

A SPACIOUS PATH TO FREEDOM

Practical Instructions on the Union of
Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga

by

Karma Chagné

with commentary by

Gyatrul Rinpoche

translated by

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Contents

Preface by Sangye Khandro	7
Translator's Note	13
1 A Treasury of Oral Transmissions	15
2 The Stage of Generation	39
3 The Cultivation of Quiescence	63
4 The Cultivation of Insight	85
5 Identification	103
6 Practice	125
7 Mahāmudrā	149
8 Atiyoga	171
9 Sealing with the Dedication	191
Notes	215
Glossary of Terms	219
Glossary of Names	221
Index of Texts Cited by the Author	225
General Index	239



Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche
photo: Deborah Korman/Vimala Archives

Preface

by Sangye Khandro

Karma Chagmé Rinpoche was born in the Nyomtö region of Zalmo Gang in the Do-Kham area of the snowy land of Tibet. In exact accordance with the prophecies given by the illustrious Vajrayāna master Guru Padmasambhava, he appeared as a *Nirmāṇakāya* in this world in the year 1613. His father was the well-known Mahāsiddha Padma Wangdrak, and his mother was an apparent wisdom *Ḍākini* known as Chökyong Kyi. Curiously enough, at the very moment he was born, his father gave him the longevity empowerment from the *termas* of Tertön Ratna Lingpa. His father also gave him his first name, Wangdrak Sung. His father was his Lama until he was eleven years of age, during which time the young Wangdrak Sung learned to read and write, perform spiritual ceremonies, memorize texts, and sit in silent meditation for extended periods of time.

The young child was a brilliant learner and went on to master everything that was presented to him. In his eleventh year, he met one of his important karmic Lamas from past lives, the hidden contemplative Prawashara. After receiving many of the important empowerments, transmissions, and pointing-out instructions at the feet of his teacher, he went out to wander in sacred lands and power spots to perform and accomplish the inner practices. In short, he actualized each one of the deities to which he had been initiated and attained authentic signs of realization. After this he received the important transmissions for Avalokiteśvara and the lineage of the Mahāmudrā from Kün-ga Namgyal of Drungpa Tserlung.

At the age of nineteen, Wangdrak Sung resolved to abandon the lifestyle of a householder and journeyed to the seat of the Karmapa, Tsurphu Monastery, to receive the vows of ordination. There he took the vows of refuge, novice ordination, and full ordination. Becoming a fully ordained monk, he then joined the Saṅgha at the Thupten Nyingling Monastery of the Zurmang tradition. Now known by his ordination name, Karma Chagmé, he served the monastery with forthright honor and diligence, while simultaneously mastering all the major and minor texts on logic.

In the year of the dragon, the Karmapa and his two spiritual sons came to the Zurmang Monastery. During their stay, Karma Chagmé received from the Karmapa many important empowerments, transmissions, and pointing-out instructions, among which were the teachings for the co-emergent Mahāmudrā. Then Karma Chagmé accompanied the Karmapa for the next year and a half, remaining with him in retreat and receiving further instructions. Karma Chagmé became famous throughout the land of Tibet, and in his twenty-first year he was given a public examination during the Great Prayer Festival of the Karma Kagyü before a gathering of twelve thousand monks. Following this, his fame increased when he offered two of his fingers as butter lamps. This occurred first at the passing of the Karmapa and later in front of the Jowo Rinpoche image in the central cathedral in Lhasa while receiving the Bodhisattva vows.

After performing many miraculous deeds, Karma Chagmé resolved to actualize the form of Avalokiteśvara known as Gyalwa Gyatso as his principal meditation deity. He entered into a strict thirteen-year retreat, during which he wrote many of his important commentaries. Close to the conclusion of his retreat Karma Chagmé recognized and enthroned the young *tertön* Min-gyur Dorje. At the same time, he offered to the treasure-revealer the essential empowerments and transmissions, which awakened the indwelling awareness through which blessings began to well forth as a trove of treasures from his lifetime spent in the company of the great Guru Padmasambhava. Recalling countless past lifetimes, the young *tertön* Min-gyur Dorje began having visions of innumerable deities, which unleashed a storehouse of precious transmissions. Karma Chagmé, as the treasure-keeper, was the scribe who recorded them.

After concluding his retreat, Karma Chagmé went on to lead many great and important accomplishment ceremonies that blessed the

minds of everyone present. In addition, he bestowed the empowerments for the *Namchö*, or “Space Dharma,” revelations of *tertön* Min-gyur Dorje, and the revelations of the great *tertön* king, Ratna Lingpa. He wrote an important commentary, *Buddhahood in the Palm of the Hand*, that combines these two great treasure lineages, elucidating the subjects of the outer and inner preliminaries, the vital energies, the channels and fluids, mystic heat, blissful emptiness, cutting through to original purity, and crossing over into spontaneous presence. In addition, he wrote the text partially translated here, which combines the practical instructions he had received on Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga. The founder of the Payül tradition of the Nyingma order, the Vidyādhara Künzang Sherap, received all of these important transmissions directly from Karma Chagmé. Notably, this particular lineage of practice has become the very heart of the Payül tradition and has been practiced continuously to the present time.

The Mahāsiddha Karma Chagmé Rinpoche, who was an authentic emanation of Avalokiteśvara in this world of phenomenal existence, passed away in the year 1678 after announcing to thousands of his disciples that the time had come for him to change realms. With astonishing signs he dissolved his mind into the heart of Buddha Amitābha. For seventeen consecutive days extensive after-death ceremonies were performed by scores of Lamas and monks who gathered to honor their precious Lama. Among the many countless signs of marvels that occurred before, during, and after the cremation were many images of Avalokiteśvara Gyalwa Gyatso that were found to be embossed on the very bones of this great practitioner.



Tertön Min-gyur Dorje was one of the great one hundred and eight treasure-revealer incarnates prophesied by Guru Padmasambhava. In the treasures that came into this world before him, such as those revealed by the treasure-revealer Ratna Lingpa, Dūdül Dorje, and others, there are many references to the coming of Min-gyur Dorje. Born in 1645 in the Ngom Tö Rola region of the snowy land of Tibet, the young incarnate child made no mistake in choosing his virtuous parents. His father was of the unbroken ancestral heritage of Lord Buddha Śākyamuni, and both mother and father had remarkable dreams of their child before, during, and after conception.

In accordance with all the prophecies about him, his right hand was marked with a most extraordinary blue mole, signifying the sole essential nature of the Dharmakāya. Throughout his childhood, he displayed signs and gestures that were unlike anything he could have seen or learned from anyone else; and as soon as he could speak, he told everyone who he was in his previous life. He learned how to read and write through a vision of Guru Loden Chegsé (one of the eight emanations of Guru Rinpoche), who instructed him. When he was seven years old, he perceived many Ḍākinis in visions, and they gave him pith instructions on the importance of relying upon a Lama. Immediately, he had a perfect vision of his future root Lama, Karma Chagmé Rinpoche, who was in a strict retreat at the time. The young *tertön* developed a burning, insatiable desire to meet him as soon as possible.

When he was ten years old, with the help of the Dharma Protectors, Min-gyur Dorje finally met his Lama, Karma Chagmé, who recognized him to be an unmistakable manifestation of Guru Rinpoche. Chagmé Rinpoche proceeded to bestow upon him *The Synthesized Quintessence of the Realization of Enlightened Awareness* in five stages of development. He was instructed to meditate on the clear light Mahāmudrā in successive meditation sessions. Karma Chagmé then led the young *tertön* through a series of techniques that caused him to lucidly remember all of his past lifetimes, everything he had received, and his profound familiarity with the pantheon of enlightened wisdom manifestations.

As he began to reveal his profound *termas*, he also continued to receive many transmissions and teachings from Karma Chagmé Rinpoche. As the fame of this young saint spread far and wide, fortunate disciples came from all regions of Tibet to receive these transmissions. Although the treasure-revealer Min-gyur Dorje had many disciples who were also Dharma-keepers and lineage-holders of his treasures, the principal one was Karma Chagmé Rinpoche.

Min-gyur Dorje was destined to reveal earth-treasures as well; unfortunately, the merit of sentient beings was deficient at the time and, due to this, his presence in this world was cut short. In 1667, when he was only twenty-three years old, he began showing signs of an illness that got progressively worse. With a full vision of the eight *herukas* and their *maṇḍalas*, Min-gyur Dorje's mind stream of enlightened awareness dissolved into the empty sphere of truth. His body remained upright in the perfect meditation posture for three days.

The great Vidyādhara Künzang Sherap, the founder of the Payül tradition, was one of the *tertön*'s main disciples and treasure-keepers. Künzang Sherap was now the perfect upholder of the lineages of both Karma Chagmé Rinpoche and Tertön Min-gyur Dorje. His lineage has been transmitted through the succession of Payül lineage-holders to the present time.



The Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche, also referred to as Payül Gyatrul, is a Lama who holds this lineage in the present day. Born in Tibet in 1925, he was recognized by Jamyang Khyentse Lodrö Tayé to be the incarnation of Sampa Künkyap, a Payül lineage meditator who spent his life in retreat and later gave empowerments and transmissions from his retreat cave to multitudes of disciples. After being brought to his Payül Dhomang Monastery, the young Gyatrul was educated by his tutor Sangye Gön. Sangye Gön received his name as a newborn baby from the famous Gili Tertön (Dudjom Lingpa), who singled out the child while passing through his village, named him, and predicted his future.

During the many years that the young Gyatrul spent with his Lama, he remembers him having regular visitations from a white man (Avalokiteśvara), and he recalls that Sangye Gön's own white hair turned black and he grew new teeth, replacing those that were missing. Most of Gyatrul Rinpoche's basic training occurred under his teacher Sangye Gön, including his training in the lineage of Karma Chagmé's *Buddhahood in the Palm of the Hand*, *The Union of Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga*, and in much supplementary material that he studied with his teacher for three consecutive years. Later Gyatrul Rinpoche entered retreat with the miraculous activity emanation of the Dudjom incarnations, Tulku Natsok Rangdröl, who became his root Lama. Tulku Natsok Rangdröl's root Lama was Lam Dolo, who was the tutor of Dudjom Lingpa as a young boy. Again he received these important transmissions while simultaneously practicing them in retreat. On yet another occasion, Gyatrul Rinpoche received the transmissions directly from the great Payül Chogtrul Rinpoche, the root Lama of H.H. Penor Rinpoche, the present head of both the Payül lineage and the Nyingma Order as a whole. He received these and countless other transmissions again from the great Apkong Khenpo. He spent much

of his life in Tibet before the Chinese occupation in the presence of these and many other great teachers, receiving the important transmissions and accomplishing the practices.

Since arriving in the West, among the many great deeds and acts of kindness that Gyatrul Rinpoche has displayed is his organization of two historic Dharma tours of H.H. Penor Rinpoche to the United States. During that time the lineage of Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga was firmly established through the transmissions of the essential empowerments and pointing-out instructions bestowed at various locations around the country. Later, the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche took the time to give the necessary instructions and lead students in the practices. Many of the principal practices from the cycle of *Buddhahood in the Palm of the Hand* have been translated into English, and numerous retreats have already taken place under Rinpoche's direction. In the past year and a half, Rinpoche has been teaching extensively from the *Practical Instructions on the Union of Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga*, including instructions on identifying the essential nature of awareness and all the supplementary chapters.

The profound blessings of the lineage of practice and realization make their authentic mark in the West through the kindness of the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche and the great lineage-holders and founders of the past. This account is but a mere drop of potent nectar to moisten the minds of those who will go on to turn the pages of this precious book of authentic practical instructions. More extensive accounts of the life stories of both Karma Chagmé Rinpoche and Tertön Min-gyur Dorje can be found in the *Garland of Immortal Wish-fulfilling Trees*, the history of the Payül Tradition of the Nyingmapa. As for the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche, he continues to turn the wheel of Dharma, elucidating many great lineages, inspiring many students to translate the precious teachings into English for the benefit of generations to come, and tirelessly encouraging practitioners on the path.

Tashi Choling, 1995

Translator's Note

Karma Chagmé presented his classic work *Meaningful to Behold: The Essential Instructions of Avalokiteśvara on the Union of Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga*,* in its entirety as an oral teaching lasting thirty days. This is a more elaborate treatise than his work translated as *Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen* (Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1994), with a commentary by Tulku Chökyi Nyima. The portions of *Meaningful to Behold* that are translated here are those on which the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche gave oral commentary at his Buddhist center Orgyen Dorje Den in San Francisco during 1994 and 1995. At that time, Gyatrul Rinpoche gave teachings on the first chapter and the concluding eight chapters of this text, which cover the main practices of Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga, but he chose not to give a commentary on the intervening chapters, which discuss the preliminary practices. Thus, these chapters have not been translated here. However, similar versions of this same subject matter are presently available in numerous other English translations, including the above-mentioned *Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen*, the Ninth Karmapa's *Mahamudra: Eliminating the Darkness of Ignorance* (Dharamsala: LTWA, 1978), Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My*

**Thugs rje chen po'i dmar khrid phyag rdzogs zung 'jug thos ba don ldan* by Kar ma chags med (Bylakuppe: Nyingmapa Monastery, 1984). The title of this work, *A Spacious Path to Freedom*, does not correspond to that of Karma Chagmé's work, as it designates only a part of Karma Chagmé's work, together with Gyatrul Rinpoche's commentary.

Perfect Teacher (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), and Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Four Ordinary Foundations of Buddhist Practice* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1994).

I have also translated the supplementary chapters of *Meaningful to Behold*, along with a commentary that Gyatrul Rinpoche presented during 1995 and 1996; this will appear in a subsequent volume. Gyatrul Rinpoche comments that teachings on the six transitional processes, or *bardos*, which I have translated in the book *Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos*, with Gyatrul Rinpoche's commentary, should be regarded as ancillary to these teachings.

I have translated this text in close collaboration with the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche, who went through it with me line by line. Afterwards, he gave teachings on this treatise at Orgyen Dorje Den, his Buddhist center in San Francisco, for which I served as interpreter. This oral commentary was transcribed by a number of his students in California and Oregon and was then edited by Rinpoche's students Neal King and Lindy Steele. To the best of our knowledge there is only one edition of this text, which was published in India. Written in the *dbu med* script, many words are abbreviated, and the spelling is loose, to say the least. This made the translation particularly challenging, and I would not have taken on the task but for the constant encouragement and assistance I received from Gyatrul Rinpoche.

Karma Chagmé states that he composed this treatise so that many old mendicants and recluses may accomplish their eternal longing for happiness by practicing the union of Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga. He speculates that no advanced scholars will be interested in this work, though they may gratified by its many citations. Karma Chagmé concludes this work with his apology to scholars for any possible errors in the order of some of the citations. Despite our best efforts, there may still be errors in the translation. If these are detected by other scholars, I hope they will bring them to my attention. As Gyatrul Rinpoche strongly emphasized, this work is intended chiefly for those wishing to practice Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga in order to realize the essential nature of their own minds. It is our earnest prayer that our efforts will help make this profound contemplative path accessible to people in the modern world.

B. Alan Wallace
Santa Barbara, California
Spring, 1997

Glossary of Terms

absolute nature of reality	chos kyi dbyings	dharmadhātu
actual primordial wisdom	don gyi ye shes	
afflictive obscuration	nyon mongs pa'i sgrib pa	kleśa-āvaraṇa
awareness	rig pa	vidyā
Breakthrough	khregs chod	
chosen deity	yi dam	iṣṭadevatā
conceptual elaboration	spros pa	prapañca
consummate awareness	rig pa tshad phebs	
contemplation	rnal 'byor	yoga
cycle of existence	'khor ba	saṃsāra
display of awareness	rig pa'i rtsal	
embodiment	sku	kāya
Expanse class	klong sde	
extinction into reality-itself	cho nyid zad pa	
Five Purifications	mngon byang lnga	pañcābhisambhodi
four contemplations	rnal 'byor bzhi	caturyoga
Four Remedial Powers	g.nyen po'i stobs bzhi	
Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind	blo ldog rnam bzhi	
extrasensory perception	mngon shes	abhijñā
habitual propensity	bag chags	vāsana
ideation	rnam par rtog pa	vikalpa
insight	lhag mthong	vipaśyanā
intermediate state	bar do	antarābhava
knowledge <i>mantra</i>	rig sngags	vidyāmantra
Leap-over	thod rgal	
meditative stabilization	bsam gtan	dhyāna
mental afflictions	nyon mongs	kleśa

Glossary of Names

Chakya Chenpa
Phyag rgya chen pa

Cherbupa
gCer bu pa

Chö Yülwa
gCod yul ba

Chödrak Gyatso
Chos grags rgya mtsho
(The Seventh Karmapa)

Chökyi Wangchuk
Chos kyi dbang phyug

Chöying Dorje
Chos dbyings rdo rje
(The Tenth Karmapa)

Dadak Metri
mDa bdag metri

Dagpo Rinpoche
Dvags po rin po che
(Also known as Gampopa,
sGam po pa)

Déwé Gönpö
bDe ba'i mgon po

Dezhin Shegpa
De bzhin gshegs pa
(The Fifth Karmapa)

Dönden Zhap
Don ldan zhabs

Döndrup Tsenchen
Don grub mtshan can

Dong Kachöpa Saraha
gDong mkha' spyod pa sa ra ha

Dorje Pagmo
rDo rje phag mo

Dragkarwa
Brag dkar ba

Dragpa Gyaltsen
Grag pa rgyal mtshan

Drikung Könchok Trinley Namgyal
(Drikung Dharmarāja)
'Bri khung dkon mchog phrin las
rnam rgyal

Drogön Chöpak
'Gro mgon chos 'phags

Dromtön
'Brom ston

Drubgyü Tenpa Namgyal
sGrub rgyud bstan pa rnam rgyal

Drugchen Karma Tenpel
'Brug chen karma bstan 'phel

Index of Texts Cited by the Author

- The Account of Bhikṣu Mahādeva* 20
dGe slong lha chen po'i lo rgyus
- Avalokiteśvara's Collected Essential Instructions* 146
Thugs rje chen po'i tshom bu dmar khrid
- Avalokiteśvara's [Instructions on the] Natural Liberation from the
Miserable States of Existence* 24
Thugs rje chen po ngan song rang grol
- Avalokiteśvara's Teachings to Maitripa* 130
sPyan ras gzigs kyis mi tra dzva ki la gdams pa
- The Bhadrakarātri Sūtra* 83
mTshan mo bzang mo'i mdo
- Birth Accounts* 34, 36
sKye rabs
Jātaka
- The Blazing Lamp* 179
sGron me 'bar ba
- The Bodhisattva Corpus Sūtra* 34, 165
Byang chub sems dpa'i sde snod kyi mdo
Bodhisattvapitakasūtra
- Buddhahood in the Palm of Your Hand: Instructions on the Great Perfection* 25
rDzogs chen gyi khrid sangs rgyas lag 'chang
- The Bundle of Stalks Sūtra* 192
sDong po bkod pa'i mdo
Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra

General Index

- Amitābha 9, 15, 22, 57, 59, 78, 83, 184, 187, 199, 200-202, 205, 212
- Atiśa 18, 23, 58, 122
- Avalokiteśvara 7-9, 11, 15-16, 24-27, 39, 47-49, 61, 63, 79, 83, 85, 115, 125, 137, 149, 153, 171-172, 201, 205-206, 212
- Breakthrough 103, 180, 206
- Cherbupa 113
- Chödrak Gyatso 22-23
- Chökyi Wangchuk 22, 24
- Chöying Dorje 24
- Dadak Metri 130
- Dagpo Rinpoche (Gampopa) 19, 138, 165
- Déwé Gönpö 22
- Dezhin Shegpa 22-24
- Dönden Zhap 73
- Döndrup Tsenchen 24
- Dong Kachöpa Saraha 144
- Dorje Pagmo 169
- Dragkarwa 23
- Dragpa Gyaltsen 138
- Drikung Könchok Trinley Namgyal 25
- Drugchen Karma Tenpel 25
- Drug Gampopa 99
- Drugchen Kün-ga Namgyal 97, 147, 210
- Düdü Dorje 9, 25-26
- Düsum Kyenpa 22-23, 69, 156
- Dzongtö Kandroma 41
- Expanse class 180
- four contemplations 166
- Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind 51, 75, 86, 118, 132, 135, 139, 146, 152-153, 175
- Garab Dorje 172
- Gelong Tsöndrü 212
- Geshe Jayülpa 93
- Great Compassionate One 15, 46-47, 50, 52, 56, 58
- Gö Tsangpa 25, 139, 150, 156, 169
- Gyachakri 23
- Gyalsey 23
- Gyalwa Chö Dingwa 164
- Gyalwa Yeshe Do 173
- Gyalwang Chöjé 168
- Gyaré 166
- Gyatön Chökyi Zangpo 145
- Jampal Zangpo 22, 27
- Jamyang Khyentse Lodrö Tayé 11
- Jigten Gönpö 164
- Kangkawa 23
- Karma Lingpa 173
- Karma Pakši 22-24, 42, 49
- Karma Trinley 24

- Katogpa Jampa Bum 23
 Könchok Yenlak 22, 51
 Kumché 23
 Kün-ga Namgyal 7, 24, 97, 147, 210
 Lama Drung Yigpa 25
 Lama Zhang 71
 Leap-over 70, 149-150, 163, 171, 180,
 182, 188, 206-207
 Legshé Drayang 24
 Lodrö Dragpa 24
 Lodrö Rinchen 22
 Machik Labdrön 48, 199
 Mahāsiddha Masey 24
 Maitreya 22, 32-33, 37, 107
 Mañjuśrī 20, 22-23, 26, 36, 154
 Marpa Lhodrak 71
 Mé-nyak Gomring 157
 Mikyö Dorje 22, 24
 Mikyö Zhap 24
 Milarepa 22-23, 209
 Mind class 180
 Min-gyur Dorje 8-10, 12, 24
 Mipam Padma Karpo 165
 Namké Dorje 133
 Nāgārjuna 18, 22, 42, 87, 104
 Natsok Rangdröl 11, 27
 Ngadak Nyang 23
 Norbu Gyenpa 24
 Norbu Lingpa Déwé Dorje 133
 Nyang Ting-nge-dzin Zangpo 173
 Nyima Beypa 112
 Nyima Tsal 112
 Orgyen Rinpoche (Padmasambhava)
 7-9, 15, 19, 23, 26, 43, 47, 73, 86,
 94, 107, 112, 120, 134, 153, 172-173,
 194, 200
 Özer Seng-ge 24
 Padma Ledreltsal 23
 Pagmo Drüpa 26, 42, 105, 163
 Paljor Döndrup 22-23
 Patrul Rinpoche 14, 30
 Payül Chogtrul Rinpoche 11
 Precept class 180
 Rāga Asey 22, 24, 26, 51, 156, 210
 Rāhula 22
 Rangjung Dorje (Rangjungwa) 23, 25,
 92, 117, 163
 Ratna Lingpa 7, 9, 23, 27
 Rechenpa 22
 Rinchen Könchok Paljor 25
 Sakya Pañchen 138
 Sampa Künkyap 11
 Sangye Gön 11, 27
 Sangye Nyenpa 22
 Sangye Zhagchenpa 24
 Śāntideva 23, 73, 107
 Saraha 22, 105, 112, 129-131
 secret *mantra* 22, 39-41, 49, 174, 205
 Sending and Receiving 206-207
 Serlingpa 23
 Sey Lama Yeshe Dorje 23
 Sharawa 23
 Situ Chökyi Gyaltsen 25
 Six-phase Yoga 42
 Songtsen Gampo 46-47, 115, 137, 171
 spell *mantra* 205
 Taglung Tashi Paldrup 25
 Tonglen Rinpoche 21
 Tongwa Dönden 22-23
 Tsangpa Gyarey 26
 Tsombupa 57
 Tsuglak Trengwa 67, 146, 160, 162
 Vajradhara 22, 40, 75, 172
 Vajravārāhi 22, 57
 Vimalamitra 23, 173
 Wangchuk Dorje 22, 25
 Yagdey Pañchen 144
 Yang Gönpa 25, 140, 166
 Yungtönpa 22-23