

Luminous Essence



A GUIDE TO THE GUHYAGARBHA TANTRA

by Jamgön Mipham

FOREWORD BY

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

TRANSLATED BY THE

Dharmachakra Translation Committee

SNOW LION PUBLICATIONS

ITHACA, NEW YORK

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❖ Foreword ❖

READING IS IMPORTANT to me, and I am often reminded of the great kindness of the scholars and translators of the past who translated a vast array of Buddhist literature into Tibetan. Through their persistent efforts, working in small teams, they made books available to Tibetans that allowed a deep understanding of the Buddha's teachings to take root in Tibet. It was this understanding that later found expression in the many books composed by Tibetan authors. Therefore, it gives me great pleasure to know that there are groups of experienced translators today, similar to those of the past, such as the Dharmachakra Translation Committee, who are working steadily to translate Buddhist books from Tibetan into English and other Western languages. Undoubtedly these will make an invaluable contribution to a deep and lasting understanding of the Buddhist tradition.

One of the most accomplished scholars and prolific writers of recent times in Tibet was Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche. An eclectic master, who was prominent in the nonsectarian movement that flourished, particularly in Eastern Tibet, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, his works are regarded as authoritative.

I am pleased to know that great care has been taken in preparing this translation of *Luminous Essence*, Mipham Rinpoche's commentary on the *Guhya-garbha Tantra*, the root tantra which reveals mind and wisdom to be naturally manifest. It is inspiring to know that the project has received the blessing and guidance of such eminent contemporary masters as Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Trulshik Rinpoche, who have also showed great kindness as teachers to me.

I have no doubt that interested and initiated practitioners of the *Guhya-garbha Tantra* cycle of practices will derive great benefit from reading and relying on this explanatory text. I congratulate all who have participated in

this work of translation and offer my prayers that the good you have done will make a far-reaching contribution to peace and enlightenment in the world.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

❖ Introduction ❖

I AM PLEASED to present the community of tantric practitioners with this translation of Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche's *Luminous Essence*. Mipham Rinpoche's eloquent and profound treatise is a general commentary on the meaning of the famed *Tantra of the Secret Essence*, the *Guhyagarbha-tantra*, which reveals mind and wisdom to be self-display. When studying a profound text such as this, it is imperative to proceed in an authentic manner with the blessing of the lineage. In the case of the tantric scriptures, this means to receive the appropriate empowerments, reading transmissions, and oral explanations of the text from a qualified lineage master. Simply reading the text on one's own will not facilitate a genuine understanding of either the words or their meaning.

For this reason, it is crucial to first seek out a genuine master of the lineage who possesses both experience and realization based on the view of inseparable purity and equality. From such a master one must receive the ripening empowerments, the supportive reading transmission, and the liberating oral instructions. Finally, having received the complete transmission of the text, one must be diligent in putting it into practice and so liberate oneself into the fruition of the Great Perfection.

In order to serve the community of practitioners, the Dharmachakra Translation Committee has now prepared an English translation of Mipham Rinpoche's *Luminous Essence*, which lays out the fundamental framework for tantric theory and practice. The encouragement to propagate this text I received in particular from Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche and Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. The translation has been produced with the kind help of several accomplished teachers, headed by Kyabje Trulshik Rinpoche, who most kindly conferred the empowerments for the *Tantra of the Secret Essence* upon the team of translators.

May all merit in producing this text become the cause of happiness and awakening for all beings.

Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche
President, Dharmachakra Translation Committee

❖ Translators' Introduction ❖

THE PRESENT TRANSLATION of Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche's *Luminous Essence* has been produced as a group project involving several translators who based their efforts on the oral instructions of several expert teachers. In particular, the translation relied on the explanations of Khenpo Sherab Sangpo, who taught the complete text at Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery in Boudhanath during the summer months of 2005. In addition, the translation benefited greatly from the additional teachings of Khenpo Sherab Dorje, Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö, Khenpo Kātyāyana, and Tulku Nyima Gyeltsen. For the translation of the root verses of the *Tantra of the Secret Essence*, the translation primarily relies on Longchenpa's famed commentary in his *Dispelling the Darkness of the Ten Directions*, as well as Khenpo Shenga's interlinear commentary. The translation was produced by Thomas Doctor, Heidi Köppl, Douglas Duckworth, Andreas Doctor, and Cortland Dahl. The various translations were compiled and checked against the original Tibetan by Andreas Doctor before finally being edited by Cortland Dahl.

Traditionally, tantric teachings such as these have been kept secret from the general public since the profound nature of their contents makes them likely to be misunderstood. However, based on the personal advice and public statements made by several senior masters, it appears that the benefit of keeping tantric teachings secret is now outweighed by the danger of not making genuine teachings available in a time when tantric teachings of dubious origin proliferate in print and on the internet. This view is also one that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has expressed on several occasions. For example, in his introduction to *Tantra in Tibet* (1987, Snow Lion Publications) His Holiness says: "In general, translating a book of Mantra for sale in shops is unsuitable, but at this time and in this situation there is greater fault in not clearing away wrong ideas than there is in distributing translations. Much

falsely ascribed information about Secret Mantra has wide repute nowadays, and therefore, I think that translating and distributing authoritative books may help to clear away false superimpositions.”

It is with this advice in mind that the present translation is now being published by Snow Lion Publications. However, the fact that the translation is being distributed publicly should not lessen the importance of the advice given by all traditional authorities on tantric thought and practice: to fully understand the message contained in the profound tantric scriptures, it is essential to receive the appropriate empowerments, reading transmissions, and oral instructions before finally putting the teaching into practice through meditation. To reflect the necessity of relying on a living master to clear away questions and doubts regarding the topics discussed in texts such as this, we have presented the translation without an introductory discourse or any form of annotation. It is hoped that this will prompt the reader to seek out a genuine master who can transmit the teaching in its entirety so that the great tantric wisdom traditions of India and Tibet may gain a solid footing as they spread to new regions of the world.

The translators wish to express their profound gratitude to Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche and all other learned and accomplished teachers, who with wisdom and compassion guided our feeble efforts to convey the beauty and profundity of Lama Mipham’s sacred words into English. We also wish to humbly convey our thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama for blessing this publication in his foreword. The entire translation process has enjoyed the kind support of the Tsadra Foundation in the form of a generous grant for which we are most thankful. We also wish to thank Snow Lion Publications for publishing this text and for their efforts in bringing Buddhism to the Western world.

We sincerely regret and apologize for any errors and mistakes this translation may contain. They are exclusively ours, caused by our superficial understanding of the profound nature of Mantra. Whatever goodness may come from the translation, we dedicate it to the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings.

On behalf of the team of translators,
Andreas Doctor