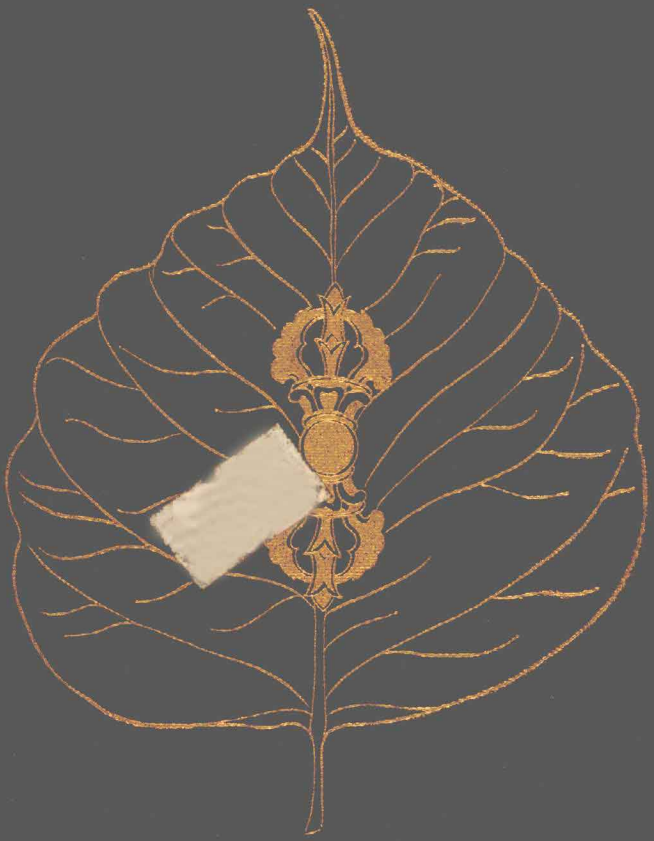

Kindly Bent to Ease Us

Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa

Part One: Mind
Sems-nyid ngal-gso

from

The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease
Ngal-gso skor-gsum

Translated from the Tibetan and annotated by

Herbert V. Guenther

Dharma Publishing

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Illustrations
Frontispiece: Padmasambhava, the Great Guru
who inspired Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa
Page 2: Klong-chen-rab-'byams-pa

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To Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche

Foreword

Until now, there has been no authentic translation describing the Dzogchen teachings of the Nyingma school which are the most sophisticated and effective practices of Vajrayana Buddhism. So I am very grateful and happy that this introductory text is now available to all those interested in deepening their understanding of the Buddhist path.

The subject of this book is how to attain Enlightenment. By interweaving the teachings of the Sutras and Tantras, Longchenpa beautifully summarizes all Buddhist thought. Traditionally, each aspect of the Buddhist path has three parts: *tawa*, *gompa*, and *chodpa*—'view', 'meditation', and 'action'. 'View' means to investigate the nature of the Buddha's inner experience. This effort to see reality 'just as it is' inspired all Buddhist philosophy and intellectual development. Through meditation, we learn to be mindful each moment and to integrate this view in every situation. According to the Tantras, negative energies and subjective interpretations become subtly transformed and purified, like alchemy—everything is seen as naturally pure and completely perfect. When we learn to participate in this world

fully, with all its joys, allurements, and sorrows, every situation is useful. The very bonds which attach us to samsara become the means to Enlightenment.

This knowledge already exists within our own experience, but we need to study, meditate, and practice properly. First we must understand both the text and the teachings and learn to magnify them within ourselves through our own direct experience. Longchenpa's presentation is very deep and meaningful, so read and study each word and sentence carefully. In the Nyingma view, philosophy and experience function simultaneously. Like water and wetness, one is not separate from the other.

The Nyingma lineage which we follow represents the living continuation of this inner realization, the link and the thread, the key to Enlightenment which has been passed on from teacher to student for many centuries. Following this lineage, we cannot accumulate any more negative karma. Once this realization becomes part of our inner nature, no questions or doubts remain. We share the same enlightened understanding of the living lineage which cannot die, cannot disappear, cannot be destroyed or lost. Traditionally it is said that 'Padmasambhava pointed to the door and Longchenpa opened it'. Through his omniscient insight and untiring compassion, he inspired many followers to practice the Dzogchen teachings and to attain Enlightenment in one lifetime.

The world today seems very dark, confused, and empty, so I sincerely hope that this book will, in a small way, bring the light of the Dharma to whoever is interested in the Buddhist path or wishes to improve himself. I am especially grateful to Dr. Guenther for helping to preserve these introductory Nyingma teachings. Longchenpa is such an important figure in this unbroken lineage that in the future we hope to publish many more volumes of his exceptional and illuminating work.

Founder, Nyingma Institute
Berkeley, California

TARTHANG TULKU RINPOCHE

Preface

There is depth, breadth, and magic in Nyingma (*rnying-ma*) thought and its charm grows the more one studies it. Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa Dri-med 'od-zer's presentation is lit with a mysterious light that radiates into and transfigures every aspect of man's life. For he is no mere pedant, content with parading passages from hallowed texts he has happened to have learned by heart. Rather, he is a person who has something to say because he can speak from experience, and he is quite explicit as to how he wants us to understand what he has to say. Therefore, in the notes to the translation of the text I have utilized his many other works in which he stipulates in greater detail his meanings for the terms he uses; and I have, precisely for this reason, refrained from resorting to Sanskrit words which are not only quite meaningless for an English-speaking reader but have very little, if any, significance to indigenous Tibetan works which have been written in Tibetan and not in Sanskrit. Only in the case of proper names have I employed the more familiar Sanskrit terms—provided they are available, which is not always the case.

I am also grateful to my colleagues, professors Keith Scott and Leslie Sumio Kawamura, for critical comments; to my graduate students Kennard Lipman and Leonard van der Kuijp for their assistance in proofreading.

Finally, my thanks are due to the members of the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley, California, and the editorial staff of Dharma Publishing, in particular, to Mr. Steven D. Goodman, Mr. Stephen Tainer, Mr. Paul Clemens and, last but not least, Miss Judy Robertson, for their careful editorial work on the typescript.

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Introduction

Kun-mkhyen (the 'all-knowing', 'all-understanding') Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa Dri-med 'od-zer, hailed as a second Buddha and certainly the greatest thinker in the Old Tradition (*rnying-ma-pa*), was born on the eighth day of the second lunar month of the Earth-Male-Ape year (i.e., Friday, 1st of March, 1308) at Gra-phu stod-grong in gYo-ru, the most eastern of the two parts into which dBus (Central Tibet) was originally divided. His father, the 'teacher' (*slob-dpon*) bTsan-pa-srung, could trace his ancestry back to Ye-shes dbang-po-srung of the Rog clan, who is counted as one of the 'seven chosen ones' (*sad-mi bdun*), intelligent men who had been selected from the nobility at about 779 to be ordained as monks by Śāntarakṣita, the renowned Indian paṇḍita, during his stay in Tibet. His mother, 'Brom-gza'-ma bsod-nams-rgyan, was a descendant of the 'Brom clan, to which 'Brom-ston rgyal-ba'i 'byung-gnas (1005–1064), the famous disciple of Atīśa, also known as Dīpankara Śrījñāna (982–1054), belonged.

In 1319, Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa took up ordination at

bSam-yas in the presence of the 'abbot' (*mkhan-po*) bSam-grub rin-chen and the 'teacher' (*slob-dpon*) Kun-dga' 'od-zer, when he was given the name Tshul-khrims blo-gros. The next years were spent in intensive studies under the most famous teachers of the time. Apart from studying under those belonging to his own tradition, the rNying-ma, he also was a student of Rang-byung rdo-rje (1284–1339), the Karma-pa bKa'-brgyud-pa hierarch, and of the Sa-skya-pa bla-ma Dam-pa bsod-nams rgyal-mtshan (1312–1375), both of them representing the 'New (*gsar-ma*) Tradition' (the dGe-lugs tradition originated after Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa's time). Because of his knowledge he became known as Ngag-gi dbang-po of bSam-yas and as Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa, and he used these titles as signatures to some of his works.

When he was in his late twenties two events occurred that were to be of decisive importance for his intellectual and spiritual development. The one was a vision of Padmasambhava and his consort Ye-shes mtsho-rgyal, which resulted in his adopting the names Dri-med 'od-zer, as given him by Padmasambhava, and rDo-rje gzi-brjid, as conferred upon him by Ye-shes mtsho-rgyal, in his vision. At this time—and one experience may have led to another—he became deeply attracted to and involved in the *mKha'-'gro snying-thig*, mystical teachings connected with Padmasambhava, which he then developed in his own *mKha'-'gro yang-tig*. He also conceived the plan of founding or restoring the monastic settlements of Lha-ring-brag, O-rgyan-rdzong, and Zhva'i lha-khang. The last named had been founded by Myang Ting-nge-'dzin bzang-po, who was an important personage during the reign of Khri-srong lde'u-btsan (755–797) and his successors, and had been a supporter of the growing Buddhist movement. It was for this reason that he was executed, after 836, under Glang dar-ma (who was opposed to Buddhist ideas). In this temple Myang Ting-nge-'dzin bzang-po had concealed the *sNying-thig* teachings of Vima-

lamitra who had been one of the earliest representatives of rDzogs-chen thought in Tibet.

The second decisive event in the life of Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa was his meeting with the great mystic (*phyam-rdal rig-'dzin chen-po*) Kumaradza (gZhon-nu rgyal-po, Kumārarāja, 1266–1343), a Tibetan, who is most often mentioned under his Indian name. Kumārarāja was particularly connected with the teachings of Vimalamitra, whose embodiment he is believed to have been.[1] Vimalamitra's teachings, summed up in the *Bi-ma snying-thig*, had been rediscovered by lDang-ma lhun-rgyal and in course of time transmitted by Me-long-rdo-rje (1243–1303) to Kumārarāja and by the latter to Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa, who elaborated these teachings into his *Bla-ma yang-tig* and then fused the teachings of both the *mKha'-'gro yang-tig* and the *Bla-ma yang-tig* into his most profound *Zab-mo yang-tig*.

An unfortunate incident seems to have provoked the hostility of the powerful Tai-si-tu Byang-chub rgyal-mtshan (1302–1364) of Phag-mo-gru who in 1358 had formally taken over power from Sa-skya and who, almost immediately afterwards, believed Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa to be an ally of 'Bri-khung. In 1359 one of the 'Bri-khung monks, a fanatic (*sgom-chen*) Kun-rin, staged a revolt. Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa tried to mediate, but his effort was considered a support of this revolt. He was forced into exile in Bhutan and stayed at the monastery of Thar-pa-gling near Bum-thang where he had been in 1355.[2] Eventually he was reconciled with Tai-si-tu Byang-chub rgyal-mtshan through the efforts of his lay patrons, prince Si-tu Shākya bzang-po of dBus-stod and prince rDo-rje rgyal-mtshan of Yar-'brog, and was allowed to return.

Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa died on the eighteenth day of the twelfth lunar month of the Water-Female-Hare year (i.e., Wednesday, the 24th of January, 1364) at O-rgyan-rdzong in Gangs-ri thod-kar, the place he had loved most during his many travels and periods of seclusion in various caves.

In his relatively short life Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa was able to write an enormous number of works. His biographer, Chos-grags bzang-po,[3] lists two hundred and seventy titles, unfortunately arranged according to subject-matter and not in chronological order so that we cannot trace Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa's intellectual development.[4] Another unfortunate circumstance is that quite a number of his works seem to have been lost. Throughout his major writings he presents a unitary account of Buddhist thought which, long before his time, had tended to proliferate into, and even become stagnant in, highly specialized areas. rDza dPal-sprul O-rgyan 'Jigs-med chos-kyi dbang-po (b. 1808) has well brought out this unifying character of Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa's writings, when he says:[5]

> They are *dBu-ma* (Mādhyamika), *Pha-rol-phyin-pa* (Pāramitā), *gCod-yul, Zhi-byed* (the calming of frustration and suffering), *Phyag-rgya-che* (Mahāmudrā),[6] and the very essence of *rDzogs-chen*.
> All these interpretations gather here, and still (Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa's writings) are superior to all of them.
> If you happen to be a follower of this all-knowing guru,
> You must never become separated from this his wholesome teaching;
> It will be enough if you make it your companion in all your thinking;
> There is nothing like this to let your mind realize its aim.

The major works, about which this eulogy was written, are the "Seven Treasures" (*mdzod bdun*), each of them indispensable for an understanding of the profound and intricate teaching which is termed *rDzogs-chen* ('absolutely complete'), and which is based so much on direct experience rather than on speculative and representational thought.[7] Of these "Seven Treasures," the *Theg-pa'i mchog rin-po-che'i mdzod* is the most comprehensive work, dealing with all aspects of the rDzogs-chen teaching in twenty-five chapters; the remaining six "Treasures" take up specific points.

Thus, the *gNas-lugs rin-po-che'i mdzod*, consisting of a short basic text in verse form and its detailed commentary, the *sDe-gsum snying-po'i don-'grel gnas-lugs rin-po-che'i mdzod*, discusses the four vectorial connections in what may be termed the 'experience of Being'—its ineffability, coherence, spontaneity and solitariness—as well as the person to whom this teaching can and may be imparted.

The *Man-ngag rin-po-che'i mdzod* is a summary in verse form of the essentials for practicing and understanding the tenets of Buddhism, and, through understanding, growing into the fullness of Being. It is arranged in sets of six topics.

The *Grub-pa'i mtha' rin-po-che'i mdzod*, in eight chapters, is the most exhaustive and critical treatment of Buddhist philosophy. The work begins with the history of the Buddha as both a spiritual and cultural phenomenon, then deals with the compilation and transmission of the teaching and the beginnings of the early schools after the demise of the Buddha. After a detailed presentation and trenchant critique of the tenets of the traditional four schools—Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra and Mādhyamika—Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa elucidates the 'existential' experience culminating in 'absolute completeness' (*rdzogs-chen*).

The *Yid-bzhin rin-po-che'i mdzod*, in twenty-two chapters, consists of a relatively short basic text in verse form and a very lengthy and exhaustive commentary, the *Padma dkar-po*, and covers the whole of the Buddhist world-view with man as an integral part. It first considers the origin of the world in philosophical perspective, and then treats ontology (the problem of Being, not of some kind of being), cosmology (the rich unfolding of Being, as envisaged in the Avataṃsaka teaching, and not the more or less static arrangement of objects around us, as presented in the Abhidharmakośa),[8] and anthropology (man as an open-ended task, not an essence or ego). It then turns to the spiritual growth of man in his predicament of being man, to his need for friends to help him along in developing ethically, and to the relationship

between teacher and disciple. This is followed by a detailed account of the various philosophical systems that had evolved in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist circles. The discussion aims at clarifying the student's task of coming to an awareness and understanding of Being, rather than remaining bound in mere doctrinal postulations.[9]

The *Tshig-don rin-po-che'i mdzod,* in eleven chapters, sums up the essentials of rDzogs-chen thought—the seeming loss of Being in the state of a human being, a loss which always presents itself as a challenge to find Being, and the inner experiences with their symbols through which man's development towards Being manifests itself. This work is intimately related to the *sNying-thig* teachings.

The *Chos-dbyings-rin-po-che'i mdzod,* consisting of a short basic text in verse form and a detailed commentary, the *Lung-gi gter-mdzod,* in thirteen chapters, deals with the primordial experience of the meaningfulness of Being. Essentially, it is an account of experience as experience, not of a particular experience of something.

In all these works Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa quotes from the vast literature that had developed during the early phase of Buddhism in Tibet, in support of his own brilliant exposition of a living and lived-through experience. He uses these quotations in an interpretative rather than dogmatic fashion. Thus throughout his works he reveals himself as an independent and original thinker.

Although the "Seven Treasures" are counted as Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa's crowning achievement, this does not mean that his other works are less important. As a matter of fact, Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa is so unique that a distinction between more important and less important works is not only not possible, but even meaningless. The "Seven Treasures" are as indispensable for understanding his other works as his other works are for the "Seven Treasures". Especially important in this respect are his two trilogies, the *Ngal-gso skor-gsum,* "The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and

Ease," and the *Rang-grol skor-gsum*, "The Trilogy of Freedom as Freedom."[10] The fact that Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa himself seems to have considered these trilogies of primary importance may be gleaned from the number of works he wrote to bring out their significance in making Buddhist ideas a living experience.

The *Ngal-gso skor-gsum* consists of the following works:

A 1. *rDzogs-pa chen-po Sems-nyid ngal-gso*, the basic work, written in verses and consisting of thirteen chapters, intricately interwoven as to content and practical guidance as to the meaning and significance of Mind-as-such.

2. *rDzogs-pa chen-po Sems-nyid ngal-gso'i 'grel-pa Shing-rta chen-po*, a detailed commentary on the above work.

3. *rDzogs-pa chen-po Sems-nyid ngal-gso'i 'grel-pa Shing-rta chen-po'i bsdus-don-gyi gnas rgya-cher dbye-ba Padma dkar-po'i phreng-ba*, a structural analysis of each of the thirteen chapters.[11]

4. *rDzogs-pa chen-po Sems-nyid ngal-gso'i gnas-gsum dge-ba gsum-gyi don-khrid Byang-chub lam-bzang*, an analysis of the basic work into one hundred and forty-one contemplative topics, of which ninety-two belong to the common form of Mahāyāna, twenty-two to the Vajrayāna, and twenty-seven to the rDzogs-chen.

B 1. *rDzogs-pa chen-po bSam-gtan ngal-gso*, the basic work, written in verses and consisting of only three chapters, dealing with the suitable places for contemplative attentiveness, the person engaging in this activity, and the process and purpose of contemplative attentiveness.

2. *rDzogs-pa chen-po bSam-gtan ngal-gso'i bsdus-don Puṇḍarīka'i phreng-ba*, a structural analysis of the above work.

3. *rDzogs-pa chen-po bSam-gtan ngal-gso'i 'grel-pa Shing-rta rnam-par dag-pa*, a detailed commentary on the basic work.
4. *rDzogs-pa chen-po bSam-gtan ngal-gso'i don-khrid snying-po bcud-bsdus*, a short guidance to contemplative experience.

C 1. *rDzogs-pa chen-po sGyu-ma ngal-gso*, the basic work, written in verses and consisting of eight chapters, each of them dealing with the apparitional, fleeting, dreamlike character of what is usually believed to be steady and reliable.
2. *rDzogs-pa chen-po sGyu-ma ngal-gso'i bsdus-don Māndarava'i phreng-ba*, a structural analysis of each of the eight chapters of the basic work.
3. *rDzogs-pa chen-po sGyu-ma ngal-gso'i 'grel-pa Shing-rta bzang-po*, a detailed commentary on the basic work.
4. *rDzogs-pa chen-po sGyu-ma ngal-gso'i don-khrid Yid-bzhin nor-bu*, a short guidance to practice.

The arrangement of the basic works together with their commentaries in this order A, B, C, is explained by Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa in his *Ngal-gso skor-gsum-gyi spyi-don legs-bshad rgya-mtsho*. There[12] he says that, if a person is to set out on his quest for life's meaning, he must already have a conviction that life holds meaning and have a vision of its meaningfulness. At the same time meaningfulness is somehow a clue pointing back to the fundamental stratum on which the pursuit of meaningfulness is founded. The explication of this fundamental stratum is found in the *Sems-nyid ngal-gso*. Once this fundamental stratum has been understood one can 'travel the road' towards meaningfulness through attending to representational and non-representational forms of thinking. This is the theme of the *bSam-gtan ngal-gso*. Lastly, we tend to reify the contents into inflexible objects, into constant patterns somewhere 'out there' into

which we locate 'ourselves' as a new object—the ego. To prevent experience from turning into an objectified event and to safeguard the unique moment of knowing and valuing, perceiving and conceiving, before all this again congeals into rigid categories of representational thinking, some aid is needed. This aid is offered by the *sGyu-ma ngal-gso*. In other words, the first work explicates that all that is is the source material that serves as the highway towards life's meaning; the second, that all that is is spontaneously present in sheer lucency; and the third, that all that is is self-presenting without ever being something 'concretely' real.[13]

Throughout these three works experience is and remains the central theme. But experience is not an object nor a fact alongside other objects or facts. Therefore experience must never be confused with sentimentality and its attendant 'mannerisms'. These mannerisms are made possible through the projective character of experience which brings about the objectification of the emerging content and entails the loss of the dynamic aspect of experience. Experience as experience is a more ultimate factor, broader in range and scope and prior to even a 'mind'. And yet, without mind there would be no meaning to experience. However, mind (*sems*) as a noetic-noematic complex, determining the 'meaning' of world, of being, of experience and of whatever it takes notice, is a coming-into-presence made possible through the open and projective presence of Mind-as-such (*sems-nyid*), which is irreducible to object and fact, while constituting their configurative location.

The importance of experience as the seed from which perception, cognition, and valuation grow and as the upsurge that occasions its actualization, is emphasized by Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa in the analysis of the title *rDzogs-pa chen-po Sems-nyid ngal-gso*. He says:[14]

> *rDzogs-pa* ('complete') indicates the whole of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa. And when is this completeness found? From the very beginning it is complete in (or as) absolute (*chen-po*)