

The Total Space of Vajrasattva .

Date : October 9, 2017

Dorje Sempa Namkha Che

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's Introduction to his Oral Commentary



Chögyal Namkhai Norbu with Dr Jamyang Oliphant at the presentation of SHAR RO, a book honoring Rinpoche's achievements, teaching and research, in December 2016 at Merigar West. Photo by Izabela Jaroszewska

I told you already that Ati Guruyoga is the most important essence of the practice. And the practice is very important because if we learn something we should apply it. If we apply the very essence of a practice like Ati Guruyoga, then we can have realization, we will have benefit. If we are not applying it and we are just thinking and learning intellectually, there is no benefit. I already gave you the example of medicines; if we are going to a doctor we discover which kind of illness we have but if we are not using the medicines and applying the doctor's advice there is no benefit. The same is true for the teaching. It is very important that we apply the practices concretely, not remaining only with a nice idea. This doesn't help. We always start with Ati Guruyoga. I also told

you I'm teaching Dzogchen. Maybe you can find many different titles. People run very much after titles, names and forms, but this is not the principle of the Dzogchen teaching. Its principle is knowledge and understanding. We should discover what is Dzogchen, which is our real nature and then we try to be in that state. What I'm doing in all retreats is Dzogchen teaching, and even if we use different titles what I teach is mainly Ati Guruyoga. For that reason I tell people, "If you don't remember what I taught don't worry, but remember that I explained we should do Ati Guruyoga." This is what I'm asking you. I'm not asking you to chant mantras or do visualization of deities. If you like you can do everything, in the Dzogchen teaching there is no limitation. You can apply anything if you have a base, but base means that you have to know which is the essence of the teaching. That is what we need to discover.

In the Dzogchen teaching we should first know that the essence of the teaching is our real nature, and we need to discover it. If we don't know the essence of the teaching, then it is just like working in a very nice field for growing something but without planting any kind of seed. So what will grow? Nothing. In the same way discovering our real nature is the base, then we work with practice, and finally we manifest our realization. For that reason Ati Guruyoga is very important, everybody should remember it, old and new practitioners.

In this retreat I want to present a work that I did for many years and now it is ready. It is something related to a very important and famous text, called Dorje Sempa Namkha Che, that Guru Garab Dorje was chanting when he was a small boy. It is the essence of the Dzogchen teaching. Dzogchen teaching is also the most ancient teaching we have. How do we know that? In the Dzogchen tantras it is explained that twelve Dzogchen masters from ancient time until today existed in different epochs. The first, the most ancient of the twelve masters, is called Tönpa Nangwa Tampa. He was a human when the human condition began. In history it is said that at the beginning humans were just like Devas, they had those kind of qualifications. But then, as emotions increased more and more, these qualifications slowly slowly decreased, so that now we have this human condition.

Tönpa Nangwa Tampa lived in that very ancient time, and as the first teacher of the primordial teachers he taught the Dra Thalgyur, a tantra having six chapters. Some time ago I gave the complete lung transmission of this tantra. This is the root of all Dzogchen tantras, the real source of the Dzogchen teaching. Dzogchen masters studied it because the Dra Thalgyur is the root of everything. How was it developed? A very learned teacher of the Dzogchen teaching was Longchenpa who wrote the Seven Treasures. These seven texts are related basically to the Dra Thalgyur. Of course we do not understand all explanations of the Dra Thalgyur. If you read it you can understand some things but many things you cannot understand. We remained that way for centuries. Maybe at the time of Guru Padmasambhava they had more knowledge, more texts. For instance a commentary of the Dra Thalgyur tantra was written by Vimalamitra. Vimalamitra and Guru Padmasambhava were the most important sources of Dzogchen teaching in Tibet. Vimalamitra wrote a commentary of the Dra Thalgyur, but we had no knowledge of this text in Tibet. In Tibet I knew the Dra Thalgyur because I received the transmission of lung of all Dzogchen

tantras, but we were not aware of the existence of this commentary. Many teachers such as Longchenpa, Jamgön Mipham and Paltrul Rinpoche, were writing instructions of Dzogchen teaching but nobody said that this commentary existed. So we were ignoring it. If we had it we would have understood better the meaning of the Dra Thalgyur. 500 years ago the 5th Dalai Lama was interested in the Dzogchen teaching. He received many Dzogchen teachings from the most important teacher of Mindrolling monastery, Minling Terchen. The 5th Dalai Lama had this knowledge and the 5th and 6th Dalai Lamas painted Thögal visions in the temple. At that time the commentary of Vimalamitra was discovered but of course they were keeping it very private, not public. The 5th Dalai Lama's personal library was found in the Drepung Monastery because when he was young, before becoming governor of Tibet, he was living in the Drepung Monastery so he had his personal library there. Later when he became very famous and important, he moved to Potala Palace, but his library remained in the Drepung monastery. No one particularly made use of this library, but it remained there, and was considered very important as it was the library of the 5th Dalai Lama. To enter, a special permission was needed but they did not give permission easily, so many centuries passed in this way.

After the Cultural Revolution the Vimalamitra commentary was discovered there. How? When the Cultural Revolution started, Tibetans were afraid that everything would be destroyed, so all the 5th Dalai Lama's books were hidden in a small room. After the Cultural Revolution some young Tibetan students discovered the hidden library and they asked permission to the local government to use it. But they got permission only for doing a list or catalogue of the books. So they made a list. These students were attending a school in Lhasa called Tibetan Scientific School where many young tibetans are studying after finishing university. I went to that school twice to teach ancient history and Tibetan culture, so we knew each other very well, and those who did the list showed me a copy. When I looked at it I saw the commentary of Vimalamitra of the Dra Thalgyur tantra. I was very surprised because I never knew it existed, so I asked them to make a copy of it because for me and for the Dzogchen teaching it was very important. They said they were not allowed to as they had no permission. I told them to make a copy secretly, and after one year they made a photocopy and sent it to me. It consisted of 334 pages. Tibetan writing pages are quite wide and in general one page has only six lines but this text had nine lines and it was written on both sides of the sheet so that each page contained 18 lines. I found many mistakes because they were handwritten copies. Some parts had more mistakes, some parts less, because they were copied by different persons. Some copyists had some knowledge and wrote a little better; others had less knowledge and made more mistakes. Then I thought that since it was a very important text, I should type it in the computer to make it readable for everybody.

I started that work and continued for some weeks. Then I thought it was impossible because I'm getting old and it has so many pages that I would never finish, so I stopped. However, after some months I thought that even if I don't finish, better to give it a try, otherwise nobody will. And this book is very important for all people interested in Dzogchen teaching. So I continued even if I didn't have much time because I was going around giving teaching retreats, but when I had time I dedicated myself to writing it down day and night. After two years I finished to type it all in my

computer. Then I became aware that I did not copy it well because I was reading and writing it in the correct way without marking the mistakes in the original text so that my digital copy was not the copy of the original book. Scientifically we have to know that, otherwise nobody will know how was the original book. I did it again correcting and putting back all the original mistakes. So it became two volumes at the end. After one or two years I finished it, marking what was the original text and which were my corrections, otherwise it had no value. But meanwhile I found another original copy of the Dra Thalgyur tantra.

Previously in Tibet this book was not known but later in East Tibet lived Kathog Situ Rinpoche, a very learned teacher. He was a highly important reincarnation who was very interested in the Dzogchen teaching. He went everywhere in central Tibet and also to Nepal and India searching for original books of the Dzogchen teaching. He found many commentaries of Dzogchen tantras, copied them and brought them back to his residence, Kathog monastery. His idea was to print them to show that they were important texts and commentaries of Dzogchen. But when he returned from his journeys he didn't live long and after a few years he passed away. His library remained there, but no one understood what it was. In ancient times that monastery was very famous for Dzogchen Semde and Longde. They were studying and applying these teachings and there was a very rich transmission and tradition. But recently all the lamas of Kathog monastery had become very famous reincarnations that were interested only in developing nice temples, etc., not in studying very much. So they lost some of those qualifications and no one thought about Kathog Situ Rinpoche's library anymore.

Then recently a learned khenpo had the idea of looking at the texts in that library and discovered all the Dra Thalgyur commentaries and small commentaries of Dzogchen Upadesha tantras, and he tried to publish all these texts in the Nyingma Kama series. When I discovered these copies I compared the 5th Dalai Lama's and Kathog Situ Rinpoche's copies and I understood that their source was not the same. Originally both were handwritten, but I had no handwritten copy of Kathog Situ Rinpoche's, only the publication of the khenpo. Also I found that sometimes in the 5th Dalai Lama's copies some lines were missing and some words were different. Comparing all these versions I worked on them for two years and did many corrections. Later I removed all the corrections for those who are interested in reading the amended version of the Dra Thalgyur tantra. Altogether, with the version showing the corrections and the original text I prepared six volumes that I presented during the Dzogchen Forum in Moscow many years ago. This was one of my works.

The Dra Thalgyur Tantra is a very important root of the Dzogchen teaching. When we go to the essence of the Dzogchen teaching the most important text is the Dorje Sempa Namkha Che. It is not a tantra, it is a lung. In the Dzogchen teaching a text that contains all complete explanations of base, path, and fruit is called a root tantra. In the Vajrayana teaching a root tantra has ten qualifications. A text that is explaining only some of them is not a root tantra. In Dzogchen teaching it is different but base, path, and fruit must be complete; then it becomes a root tantra. A lung contains the most important points of a tantra. If a tantra, for instance, has ten chapters, maybe

some of them are not the very essence of the teaching and only two or three chapters represent the essence of everything. When a teacher like Guru Garab Dorje, and also some of the mahasiddhas in the different dimensions, found these tantras they took the essence of them and compiled a lung. Dorje Sempa Namkha Che is a lung, the essence of the Dzogchen teaching. When Vairochana started to translate Dzogchen teaching in Tibetan, he first translated five texts. Four of them are lungs, not tantras, the tantras were translated later. Lungs are more essential, more important. One of the first lungs translated by Vairochana was not an original lung of the teaching, it was a text, Changchub Semgön, written by Mañjushrimitra for introducing the Dzogchen teaching to buddhists. Among these five is Dorje Sempa Namkha Che that Garab Dorje was chanting when he was a small boy, not because he learned it from someone but because he was an emanation of Buddha Shakyamuni.

The first of the twelve primordial teachers is Tönpa Nangwa Tampa, the last one is Buddha Shakyamuni who didn't teach directly Dzogchen teaching. Indeed among the twelve teachers someone taught the Dzogchen teaching directly, someone indirectly. Buddha Shakyamuni did not transmit the Dzogchen teaching, but we consider the Dzogchen teaching a Buddhist teaching because Garab Dorje was an emanation of Buddha Shakyamuni, so his teaching is considered Buddha Shakyamuni's teaching.

When we follow a buddhist teaching it is important to know that Buddha's teaching is not only the oral teaching he gave in India. Buddha is omniscient, a totally enlightened being having many possibilities to communicate; so the Buddhist teaching has many aspects, not only what was taught in India. In Tibet we have the collection of all the teachings of Buddha called Kangyur. Ka means word of Buddha, gyur means translated in ancient times from Sanskrit to Tibetan. The Kangyur comprises 108 volumes. It does not mean that all these were taught in India at Bodhgaya or somewhere else as oral teachings. In sacred places of India, like Rajghir at Vulture Peak, Buddha taught Mahayana, but most Mahayana teachings are not oral teachings developed in India.

When Buddha manifested parinirvana or death, 18 different schools of Hinayana immediately appeared. There was no Mahayana at that time. Mahayana was really weak and no one was presenting himself as a Mahayana follower. Hinayana schools were fighting each other. Today in South Asia what is left is Theravada, one of the 18 schools but Theravada doesn't represent all Hinayana schools.

Mahayana developed in different dimensions, not only in the human dimension. So how was it developed in the human dimension? Not only through Buddha's mouth. We have three or four different aspects of Buddha's teaching; one is shalme sungpai ka, through Buddha's mouth: people listened to his teaching and then wrote it down. These are the sutras.

The second aspect is jesu nangwai ka, that means people empowered by Buddha, not Buddha himself. For instance the Prajñāparamitahridayasutra is the very essence of paramita in Mahayana and is very diffused in China, Japan, and India. This sutra is also saying there are no eyes, no

ears, no nose, etc. and at the end it is saying there is no path, no wisdom, no attainments, etc., only total emptiness or shunyata.

This is a very important sutra and from its introduction you can understand its origin. In Buddha's thangkas there are two standing monks, Shariputra and Maugdalyayana or Mogallana. They are representing the Hinayana tradition but in a real sense Shariputra had full knowledge of Mahayana, so he asked Buddha, "How can we understand total emptiness?" Buddha said, "Please ask Avalokiteshvara." So Shariputra asked Avalokiteshvara while Buddha remained in a state of contemplation. Then Avalokiteshvara explained there are no eyes, no ears, etc.; all these explanations were given by Avalokiteshvara. But we do not say that this sutra was taught by Avalokiteshvara, we say it is a sutra of the Buddha; even if the words were pronounced by Avalokiteshvara it is a teaching of Buddha. Buddha was in a state of contemplation and in that moment there was no separation from the state of Avalokiteshvara, so this became Buddha's teaching. The difference lies in our dualistic vision. This is not the only sutra of that kind, we are just using it as an example. If you read the Kangyur you can find many sutras Buddha gave permission for and they became Buddha's teachings. Many teachings of Buddha in Mahayana are called chingyi labpai ka: Buddha empowered something and from it came a teaching that was not pronounced through his mouth. Many teachings like this exist, the most important example is a sutra in the Kangyur stating that in the dimension of the Devas there was a big drum which emitted a sound that was a teaching. When Buddha empowered objects in this way there was a reason. It was necessary to have this kind of knowledge and teaching in that moment and that dimension. Somebody wrote it down and that sutra became Buddha's teaching. There are many similar teachings of Buddha. Also in some places teachings came out from stupas, rocks, trees; by looking into Kangyur you can understand this.

In India Buddha manifested tantras like Kalachakra, but not orally, it was a manifestation. Buddha manifested as Kalachakra and transmitted it; the same is true for Hevajra and Chakrasamvara manifestations, peaceful, joyful, wrathful, etc. These teachings are related to transformation and manifestation; in the Kangyur there are many tantras as teachings of Buddha.

Another way is lungdu tenpai ka: these are Buddha's prophecies. For instance Buddha gave teachings on cause and effect in the four noble truths and it was developed in Sutra. Then someone asked him how can we get beyond cause and effect and Buddha answered that in due time there will be a teacher giving teachings beyond cause and effect. For this reason Garab Dorje is recognized as an emanation of Buddha Shakyamuni.

At the beginning nobody knew it. When Garab Dorje was a small boy chanting the Dorje Sempa Namkha Che, there were many royal teachers in Oddiyana because the king, being very devoted to Buddha Shakyamuni, invited many pandits and they became royal teachers. When they heard the boy Garab Dorje explaining how you should go beyond cause and effect and how all teachings not going beyond cause and effect are not perfect complete teachings, only provisional, the pandits were worried because Buddha's teaching was based on cause and effect, so Garab Dorje could

be dangerous. Therefore they sent a message to the famous University of Nalanda, in India, where many pandits of Yogachara school resided. They said, "A boy is chanting in this way, when he grows up he can become dangerous for our teaching. We must go to Oddiyana to defeat this small boy and eliminate this idea."

At that time Garab Dorje asked his mother the princess to discuss with the pandits and she said, "You cannot discuss with pandits, you have not changed your teeth yet." After a while a group of pandits from Nalanda travelled to Oddiyana and Mañjushrimitra, the best pandit of the Yogachara school was among them. They travelled many months because at that time Oddiyana was in the current Pakistan, now a Taliban place. When they arrived, they visited Garab Dorje and started arguing with him. He replied with only a few words and Mañjushrimitra, because of his good karma, woke up immediately and understood that Garab Dorje was an emanation of Buddha. He said, "I have accumulated very bad actions because of not knowing that you are an emanation of Buddha Shakyamuni, what can I do for purifying this?" Garab Dorje said, "Don't worry, you can write a book explaining what you understood in the language of Yogachara." So Mañjushrimitra wrote Changchubkyi Sengön or Dola Sershun.

Changchubkyi Sengön equals meditation on bodhichitta, where bodhichitta means primordial state, not compassion as in the Sutra style. In Dola Sershun, do means stone. When you do not have knowledge you only see a stone. But then you discover that it is pure gold; sershun means very purified gold. Mañjushrimitra wrote this book and sent it to Nalanda where everybody understood that Garab Dorje's teaching was the essence of Buddha Shakyamuni's teaching. Mañjushrimitra became the most important student of Guru Garab Dorje. Also Thuwo Rajahasti, another pandit of the group, became his student, and they learned Semde, Longde, and Upadesha. At the time of Guru Garab Dorje no Dzogchen tantras existed, but today we have all the Dzogchen tantras because they were all taught by Garab Dorje. Most of the teachings taught by the twelve Dzogchen teachers were retransmitted by him.

Luckily today we have all these tantras thanks to Garab Dorje. He did not compose them, but he wrote some books himself; for instance a commentary of a tantra of Mañjushri, and also some Dzogchen Semde instructions that we are using today. Many lungs, not only these five, are called Dzogchen teaching. When Garab Dorje manifested the rainbow body, Mañjushrimitra received his three statements explaining how to transmit them to students, how Dzogchen practices should be applied and how to continue in the Dzogchen state. These are the three statements of Garab Dorje.

Knowing that they were extremely important for keeping Dzogchen teaching alive, Mañjushrimitra divided all of Garab Dorje's teachings into three series that were related to the three statements. The first statement is "direct introduction." Someone says that traditionally we have to do preliminary practices, ngöndro (meaning preparation), before receiving the real teaching. Still the Gelugpa and Sakyapa traditions do not include Guruyoga in ngöndro. They do prostrations related to the physical body, Vajrasattva practice for purifying, and offering of the mandala for

accumulating merits. Kagyüpa and Nyingmapa traditions at least include Guruyoga, but it is difficult that at this stage you can understand the real meaning of Guruyoga.

This is the traditional way for maintaining schools, etc., but not for having realization. If you like you can do that, but sometimes it doesn't correspond to our condition. During my first visit to USA, in Boston there was a Kagyüpa center that invited me to talk about dharma teaching. When I arrived there I saw a very elegant gentleman and I thought he came to listen to my talk but he said, "I want to talk to you about an important thing." I answered that this was not the right moment because I had to give a lecture and we could talk later. Then I lectured in a hall, and through the windows I saw that gentleman outside going up and down, so I understood that he was not interested in my talk. At the end he came to me and said, "I want to ask you something because I heard that you are not only a teacher but also a Tibetan doctor." He explained his problem and it was clear that a paralysis was starting to overtake him. I said that it was related to negative provocations, not to a normal illness, and that he should do a practice for controlling this negative energy. I asked if he was doing some practice and he said, "Yes, I'm following a teacher and I'm doing preliminary practice or ngöndro." I said, "You are lucky to have a teacher, ask him to give you the transmission of the practice of Vajrapani, then you practice it intensively and in this way you can control your negative provocation. And if you use medicines, therapies, etc., they will become very useful because you have controlled negative provocations." He said OK and went away without asking me for Vajrapani transmission because I was not his teacher.

Next year I went to that place to give a talk and that gentleman arrived again before the teachings. I asked him, "Did you do Vajrapani practice?" He said, "No, because my teacher didn't want to give me that transmission because I have to finish the ngöndro." He was doing the ngöndro for seven years already but because of his nerve illness he could not finish prostrations. But still he didn't ask me for that transmission. I told him to insist with his teacher to receive the transmission of that practice. That time he came to my teachings and knowing he was present I explained what are negative provocations, how we can receive them and deal with them in daily life very clearly. But he didn't ask me for Vajrapani transmission.

Then I didn't see him for some time and after three or four years, when we did a retreat in Tsegylgar, he appeared there. A little older, he was blind, coming with a dog and a cane. The first time he was a very elegant man but now he had completely changed. This time he was interested in my teaching and followed my retreat; of course I transmitted Vajrapani but it was too late. After a few years I asked people where was that man and they said he died.

It is not sufficient only preparing. It is necessary to practice. Otherwise, as I'm always telling my students, if you do only preparations and do not understand the real sense of the teaching it is becoming just like pigeons, as we say in Tibet: in the evening they are flying somewhere to sleep during the night. They turn to the right side, then to the left side, always trying to find a comfortable position without ever finding it, always preparing and never sleeping till morning.

Really, in the teaching we should go to the essence otherwise there is not much benefit. When I started to give Dzogchen teachings many Tibetan teachers criticized me directly or indirectly saying that Namkhai Norbu was giving the Dzogchen teaching to students who had not done the ngöndro. But I'm not worried because I know the Dzogchen teaching. Garab Dorje said that the first point is direct introduction from mind to nature of mind, which is the main path for having realization. This is what I already explained. Ati Guruyoga is an introduction. There are different ways of introducing but essentially I'm teaching that way. I'm not asking people if they did preliminary practices or not. I'm not teaching them. We know very well that we have a very short life and we try to do our best for having some benefit. So I'm not worried because Garab Dorje did not say to do preliminary practices first. Since he was omniscient, he would have said it and would have given four statements if it was necessary; first preliminary practices, then direct introduction.

The second statement is not remaining in doubt. If you remain in doubt you cannot have realization; for this reason you follow teachings such as Longde. Finally, when you are 100% sure about your real nature, you integrate everything in that state. This is the third statement of Guru Garab Dorje.

Then later also teachers who criticized me gave teachings to people without preliminary practices because they discovered how we should work in this society; we cannot always do complicated things. This corresponds to Buddha's teachings; we have to give teachings according to the conditions of individuals, their capacity and desire. If they are interested you should give without limitations. Buddha said this in the Sutra teachings. Preliminary practices are like a passport, to whom do you show this passport to when you die? You cannot bring your passport, you must leave everything behind. In your lifetime no one is checking this passport. Limitations in Dzogchen teaching are the root of samsara, you should discover this and be free from them.

Now I'm explaining the Dorje Sempa Namkha Che, a very important text that is also the essence of Buddha Shakyamuni's teaching. I worked very much on this text. There are many original versions of the Dorje Sempa Namkha Che. First I compared all the verses of five different original texts, then I completed the final text. This is one work I did for a long time. After that I checked how each verse of the Dorje Sempa Namkha Che is explained in Vairochana's commentary. Vairochana translated many Dzogchen teachings. He went to Oddiyana where he met Shri Simha who also wrote a commentary of this text. We have different editions of these commentaries. The most important edition of these texts is the Vairo Gyübum, a collection of tantras and teachings of Vairochana that were recently discovered in Ladakh. In Tibet I never heard that a collection of Vairochana's texts existed; even when I arrived in India I did not hear about it.

In Ladakh there was a Togden maybe of the Kagyüpa tradition. On the border between Ladakh and Tibet lived an old ancient family and when a family member died, they invited this Togden to do pujas for 49 days. While living there he discovered a very ancient handwritten edition of Vairo Gyübum. He was not an expert on these teachings, but he knew they were very ancient and important texts. So that family offered those books to him. The Togden was happy and brought

them to Ladakh. Later they were published in Ladakh in Tashi Gönpa. When I received the information that someone had published these texts in Ladakh I immediately got a copy of them. They contain all Dzogchen root lungs, the five lungs translated by Vairochana, and some instructions not available in general. Some of them were handwritten texts; I copied and corrected all of them for some years. Now I have all these books, particularly the Dorje Sempa Namkha Che root text, a commentary of Shri Simha and a commentary of Vairochana. I typed them all in my computer.

Later, in the Dorje Sempa Namkha Che I established the words in a perfect way and I did a weekly calendar for Dzogchen practitioners. So now there is the possibility to study it, sometimes only one verse, or sometimes two verses for each of the 52 weeks in a year. Our translator Adriano translated the Dorje Sempa Namkha Che and now everything is ready. I want to give you the transmission of this text explaining it just a little so that you can read it.

Oral teachings given by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu at Namgyalgar, Australia, November 3-8, 2015
[Published by Shang Shung Publications 2017](#)

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