering

རང་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གོམས་པའི་བསྐྱེད་རྫོགས་ལ།
rang nyi kyi gompé kyé dzok la
In your creation and completion practice,

ཚེ་གཅིག་དུ་མཉམ་བཞག་གནད་ཀྱི་གཟེར།
tsé chik tu nyamzhak né kyi zer
Strike the vital point of one-pointed meditative equipoise!

དེ་འདའ་དཀའི་གདམས་པའི་ཟབ་གསང་ཡིན།
dé da ké dampé zab sang yin
That is the profound secret of the instructions for the moment of death.⁸

ནམ་ཞིག་འདིར་སྤང་རྫོགས་པའི་ཚེ།
namzhik dir nang dzogpé tsé
When the appearances of this life are exhausted,

ཕྱི་ནང་གི་སྤྲ་རགས་ཀླན་ཐིམ་ནས།
chi nang gi tra rak kün tim né
When everything—outside and inside, subtle and gross—dissolves,

སྤང་འོག་ཁུ་རུལ་གྱི་རྒྱ་བ་གཉིས།
teng ok khudül gyi gyuwa nyi
The seminal element above and the ovular element below will move

དབུ་མའི་ལམ་ནས་སྤྲིང་གར་ཕྱད།
ümé lam né nyingar tré
Along the axis of the central channel and meet at the heart center.⁹

སྤང་མཆེད་ཐོབ་གསུམ་རྫོགས་པའི་མཐུས།
nang ché tob sum dzogpé tü
When the three stages of appearance, increase, and nearing attainment are over,¹⁰

རང་བཞིན་བརྒྱད་ཅུའི་རྟོག་པ་འགགས།།

rangzhin gyechü togpa gak

The eighty inherent thought patterns will have ceased.

དེ་ཉིད་ཐོབ་ནས་མཁའ་ལ་ཐིམ་དུས།།

dé nyer tob namkha la tim dü

When they dissolve into space at the stage of nearing attainment,

ནམ་རྟོག་སྔ་ཕྱིའི་རྒྱུན་ཐག་ཆད།།

namtok nga chi gyün tak ché

The stream of concepts related to past and future is cut off.

སྤྱིན་མེད་ནས་མཁའ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡི།།

trinmé namkha tabu yi

When spontaneously arising emptiness-clarity dawns

ལྷན་སྐྱེས་སྟོང་གསལ་འཆར་བའི་ཆོ།།

lhenkyé tong sal charwé tsé

Like a cloudless sky,

ཀ་དག་ལྷན་གྲུབ་དབྱེར་མེད་པ།།

kadak lhündrub yermé pa

Primordial purity and spontaneous perfection are inseparable.

གཉུག་མ་སྒོ་བྲལ་གོམས་པའི་མཐུས།།

nyugma lodral gompé tü

On the basis of having become familiar with the innate nature free from intellect—

ངོ་ཤེས་ཐག་ཆོད་གདིངས་ཐོབ་སྟེ།།

ngo shé tak chö ding tob té

Recognizing it and developing conviction and gaining confidence—

འཆི་སྤིད་ཆོས་སྐྱའི་གྲོང་དུ་གྲོལ།།

chi si chökü long du dröl

At the moment of death, you will be liberated in the expanse of the dharmakāya.

དེར་མཆོག་གི་བརྟན་པ་མ་ཐོབ་ཆོ།།

der chok gi tenpa ma tob tsé

After that, if you have not attained such supreme stability,

ནམ་མཁའ་འོད་གསལ་ལ་ཐིམ་པས།

namkha ösal la timpé

Through space dissolving into luminosity,

ཚོས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་བར་དོའི་གཞི་སྒྲུང་ལས།

chönyi kyi bardö zhi nang lé

Five-colored rays of light will radiate [587]

འོད་ཟེར་རྣམ་པ་ལྟ་བུ་གསལ།

özer nampa nga ru sal

From the appearances of the ground¹¹ in the bardo of dharmatā.

དེ་ལ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་རུ།

dé la rangzhin mepa ru

Liberated by certainty in their lack of inherent existence,

ཡིད་ཆེས་གྲོལ་ནས་བཙན་ས་ཟེན།

yiché dröl né tsensa zin

You will seize the throne!

དེ་ལྟའི་འོད་གསལ་རྒྱང་འཇུག་ལ།

dé té ösal zungjuk la

Like that, when luminosity dissolves into union,

ཐིམ་པ་ཞི་དང་ཁྲོ་སྡི་ཡི།

timpa zhi dang trowo yi

Everything manifests as the magical display

སྐྱུ་འཕྲུལ་རྩལ་མོ་ཅིར་ཡང་འཆར།

gyutrül rölmo chir yang char

Of the peaceful and wrathful deities.

མི་འཇིགས་གདིངས་ཆེན་ཐོབ་ནས་ཀྱང་།

mi jik ding chen tob né kyang

If you have achieved supreme fearlessness and confidence,

གནད་གསུམ་དག་གིས་རྣམ་པར་གྲོལ།

né sum dak gi nampar dröl

You will be completely liberated through these three key points.¹²

དེ་ནས་ཟུང་འཇུག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལ།

dé né zungjuk yeshé la

After that, when union dissolves into wisdom,

ཐིམ་ཚེ་བཞི་སྒྱུར་སྒྲུང་བ་འཆར།

tim tsé zhi jor nangwa char

The vision of the combined four wisdoms will arise.¹³

རྡོ་རྗེ་སེམས་དཔའི་ཁོང་གསེང་ནས།

dorjesempé khong seng né

Through the narrow, hollow path of Vajrasattva,¹⁴

མ་ཡེངས་རིག་པའི་ངང་དུ་གྲོལ།

ma yeng rigpé ngang du dröl

You will be liberated in a state of undistracted awareness.

སྤར་ཡང་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྷན་གྲུབ་ལ།

lar yang yeshé lhündrub la

Next, when wisdom dissolves into spontaneous perfection,

ཐིམ་པས་རིག་པ་ཤར་ལུགས་བརྒྱད།

timpé rigpa shar luk gyé

Awareness dawns in eight ways.¹⁵

འབྱུང་ཆེ་དག་པ་ལྟར་ཤར་བའི།

jung tsé dagpa tar sharwé

At the time of arising, when dharmatā dawns as purity,

ཆོས་ཉིད་ལེགས་པར་ངོ་འཕྲོད་དེ།

chönyi legpar ngotrö dé

You will clearly recognize it.

སྒར་འདྲིས་མི་དང་འཕྲད་པ་ལྟར།

ngar dri mi dang trepa tar

It is like meeting someone you already know.

ཡིད་ཆེས་བཅོན་ས་བཟུང་བས་གྲོལ།

yiché tsensa zungwé dröl

Having certainty and taking the throne, you will be liberated.

དེ་ཚེ་མངོན་ཤེས་རྗེས་སུ་ག།

dé tsé ngönshé jedren druk

At that point, the six clairvoyances¹⁶ and six recollections dawn;¹⁷

འཆར་ཞིང་ཚོས་ཀུན་མི་བརྗེད་པའི།

char zhing chö kün mi jepé

There also arises mastery

གཟུངས་ལ་དབང་ཐོབ་ཏིང་ངེ་འཛིན།

zung la wang tob ting ngé dzin

Of the dhāraṇī of not forgetting all teachings¹⁸

ཉམས་སུ་སྟོང་བ་དག་ཀྱང་འབྱུང་།

nyam su nyongwa dak kyang jung

And a pure experience of samādhi.

དེ་ནས་སྤྱན་སྒྲུབ་སྒྲུང་བ་ཉིད།

dé né lhündrub nangwa nyi

After that, through the appearances of spontaneous perfection themselves

ཐིམ་ལུགས་བརྒྱད་ཀྱི་རིམ་པ་ཡིས།

tim luk gyé kyi rimpa yi

Successively undergoing the eight modes of dissolution,

གདོད་མའི་གཞི་ལ་གྲོལ་བའི་ཚེ།

döme zhi la drölwé tsé

When you are liberated in the primordial ground

ཁྱད་ཚོས་སྤྱག་དང་ལྷན་པ་དེ།

khyé chö druk dang denpa dé

You will possess the six special qualities:¹⁹

འབྱུང་གཞི་ལས་འཕགས་རིག་པའི་དངོས།

trül zhi lé pak rigpé ngö

The actualization of awareness that is superior to the ground of confusion,

རང་ངོའི་ཚོས་ཉིད་རྣམ་པར་གསལ།

rang ngö chönyi nampar sal

The dharmatā—your own essence—radiantly appearing,

སོ་སོ་རང་རིག་བྱེ་བྲག་ཕྱེད།

soso rangrik jedrak ché

Distinguishing the defining features of your own natural awareness,²⁰

ཡེ་ཤེས་སྒྱུད་ཡུལ་དག་ཏུ་བློ་ལ།

yeshé chöyül dak tu dröl

Liberation in the pure domain of wisdom,

འབྲས་བུ་གཞན་ཀློན་ལ་རག་མིན།

drebu zhen kyen la rak min

The result that does not depend on any other condition,

ཚོས་ཉིད་རང་སར་གནས་པ་འོ།

chönyi rangsar nepa'o

And the dharmatā abiding in its natural place.²¹

དེ་ལྟར་རྟག་ཆད་ལས་འདས་པ་འི།

detar tagché lé depé

Such is the unconfused dharmatā

ངོ་བོ་ཚོས་ཉིད་མ་འཇུག་པ།

ngowo chönyi ma trül pa

Whose essence is beyond any affirmation or denial. [588]

ཀ་དག་གཞོན་ནུ་བུམ་པ་འི་སྒྲ།

kadak zhönu bumpé ku

It is the youthful vase body of primordial purity.

ནང་གསལ་ཆེན་པོའི་འཆར་གཞི་ལས།

nangsal chenpö charzhi lé

Through the compassionate engagement

རང་བཞིན་གསལ་ལ་མི་རྟོག་པ་འི།

rangzhin sal la mi togpé

Of the radiant, nonconceptual nature,

བྱགས་རྗེའི་འཇུག་པས་འགོ་ཁམས་ལ།

tugjé jugpé dro kham la

The dawning of great inner clarity within the ground,

ལྷུན་གྲུབ་རྟག་ཏུ་འཆར་བ་ནི།

lhündrub tak tu charwa ni

What continually and spontaneously dawns for beings in the various realms

ཕྱིར་གསལ་ཆེན་པོ་ནཱ་པར་བརྗོད།

chir sal chenpo nampar jö

Is known as great outer clarity.

མདོར་ན་ཆོས་ཉིད་བར་དོ་ཡི།

dorna chönyi bardo yi

In short, if you look at the limitless appearances

སྒྲ་བ་སྤྲ་མཐའ་མེད་པ་ལ།

nangwa muta mepa la

Of the bardo of dharmatā as being external,

པ་རོལ་བལྟས་ན་མཐའ་ཡས་ཀྱང་།

paröl té na ta yé kyang

They are endless.

ཚུ་རོལ་སྤྱད་མཁན་རང་རིག་པར།

tsuröl chö khen rangrik par

But looking at self-awareness, from the side of the one experiencing it,

བལྟས་ཆོག་ཅིག་ཀྱང་མ་མཆིས་ཤིང་།

té tsé chik kyang ma chi shing

Not even a single lifetime is found to exist.

མེད་དོ་སྒྲུམ་པའི་འཛིན་པ་འང་།

mé do nyampé dzinpa'ang

Even grasping through the thought “they do not exist”

ཤར་གྲོལ་དུས་མཉམ་ནམ་མཁའ་ལ།

shar dröl dü nyam namkha la

Is liberated as soon as it arises,

སྤྱིན་དང་ཁུ་ལང་དངས་པ་ལྟར།

trin dang khu lang dengpa tar

Like clouds in the sky, mist, or vapor.

རང་སར་གྲོལ་བའི་སྐད་ཅིག་མར།

rangsar drölwé ké chikmar

In the instant that things are liberated in their own place,

གདོད་མའི་ས་ལ་ཕྱིན་པའོ།

döme sa la chinpa'o

You have arrived at the primordial ground.

དེས་ན་ད་སྟེ་ཤེས་པ་ལ།

dé na da té shepa la

Therefore, no matter what kinds of indulgence and suppression or attachment and hostility arise

དགག་སྒྲུབ་ཆགས་སྤང་གང་ཤར་ཀྱང་།

gag drub chak dang gang shar kyang

In your consciousness at that moment,

ཕྱི་རོལ་དག་དུ་རྒྱུ་མི་བཅད།

chiröl dagtu jé mi ché

By not chasing after outer things,

བར་དུ་འབྱུང་ཁུངས་མི་བཅའ་ཞིང་།

bar du jungkhung mi tsal zhing

Not looking for the source of arising in between,

ནང་དུ་གཉེན་པོས་མི་དགག་པར།

nang du nyenpö mi gagpar

And not suppressing inwardly with antidotes,

ཤར་ས་དེ་ཀར་མཉམ་བཞག་པས།

shar sa dé kar nyamzhagpé

The appearances of the bardo—resting in the very place where they dawn—

བར་དོའི་སྤང་བ་རིག་གཏངས་སུ།

bardö nangwa rik dang su

Are nakedly liberated as the expression of awareness.

ཅེར་གྱིས་གྲོལ་བའི་གནད་མཆོག་གོ།

cher gyi drölwé né chok go

This key point is supreme!

གཤམ་ཏེ་གོམས་པའི་སྟོབས་ཞན་ཅིང་།

galté gompé tob zhen ching

If an ordinary person is not liberated at that point,

སྐལ་པ་དམན་པའི་གང་ཟག་པལ།

kelpa menpé gang zak pal

Lacking good fortune or having weak meditative training,

དེར་མ་གྲོལ་ན་སྲིད་པ་ཡི།

derma dröl na sipa yi

They will take a body comprised of four elements²²

བར་དོ་འབྱུང་བཞི་འདུས་པའི་ལུས།

bardo jung zhi düpé lü

In the bardo of becoming.

མི་ལམ་ཙམ་གྱི་གནས་སྐབས་ཅན།

milam tsam gyi né kab chen

Their situation will feel like a dream.

འཇིགས་པའི་སྒྲ་བཞི་གཡང་ས་གསུམ།

jigpé dra zhi yangsa sum

The four terrifying sounds and three abysses²³

ངེས་དང་མ་ངེས་རྟགས་འཆར་ཞིང་།

ngé dang ma ngé tak char zhing

Will arise, along with certain and uncertain signs.²⁴

དབང་པོ་ཀུན་ཆར་ཐོགས་མེད་རྒྱ།

wangpo kün tsang togmé gyu

With all faculties intact, they will move about unimpededly,

དྲི་ཟ་སྒྲ་མོའི་མཛེན་ཤེས་ཅན།

driza tramö ngönshé chen

Subsisting on scents and having minor clairvoyance. [589]

སྤྱག་བསྐྱལ་ཚོར་བ་ཉམས་ལྗོང་ཆོ།

dukngal tsorwa nyamnyong tsé

When you experience suffering,

བར་དོ་ཡིན་པར་ངོ་ཤེས་ནས།

bardo yinpar ngoshé né

Knowing that this is the bardo,

སྒྲོ་གས་སྤྱག་བསྐྱལ་རབ་སྤངས་ཏེ།

kyoshé dugngal rab pang té

Completely abandon weariness with saṃsāra

དག་པོ་དང་དད་པའི་སེམས་ཀྱིས་ནི།

ga dang depé sem kyi ni

And with a joyful mind filled with faith,

ཐོགས་བརྩེ་སྤྱལ་པའི་ཞིང་ཁམས་ཀྱི།

chok chü trülpé zhingkhām kyi

Recalling the enlightened qualities

ཡོན་ཏན་ཡིད་ལ་དྲན་བྱས་ནས།

yönten yi la dren jé né

Of the nirmāṇakāya realms in the ten directions,

འགོ་བའི་འདུན་པ་རབ་ཏུ་གཏད།

drowé dünpa rabtu té

Strongly focus your aspiration to go there.

ཆོས་ཉིད་བདེན་པའི་ནུས་མཐུས་དང་།

chönyi denpé nütü dang

Through the energy and power of the truth of dharmatā

སླ་མ་དམ་པའི་བྱིན་རྒྱབས་ཀྱིས།

lama dampé jinlab kyi

As well as the blessings of the sublime guru,

སྤྱེས་བ་ཕྱི་མ་མི་བརྒྱུད་པར།

kyewa chima mi gyüpar

You will find relief in a pure realm

དག་པའི་ཞིང་དུ་དབྱགས་རབ་འབྱིན།

dagpé zhing du uk rab jin

Without passing through future births.

གལ་ཏེ་དེ་རུ་མ་གྲོལ་ན།།

galté dé ru ma dröl na

If you are still not liberated,

རིགས་རྩ་གསུམ་གྱི་བའི་ལྷས་ཤར་ཆོ།།

rik druk kyewé té shar tsé

When the signs of being born within the six classes arise,

གནས་ངན་འབྲེལ་བ་ཡོངས་བཅད་ཅིང་།།

né ngen drelwa yong ché ching

Having cut your connection to the lower realms,

ཆགས་སྤང་མིག་སེར་རྣམ་པར་སྤང་།།

chak dang mik ser nampar pang

Attachment, hostility, and jealousy will be abandoned.

སྤང་བ་བདེན་མེད་སྒྱུར་བ་འཇམ།།

nangwa denmé jongwa'am

Train in the unreality of appearances,

འབྲིང་གིས་བདེ་སྤྱོད་ལམ་ཁྱེར་དང་།།

dring gi dé tong lamkhyer dang

Or, next best, practice the path of bliss-emptiness,

གཞན་དུ་འདོད་ཆགས་མི་གཙང་བའི།།

zhen du döchak mi tsangwé

Or at least develop repulsion

འདུ་ཤེས་བསྐྱོན་པས་ཞེན་ལོག་སྟེ།།

dushé gompé zhen lok té

By contemplating the foul aspects of desire.²⁵

རང་བཞིན་སྤྱུལ་སྤྱིའི་ཞིང་འཇམས་ཆེ།།

rangzhin trülkü zhingkham ché

By merely bringing to mind the pure realms of natural *nirmāṇakāyas*,²⁶

ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་སླེབ།།

yi la jepa tsam gyi leb

You will arrive there.

ཐ་མ་ཚོས་ཀྱི་བག་ཆགས་ལས།།

tama chö kyi bagchak lé

Those who are the most base,

རིང་དུ་གྱུར་པ་གང་དག་ནི།།

ring du gyurpa gangdak ni

Those who have grown estranged from Dharmic habits,

རིགས་བྱུག་མངལ་གྱི་རྒྱར་འཁུམས་ནས།།

rik druk ngal gyi gyar tum né

Will be caged at that time in the wombs of the six classes of beings

དབང་མེད་ལས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་འབྲངས་ཚོ།།

wangmé lé kyi jé drang tsé

And helplessly pulled along by karma.

མངལ་སྒོ་ངན་པ་སྒོན་ལམ་དང་།།

ngalgo ngenpa mönlam dang

Kept away from the gate of a wretched womb

རྒྱལ་བས་འགྲོའི་མཐུ་ཡིས་ལྷོག་བྱས་ནས།།

kyab drö tu yi dok jé né

Through the power of aspiration and refuge,

དག་པའི་སྐྱེ་བ་འཛོན་འདོད་པས།།

dagpé kyewa dzin dö pé

By longing to obtain a pure birth

དལ་འབྱོར་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་ཚང་བ་ཡི།།

daljor chogyé tsangwa yi

You will attain the excellent support of a body

ལུས་རྟེན་ཕུན་སུམ་ཚོགས་ཐོབ་སྟེ།།

lû ten pünsum tsok tob té

Replete with the eighteen freedoms and advantages,

དགེ་བའི་བཤེས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་བཟུང་གོལ།།

gewé shé kyi jezung dröl

And find freedom under the care of a spiritual friend.

མདོར་ན་འདི་དུས་གོལ་འདོད་པས།།

dorna di dü dröl dö pé

In short, wishing to be free at the moment of passing,

ཟབ་མོའི་གདམས་ངག་སྟོན་མཛད་པའི།།

zabmō damngak tön dze pé

You should have overwhelming faith in the guru [590]

སླ་མར་བཟོད་མེད་དད་པ་དང་།།

lamar zö mé depa dang

Who teaches the profound instructions,

ཉིན་དུས་རང་སྒྲང་གང་གར་ཡང་།།

nyin dü rangnang gang shar yang

And in every waking hour, in the face of whatever arises,

མངོན་སུམ་ཆོས་ཉིད་ངང་དུ་བཞག།

ngön sum chönyi ngang du zhak

Rest in the direct experience of dharmatā.

རྗེས་ཐོབ་བར་དོར་འདུ་ཤེས་པས།།

jé tob bardor dushé pé

During post-meditation, perceiving everything as the bardo,

དག་པའི་ཞིང་ལ་འདུན་པ་གཏད།།

dagpé zhing la dünpa té

Set your sights on the pure realms,

སྟོན་ལམ་བཏབ་ཅིང་ངེས་ཤེས་བསྐྱེད།།

mönlam tab ching ngeshé kyé

Make aspirations, and develop conviction.

ཉལ་ཁར་འཆི་བ་ལམ་ཁྱེར་ནས།།

nyal khar chiwa lam khyer né

When you sleep, practice taking death as the path

ཐིམ་རིམ་རྩ་ཡིས་བཟུང་བྱས་ཏེ།།

tim rim ngo yi zung jé té

And identify the stages of dissolution.

རང་བཞིན་སྤྱུ་སྤྱི་ཞིང་ལམས་སུ།
rangzhin trülkü zhingkham su
Having set your course to travel

འགྲོ་བའི་འདུན་པ་རབ་གཏད་ནས།
drowé dünpa rab té né
To the pure realms of the natural *nirmāṇakāyas*,

ཟབ་ལམ་རྒྱ་ཞོན་གདམས་པ་ལ།
zab lam lung zhön dampā la
With the instructions on the profound path—riding the winds—

རྟག་ཏུ་རང་རྩལ་འབྱོར་བ་གཅེས།
tagtu rang tsal jongwa ché
It is important to continually train in your inherent dynamic energy.

དེ་ལྟར་དུས་ཀྱན་གོམས་པ་ཡིས།
dé tar dü kün gompa yi
By practicing like this all the time,

སྤིད་པ་བར་དོར་ངོ་ཤེས་ཤིང་།
sipa bardor ngo shé shing
You will recognize the bardo of becoming,

དག་པའི་ཞིང་དུ་འགྲོ་སྤྱུ་པའི།
dagpé zhing du dro nyampé
And the moment you think “to the pure realm I shall go,”

རྟག་པ་སྤྱུ་ཆེ་ངེས་པར་དུ།
togpa kyé tsé ngepar du
Without a doubt you will be born there,

པདྨོའི་སྤྱབས་སུ་རྩུ་ཏེ་སྤྱུ།
padmö bub su dzü té kyé
Miraculously, cocooned in a lotus.

སངས་རྒྱུས་མཐོང་ཞིང་དམ་ཆོས་ཉན།
sangyé tong zhing damchö nyen
You will behold the buddhas and listen to the sublime Dharma.

སྒྲིབ་པ་བླ་ན་སྒྲ་མེད་གྱི།

dribpa zé né lamé kyi

With obscurations having come to an end,

བྱང་ཆུབ་མཆོག་ཏུ་རེག་པར་འགྱུར།

jangchub chogtu regpar gyur

You will reach supreme enlightenment.

འཆི་ཆོས་སྤིད་པའི་བར་དོ་གསུམ།

chi chö sipé bardo sum

The three bardos of death, dharmatā, and becoming

སྐུ་གསུམ་ལམ་སྤྲང་མཆོག་ཡིན་བར།

ku sum lam nang chok yin bar

Are the three kāyas, the supreme appearances of the path,²⁷

སྦྱང་སྡེ་ཀུན་ནས་གསལ་བར་བསྟན།

gyüdé kün né salwar ten

As clearly taught throughout the tantric classes.

དེ་རུ་གྲོལ་བའི་གནད་གྱི་མཆོག།

dé ru drölwé né kyi chok

This is the supreme, vital point for such liberation.

མཆོག་གསང་ཆེགས་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་གནད།

chok sang dzogpa chenpö né

Supreme and secret, it is the key point of the Great Perfection.

གནད་བསྐྱུས་དྲོ་རྩེའི་རོལ་མོ་འདི།

né dü dorjé rölmo di

May this vajra symphony, the distillation of all the vital points,

འདིར་སྤང་བླ་ཆེ་མཛོན་གྱུར་ཤོག།

dir nang zé tsé ngöngyur shok

Become fully evident when the appearances of this life come to exhaustion.

རང་རྒྱུད་མྱོང་བ་མ་སྤྲེས་ཤིང་།།

rangyü nyongwa ma kyé shing

Though I have not experienced this in my own mindstream

སྡེབ་སྦྱར་སྤེལ་བའི་མཐུ་དམན་ཡང་།།

debjor pelwé tu men yang

And my ability to compose poetry is weak,

མཚོག་གཟིགས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དགོངས་པའི་དོན།།

chok zik nam kyi gongpé dön

Whatever dawned in my mind regarding the meaning intended by the supreme seers

གང་ཤར་དོ་རྗེའི་སྒྲུ་བླངས།།

gang shar dorjé lu ru lang

I sang as this vajra song. [591]

འདི་ལ་ཉེས་པའི་ཆ་གང་མཆིས།།

di la nyepé cha gang chi

Whatever faults may be here,

དཔལ་ལྷན་སྐྱེ་མར་བཟོད་པར་གསོལ།།

palden lamar zöpar söl

I pray the glorious guru will forgive them.

དགེ་བས་བདག་གཞན་འགྲོ་བ་ཀུན།།

gewé dak zhen drowa kün

Through this virtue, may I and others—all beings—

གཞི་གྲོལ་རིག་པ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཤོག།

zhi dröl rigpa sangyé shok

Attain buddhahood, awareness free in its own ground!

This was sung freely in response to someone's exhortations.

NOTES

1. The Tibetan term *'da' dka' ma* (literally, “hard to go beyond”) in the title is often used to describe a teaching that is particularly profound. In this context, however, it can be read in connection with the Tibetan idiom referring to the moment of death (*'da' ka ma*). According to Khenpo Sonam Tsewang, the spelling *dka'* (compared to *ka*) underlines the difficulty of the experience. Note that an alternate spelling is found in another text in the Kabum: Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, *'da' ka ma'i gdam pa smyur lam thig le*.
2. Jigme Lingpa, *rdzogs pa chen po klong chen snying thig gi kbrid yig ye shes bla ma*.
3. Karma Lingpa, *bar do thos grol chen mo*; Thurman, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Liberation Through Understanding in the Between*; Chogyam Trungpa and Fremantle, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*.
4. This English translation features various texts by the seventeenth-century Tibetan master Tsele Natsok Rangdrol, including his famous final words.
5. Note that in the current translation, “with the mind of the guru” does not appear in the original Tibetan and was added for clarity on the basis of the context.
6. Here the gloss given in the *zab mo yang thig* may be helpful: “Thus, method, i.e., unimpeded appearance which is male and discriminative awareness, i.e., non-clinging emptiness which is female, are in non-dual union when all of what is appearance and existence (*snang srid*), the worlds and their inhabitants (*snod bcud*), and saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, have arisen as self-appearance of Awareness. Whatever appears (at this time), it naturally arises (*rang shar*) as friend of Awareness” (Scheidegger, “Different Sets of Light-Channels in the Instruction Series of Rdzogs chen,” 27, 27n11). See also Scheidegger, “Lights and visions in Rdzogs chen thinking.”
7. This enigmatic passage was helpfully explained by Khenpo Sonam Tsewang as an imperative for the practitioner to hold their attention on the threefold space: external space; the inner space of the channels, where primordial wisdom abides; and the secret space of rigpa itself. Keeping one’s whole attention there, not elsewhere, being in that domain, has the sense of containing. When asked about this line, Khenpo Pema Sherab Rinpoche answered that the sense is remaining in that space, abiding mindfully.
8. As with the title, the translation here follows the Tibetan idiom rather than the literal rendering of “difficulty of death.”
9. See Tsele Natsok Rangdrol, *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, 31–34.

10. These three stages in the death process correspond to when one's white element travels from the crown cakra to the heart cakra, creating an overwhelming experience of whiteness; when the red element travels from the navel cakra to the heart cakra, creating an overwhelming experience of redness; and when the two elements are reabsorbed in the heart center, creating an experience of blackness just before the appearance of luminosity at actual death (Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 230; Thrangu Rinpoche, *Journey of the Mind*, 27–29; Tenga Rinpoche, *Transition and Liberation*, 45–47; Rangdrol, *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, 3–5).
11. David Germano translates *gzhi snang* as “lighting up of the ground” in his analysis of Longchenpa's discussion of the four visions of direct crossing (*thod rgal*), highlighting the aspect of luminosity (Germano, “Architecture and Absence,” 278; Longchenpa, *zab don rgya mtsbo'i sprin*, 108.3).
12. The preceding lines on the stage of “space dissolving into luminosity” refer to the three points explained by Jigme Lingpa (Chönam and Khandro, *Yeshe Lama: From the Heart Essence*, 163–65): “As the visions arise, those with naturally relaxed concentration will recognize them to be their own. In the first instant, one will have the confidence of knowing one's appearances lack true existence. In the second instant, they will be liberated in their own place. In the third instant, the immutable state of liberation will be secured.” Thanks to N.T. Ninjyed for suggesting this reference.
13. During the stage of union dissolving into the combined four wisdoms (mirror-like wisdom, wisdom of the dharmadhātu, wisdom of equalness, and discerning wisdom), all appear as respectively colored displays of light. See Dowman, *The Yeshe Lama*, 70; Chönam and Khandro, *Yeshe Lama: From the Heart Essence*, 171; Rangdrol, *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, 52. They are also described as “extremely bright round lights, like a peacock's fan” (Duff, *Highest Wisdom*, 152). On the role of the fifth wisdom (all-accomplishing wisdom) at this stage, see also Padmasambhava et al., *Light of Wisdom*, 110.
14. Also called the “secret path” of Vajrasattva, this Dzogchen term refers to the subtle channel through which the practitioner ejects their awareness at the moment of death through their eyes (as opposed to the top of the head in *powa*). See Tsele Natsok Rangdrol, *Circle of the Sun*, 45.
15. Jigme Lingpa (Chönam and Khandro, *Yeshe Lama: From the Heart Essence*, 173) explains: “By [appearances] arising as compassion, with the force of the energy of compassion that engages in saṃsāra, there is no differentiation between saṃsāra and enlightenment. By [appearances] arising as light, the aspect of appearance is radiant within. By arising as kāyas, appearances are completely undivided. By arising as wisdom, they are unimpeded. By arising as indivisible, awareness abides single-pointedly. By arising free of boundaries, appearances are cleansed within the nature as it is. By arising impurely, the origin of existence remains unceasing. By [appearances] arising purely, the primordial mother and child unite.”
16. These are also listed as nine states of sublime perception or clairvoyance, or even thirty-six. See Chönam and Khandro, *Yeshe Lama: From the Heart Essence*, 177; Duff, *Highest Wisdom*, 155.
17. See Chönam and Khandro, *Yeshe Lama: From the Heart Essence*, 175–77.
18. Jigme Lingpa explains, “all spiritual transmissions received in the past will simultaneously come to mind, and even dharma instructions that were never heard before will arise without limitation within the mind. This is the power of total recall” (Chönam and Khandro, *Yeshe Lama: From the Heart Essence*, 177).
19. The next six lines list the six qualities of the youthful vase body. For the corresponding passage in the *Yeshe Lama*, see Jigme Lingpa, *Highest Wisdom*, 183–85; Duff, *Highest Wisdom*, 162.

20. Regarding *so so'i rang rig*, Duff (*Highest Wisdom*, 162n384) explains, "Tib. 'so so' or 'personal' means that each person has the wisdom. This is further emphasized by saying that it is Tib. 'rang byung' self-arising or self-occurring wisdom. The term does not mean 'individually self-knowing rigpa' as has sometimes been translated."
21. This is glossed in the *Yeshe Lama* as *gdod ma'i grol sa chen po*, or "the great place of primal liberation" (Jigme Lingpa, *Highest Wisdom*, 162).
22. The term for the four outer, coarse elements (*'byung bzhi*) of earth, water, fire, and wind is used here. These are understood as the basis of the physical body that one has during life. However, Jigme Lingpa is explicit that bardo beings should not be understood to have physical bodies; see Chönam and Khandro, *Yeshe Lama: From the Heart Essence*, 187–89. At this point in the bardo of becoming, for example, one also reads of "bodies comprised of four names" (*ming bzhi 'dus pa'i phung po*); these four nominal constituents of the bardo body are feeling (*tshor ba*), perception (*'du shes*), formatives (*'du byed*), and consciousness (*rnam shes*); see Chönam and Khandro, *Yeshe Lama: From the Heart Essence*, 249n91. These points notwithstanding, the mention of "elements" can be explained by the line below about the "four terrifying sounds," which are related to the four elements and suggest that they are still very much in play.
23. On these, see Patrul Rinpoche, "A Brief Introduction to the Bardos."
24. Tsele Natsok Rangdrol (*Mirror of Mindfulness*, 68–69) offers an additional description: "Lacking an actual material body, one roams about, here and there, to and fro, like a feather blown in the wind, and experiences a feeling of pain much stronger than ever. Furthermore, at this time there occur the six unfixed signs..." Note that *rtag* (appearing in all three editions) is amended to *rtags* in the Tibetan.
25. These are three ways of preventing rebirth through the womb presented in the *Bardo Tödröl* (see Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 357–60; Tenga, *Transition and Liberation*, 94–96; Trungpa and Fremantle, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 83–86; Tsele Natsok Rangdrol, *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, 75–76). To expand briefly, during this stage of the bardo of becoming, just before entering a womb to be born again, the best thing to do is rest in equipoise in the highest view of Dzogchen, Mahāmudrā, etc. The next best thing to do is to recognize the unity of bliss-emptiness, or appearance-emptiness, according to the principles of creation- and completion-stage Tantra. If those fail, it is still possible to block one's rebirth through sheer force of revulsion at the whole prospect.
26. Used to express how the *nirmāṇakāya* is a reflection of the *saṃbhogakāya*, and thus also called the "reflection *saṃbhogakāya*" (*gzugs brnyan longs sku*), this technical term can refer both to the radiant nature of self-illuminated wisdom and natural illumination appearing externally on the path, as in the case of a pure realm. See Duff, *Highest Wisdom*, 183–84. The term is also used with its double aspect to refer to the realization of the *tōgal* practitioner, seeing things as they are, which signals no further returning to the three realms. As such, "natural" refers to the second quality of pristine wisdom manifesting simultaneously with the *nirmāṇakāya* as the path form of the *saṃbhogakāya*. See Wallace, *Heart of the Great Perfection*, 117, 117n138.
27. This technical term in the Dzogchen *tōgal* system has alternately been translated as "appearances of the path in itself" (Tiso, *Rainbow Body and Resurrection*, ch. 2) and "appearances of the way" (Scheidegger, "Different Sets of Light-Channels," 27): "This points to the fact that in Rdzogs chen thinking the Buddha-Bodies rather are looked at as appearances of the way (*lam gyi snang ba*) than as result."

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GLOSSARY

bardo of dharmatā

ཚེས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་བར་དོ། • *chos nyid kyi bar do*

Typically the third of the four bardos, the other three being (1) the bardo of this life; (2) the bardo of death; and (4) the bardo of becoming.

Bardo Tödröl

བར་དོ་ཐོས་གྲོ། • *bar do thos grol*

This influential treasure text revealed by Karma Lingpa (1326–1386) focuses on the journey a being goes through in the intermediate states after death and how to attain liberation therein.

bliss cakra

བདེ་ཆེན་འཁོར་ལོ། • *bde chen 'khor lo* • mahāsukhacakra

The energy center at the crown of the head. It is associated with bliss because when the energies there are unlocked, ecstatic feelings follow.

bliss-emptiness

བདེ་སྟོང་། • *bde stong*

The experience of bliss arising coemergently with the realization of its empty nature.

buddha nature

བདེ་གཤེགས་སྤྱིང་པོ། • *bde gshegs snying po* • sugatagarbha

Literally, “the heart essence of those who have gone to bliss.” This term indicates the inherent enlightened nature of all beings that allows them to fully awaken.

central channel

དབུ་མ། • *dbu ma* • avadhūti

One of the three main channels in the subtle body.

certain and uncertain signs

མ་ངེས་དང་ངེས་རྟགས། • *ma nges dang nges rtags*

The five certain signs in the bardo of becoming are: having no footprints, a shadow or bodily sounds; being able to move through matter in an unimpeded way; having superknowledge; one's voice not being heard by relatives; and not seeing a sun or moon.

The six uncertain signs concern one's dwelling place, company, food and clothing, support, behavior, and mental occurrences.

compassionate engagement

ཐུགས་རྗེའི་འཕྲུག་པ། • *thugs rje'i 'jug pa*

Referring to the third of the three qualities of awakened mind: essence, nature, and compassion. While it is the same term as the more general compassion, in the Dzogchen context, it connotes the mind's responsiveness and active quality.

creation and completion

བསྐྱེད་རྫོགས། • *bskyed rdzogs* • utpattikrama, sampannakrama

Two stages of deity practice associated with the higher tantras. In the creation stage, the meditator imagines the image and qualities of the deity and the purity of all form, speech, and mind. In the completion stage, the meditator dissolves the work of the conceptual mind to rest in nonconceptuality.

cutting through

ཐྱགས་ཚད། • *kbregs chod*

One of two major categories of Dzogchen, the other being direct crossing (*thod rgal*). Cutting through emphasizes the view of primordial purity (*ka dag*).

dhāraṇī of not forgetting

མི་བརྗེད་པའི་གཟུངས། • *mi brjod pa'i gzungs*

During the bardo of reality, this power is attained when one remembers all the Dharma teachings one has heard, as well as new ones.

dharmakāya

ཆོས་སྐུ • *chos sku* • dharmakāya

“The truth body.” One of three bodies of the buddhas.

dharmatā

ཆོས་ཉིད། • *chos nyid* • dharmatā

The most fundamental, irreducible quality of something. When applied to the mind, it implies buddha nature, luminous and empty, which is mind's essence.

dharmatā abiding in its natural place

ཆོ་ཉིད་རང་སར་གནས་པ། • *cho nyid rang sar gnas pa*

One of the six special qualities of the youthful vase body.

Dharmic habits

ཆོས་ཀྱི་བག་ཆགས། • *chos kyi bag chags*

Cultivated tendencies to continually apply Dharma teachings to one's experience.

direct crossing

ཐོད་རྒྱལ། • *thod rgal*

One of the two main categories of the Dzogchen teachings, the other being cutting through (*khregs chod*). Direct crossing emphasizes training with the appearances of spontaneous perfection (*lhun grub*).

eight modes of dissolution

ཐེམ་ལུགས་བརྒྱད། • *thim lugs brgyad*

The eight modes of dissolution, which occur in sequence, are as follows: (1) compassion dissolving into compassion (*thugs rje thugs rje la thim pa*); (2) primordial wisdom dissolving into primordial wisdom (*ye shes ye shes la thim pa*); (3) light dissolving into light (*'od 'od la thim pa*); (4) the enlightened body dissolving into the enlightened body (*sku sku la thim pa*); (5) nonduality dissolving into nonduality (*gnyis med gnyis med la thim pa*); (6) ultimate liberation dissolving into ultimate liberation (*mtha' grol mtha' grol la thim pa*); (7) the essence of pure primordial wisdom dissolving into primordial purity (*dag pa ye shes kyi ngo bo ka dag la thim pa*); and (8) the impure gates of saṃsāra dissolving into the gates of pure primordial wisdom (*ma dag pa 'khor ba'i sgo dag pa ye shes kyi sgo la thim pa*).

eighteen freedoms and advantages

དལ་འབྱུང་བཅོ་བརྒྱད། • *dal 'byor bco brgyad*

The eighteen conditions that make a human birth a precious support for practicing Dharma. The eight freedoms are being free from the states where it is difficult to practice dharma, including living (1) in the hells, (2) as a hungry ghost, (3) as an animal, (4) as a long-lived god, (5) in uncivilized communities, (6) with incomplete faculties, (7) with wrong views, or (8) in an age when no buddha has come. The ten advantages are divided into two sets. The first includes five circumstantial advantages: (1) a buddha has come, (2) they have taught the Dharma, (3) the teachings have survived, (4) people still practice the teachings, and (5) conditions allow one to practice. The second set includes five personal advantages: (1) one is a human, (2) one is born in a place where the Dharma is accessible, (3) one's faculties are intact, (4) one is not embroiled in deleterious lifestyles, and (5) one has faith in the Dharma.

eighty inherent thought patterns

རང་བཞིན་བརྒྱད་ཅུ་འོྱུག་པ། • *rang bzhin brgyad cu'i rtog pa*

According to Āryadeva's *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*, these states result from addictive emotions: thirty-three results from anger, forty from desire, and seven from delusion.

faculty

དབང་པོ། • *dbang po*

Referring to one or more of the six senses, or to a being's general acumen.

four elements

འབྱུང་བཞི། • *'byung bzhi*

Usually this refers to the four outer or coarse elements: earth, water, fire, and air. It can also refer to four nominal elements: feeling, perception, formatives, and consciousness that comprise the body of a bardo being.

four terrifying sounds

འཇིགས་པའི་སྒྲ་བཞི། • *jigs pa'i sgra bzhi*

Also called the four terrifying enemies (*jigs pa'i dgra bzhi*) in the context of the bardo of becoming. As [Patrul Rinpoche](#) explains, these are the sound of a mountain collapsing (earth *prāṇa*), the sound of waves crashing in the ocean (water *prāṇa*), the sound of fire destroying a forest (fire *prāṇa*), and the sound of a thousand simultaneous claps of thunder (wind *prāṇa*).

free from intellect

སྒྲོ་བཤམ། • *blo bral*

Beyond the unenlightened character of the mind (*manas*; *blo*) that rationally compares, weighs, and judges.

Great Bliss

བདེ་བ་ཅན། • *bde ba can* • *sukhāvati*

The pure land of Amitābha associated with the western direction.

Great Perfection

རྫོགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ། • *rdzogs pa chen po* • *mahāsandhi*

Also known as Atiyoga, the system of teachings and practices associated with the highest of the nine vehicles according to the Nyingma school. The term can also serve as a reference to the nature of awareness pointed out by these teachings.

ground of being manifesting as appearances in the bardo of dharmatā

ཆོས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་བར་དོའི་གནས་སྒྲུང་། • *chos nyid kyi bar do'i gzhi snang*

The experience in the bardo of dharmatā just after death, in which the true nature of reality displays itself nakedly without being framed through dualistic filters.

hollow

སྒྲུབས། • *sbubs*

In Dzogchen terminology, a hollow sphere or space.

indulgence and suppression

དགག་སྒྲུབ། • *dgag sgrub*

Referring in particular to metaphysical extremes: using the mind to over-negate reality, leading to nihilism, or indulging in an overestimation of reality, leading to eternalism.

Jigme Lingpa

འཇིགས་མེད་གླིང་པ། • *jigs med gling pa*

Jigme Lingpa (1730–1798) was an important Nyingma master most known for revealing the Longchen Nyingtik treasure cycle. He also composed the *Yeshe Lama* Dzogchen meditation manual, providing the source material for subsequent bardo teachings.

Lapis Lazuli Light

བེ་རུ་ལྷ་སྒྲུང་། • *baiDUR+ya snang*

The pure land of the Medicine Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru located in the east. Although routinely translated as “lapis lazuli,” the word *vaidūrya* has been shown by scholars to refer to beryl in both Sanskrit and Tibetan. Accordingly, it is also sometimes rendered as “star

sapphire.” The Pāli form is *veḷuriya*, and the Prākṛit form *verulia* is the source for the English word “beryl.”

Lotus Light

པདྨ་འོད། • *pad+ma 'od*

Alternatively described as the pure land (*zhing kham*s) of Padmasambhava or his luminous palace on the Copper-Colored Mountain.

luminosity dissolves into union

འོད་གསལ་ཟུང་འབྲུག་ལ་ཐིམ་པ། • *'od gsal zung 'jug la thim pa*

One of the phases of dissolution during the bardo of dharmatā.

Mirror of Mindfulness

དྭན་པའི་མེ་ལོང། • *dran pa'i me long*

bar do spyi'i don thams cad rnam par gsal bar byed pa dran pa'i me long

natural nirmāṇakāya

རང་བཞིན་སྤྱུལ་སྐྱུ། • *rang bzhin sprul sku*

A technical term for pure lands appearing as the manifestation of the mind's luminous nature. Since these are similar to saṃbhogakāya pure realms, they are also sometimes called semi-saṃbhogakāyas (*phyed sprul longs sku*) or reflection saṃbhogakāyas (*gzugs brnyan longs sku*).

ovular element

རྩལ། • *rdul* • rajas

Literally, “menstrual blood.” The subtle energy derived from a being's mother, which mixes with the energy of the father at conception and remains active in the subtle body throughout life.

post-meditation

རྗེས་ཐོབ། • *rjes thob*

Often translated as “subsequent attainment,” this refers to the state after arising from samādhi.

power of total recall of the non-forgetfulness of all dharmas

ཆོས་ཀྱི་མི་བརྗེད་པའི་གཟུངས། • *chos kun mi brjed pa'i gzungs*

A power one may attain in the bardo of dharmatā that allows one to remember every possible teaching of the Dharma.

pure birth

དག་པའི་སྐྱེ་བ་འཛིན། • *dag pa'i skye ba 'dzin*

Referring to the life condition that is conducive to Buddhist practice.

pure environments and contents

དག་པའི་སྡོད་བཅུད། • *dag pa'i snod bcud*

A synonym for pure realms, where the surroundings and the beings in those surroundings are uncorrupted by the faults of saṃsāra.

pure realm

དག་པའི་ཞིང་། • *dag pa'i zhing*

An abode of enlightened beings beyond saṃsāra.

quintessential bindu

བཅུད་ཐིག་ • *bcud thig*

The vital drop of most profound nectar.

result that relies on no other condition

བླ་བ་བྱ་གཞན་རྒྱུན་ལ་རག་མིན། • *bras bu gzhan rkyen la rag min*

One of the six special qualities of the youthful vase body.

riding the winds

རླུང་གཞོན། • *rlung gzhon*

Referring to yogic practices associated with prāṇa, or subtle energy.

seize the throne

བཅོན་ས་ཟེན། • *btsan sa zin*

A figurative expression for the attainment of enlightenment.

seminal element

ཁུ། • *khū*

Literally, “semen.” This is the subtle energy derived from a being’s father, which mixes with the energy of the mother at conception and remains active in the subtle body throughout life.

six clairvoyances

མཛོན་ཤེས་རྒྱལ། • *mngon shes drug*

According to Jigme Lingpa, the six states of clairvoyance are to know: (1) one’s immediate past lifetime, (2) where that death occurred, (3) where the next place of rebirth will be, (4), what is in the minds of others, (5) all mysterious appearances, and (6) how to see the six realms of saṃsāra.

six classes

རིགས་རྒྱལ། • *rigs drug*

The six types of being in saṃsāra: hell beings, pretas, animals, humans, asuras, and gods.

six recollections

རྗེས་ངན་རྒྱལ། • *rjes dran drug*

These are described by Jigme Lingpa as follows: By recalling the meditation deity, one will see the face of the deity. By recalling all the paths, one will achieve mastery in the bardo of the nature of phenomena. By recalling the place of rebirth, all those of inferior faculties will be reborn in a natural nirmāṇakāya pure realm. By recalling all states of meditative concentration, one will abide for five days in concentration. By recalling the teacher’s instructions, one’s phenomena will be indivisible. By recalling the view, this will be like recognizing an old acquaintance from the past.

six special qualities

ལྷན་ཚུལ་རྒྱལ། • *khyad chos drug*

As taught in Dzogchen, the six special qualities are: (1) awareness emerging from the ground of being, (2) awareness perceiving its own manifestation as dharmatā, (3) distinguishing the defining features of natural awareness, (4) gaining freedom in that distinction from confusion, (5) the resultant lack of reliance on any external condition, and (6) awareness resting in its own natural lucidity, also described as dharmatā abiding in its natural place.

ten directions

ཕྱོགས་བརྒྱ། • *phyogs bcu*

The four cardinal directions, the four ordinal directions, and above and below.

three abysses

གཡང་ས་གསུམ། • *g.yang sa gsum*

According to [Patrul Rinpoche](#), these three abysses—white, red, and black—are the spontaneous forms of the three poisons. Falling into them, one enters the womb of one's future mother. These abysses are the abyss of fear, the abyss of unconsciousness or fainting, and the abyss of attraction or aversion.

three kāyas

སྐུ་གསུམ། • *sku gsum* • trikāya

The three dimensions or bodies of awakening: dharmakāya (*chos sku*) is the truth body; saṃbhogakāya (*longs sku*) is the enjoyment body; and nirmāṇakāya (*sprul sku*) is the emanation body.

threefold space

ནམ་མཁའ་སྐུམ། • *nam mkha' sum*

An esoteric Dzogchen meditation technique of cutting through (*khregs chod*).

Tibetan Book of the Dead

བར་དོ་ཐོས་གྲོལ། • *bar do thos grol*

This influential treasure text revealed by Karma Lingpa (1326–1386) focuses on the journey a being goes through in the intermediate states after death and how to attain liberation therein.

transference

འཕོ་བ། • *'pho ba*

This is an important Vajrayāna practice in which a practitioner transfers their consciousness from their ordinary body to a pure land at the moment of death.

Tsele Natsok Rangdrol

རྩེ་ལེ་སྐུ་ཚོགས་རང་གྲོལ། • *rtse le sna tshogs rang grol*

Tsele Natsok Rangdrol (1605/1608–1677) was an important master of both the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions. His final words are regarded as pith instructions on the process of death and dying.

union

ཟུང་འཇུག་ • *zung 'jug* • *yuganaddha*

An important doctrinal term denoting the coming together of two or more distinct things to the point of their indivisibility. It is commonly used when talking about the unity of cataphatic categories like appearances, bliss, and luminosity becoming one with the apophatic category of emptiness. Also used to describe the inseparability of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

vajra yoga

དོན་རྒྱལ་ལྷ་མོ་འབྲེལ་ • *rdo rje'i rnal 'byor*

The four vajra yogas are purity (*viśuddha*), dharma, mantra, and form (*saṃsthāna*).

vision of the combined four wisdoms

བཞི་སྒྲུབ་སྣང་བ། • *bzhi sbyor snang ba*

In the Dzogchen teachings about the extremely subtle stages of dissolution the mind goes through in the bardos, after a stage called “luminosity dissolving into coalescence,” the next stage is coalescence dissolving into the four wisdoms combined.”

winds of method and wisdom

ཐབས་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རླུང་། • *thabs shes kyi rlung*

This term appears in the Dzogchen context of the winds in the body's right channel being associated with method (*thabs kyi rang bzhin*), the winds of the left channel with wisdom (*shes rab kyi rang bzhin*), and the winds of the central channel with nonduality (*gnyis su med pa'i rang bzhin*).

youthful vase body

གཞོན་ནུ་བུམ་པའི་སྐུ་ • *gzhon nu bum pa'i sku*

A synonym for the dharmakāya, which is inherently radiant prior to external appearances.