



The Golden Mirror of Wisdom

Images of the Rinchen Terdzö in Orissa, India

Text by Walker Blaine

Photographs by Christoph Schönherr, Benny Fong, Ursula Von Vacano, Laura Chenoweth, and Walker Blaine

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INTRODUCTION TO THE RINCHEN TERDZÖ

The Rinchen Terdzö is one of the great treasures of the Nyingma tradition, the oldest of the four major contemporary schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Known in English as *The Precious Treasury of Termas*, it is a massive collection of nearly 900 empowerments and related teachings and meditation practices that are based on termas. Termas are treasure teachings that were concealed by great masters of the past to be discovered in later times when those particular teachings would be the most beneficial.

When the Rinchen Terdzö is bestowed, the key part of the ceremonies is the empowerments for the meditation practices. An empowerment (Skt. *abhisheka*) is a series of ritual displays and instructions, which are simultaneously an introduction to a meditation practice and a demonstration of its fruition by the teacher. An empowerment is also an introduction to all aspects of the path to complete enlightenment from the perspective of a single vajrayana or Buddhist tantric practice. Empowerments are among the most colorful and fascinating parts of the vajrayana tradition. They involve a vast and complex range of symbolism that is designed to bring the student to the awakened state. All the senses are involved; no corner is left out of the spiritual journey presented in an empowerment.



Padmasambhava – The Buddha of the Vajrayana

In the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, the Buddha Shakyamuni stated that 8 years after his passing from this world, an enlightened teacher would come to teach the highest teachings and greatly benefit beings. The Buddha said that this teacher, named Padmasambhava, would be even more enlightened than he was, meaning that their realizations would be equal, but Padmasambhava's expression of enlightenment would be extraordinary.

Photograph by Walker Blaine

THE TEACHER

The perfect teacher can be understood in the context of three kinds of lineages or three types of relationships between teacher and student. These three lineages are used to explain the origins of the highest vajrayana teachings in the Nyingma tradition. The first lineage is called *the mind lineage of the victorious ones* and is the transmission of the dharma from a transcendent buddha to a primordially enlightened retinue of transcendent beings. The second lineage is called *the symbolic lineage of the vidyadharas* and is the transmission of the teachings from a transcendent figure like Vajrasattva to one of the very early masters of the tradition, such as the Indian teacher Prahevajra. The third lineage is called *the hearing lineage of ordinary beings*, which is where the teachings move from one of the early human lineage figures such as Padmasambhava or his contemporaries, Vimalamitra and Vairochana, to their students, continuing down to our own teachers in the present day.

The three lineages also describe the personal relationship between a teacher and a student. The *hearing lineage* refers to how the student begins to experience the truth of the teachings through words and concepts. The *symbolic lineage* refers to the relative level of what Trungpa Rinpoche called ‘crazy wisdom’, how the teacher can, without effort, create incidents and environmental circumstances that communicate the experience of awakening in the student’s life. The *mind lineage* refers to an atmosphere of mutual understanding, where the meaning of the dharma is understood nakedly without language, symbolism, or incident.

At the Rinchen Terdzö, His Eminence Namkha Drimed Rinpoche embodied all three lineages. The words of his teachings were rich and flawless. The atmosphere of the abhishekas and their symbolism had the quality of continuous magic like being in a pure realm. His Eminence’s mind seemed all-pervasive. In short, he was the complete manifestation of compassion and carried every blessing of wisdom. The steadiness and power of his presence during the three months of empowerments was nothing short of amazing; he appeared to get more and more energy as the day went on, even when we went late into the night. Hearing his voice and repeating verses with him during the empowerments became as close as one’s own thoughts. When the empowerments concluded and it was time to say goodbye, there was no adequate way to express our gratitude for having spent so much time with him in so profound a situation.

HIS EMINENCE NAMKHA DRIMED RINPOCHE



His Eminence Tertön Namkha Drimed Rabjam Rinpoche

Namkha Drimed Rinpoche manifests like all of the great masters of the past who were one-pointed in their dedication to the preservation of the transmission lineage of the teachings. During the Rinchen Terdzö, when he was not practicing or presiding over the empowerments, Namkha Drimed Rinpoche often composed texts or studied. After the conclusion of the abhishekas, His Eminence often continued his activities late into the night. His days resumed at 4:00 A.M. in the morning, when he performed his personal practice, which finished before he started his Rinchen Terdzö preparations at 6:15 A.M.

Photograph by Christoph Schönherr



Namkha Drimed Rinpoche, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, Lhunpo Rinpoche, and Tulku Kunchap Rinpoche

Within the aura of incredible discipline, His Eminence showed many facets. One was of a father who burst into a broad smile or gently shook with laughter under his robes when members of his immediate family accidentally bumped one another beneath his throne during the busy empowerment rituals. In this photo, His Eminence and the Sakyong enjoy a moment together at a photo shoot during a day off in December. In the background are Lhunpo Rinpoche and Tulku Kunchap Rinpoche.

Photograph by Walker Blaine

Blessings on the veranda

Many of the great teachers of Tibet, including His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, have praised Namkha Drimed Rinpoche's realization and activity. The Tibetan community holds him in high esteem because of his wisdom and the power of his practices for healing, divination, and pacification of obstacles. Here, at the end of a typical day, His Eminence is in the midst of bestowing an empowerment on each of the participants.

Photograph by Christoph Schönherr



SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE



At the Ripa Ladrang

This photo was taken at the Ripa family compound, the Ripa Ladrang, near the end of the Rinchen Terdzö.

Photograph by Benny Fong



Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche with the Tibetan lay sangha

For a major lineage holder like Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, receiving the Rinchen Terdzö expands what he is able to offer others. While the Sakyong is very much a part of the Buddhist tradition in the West, he is also a big part of the tradition in the East. The expectations of him are high because he is the rebirth of Jamgön Mipham Gyatso, one of the most important teachers in the Nyingma lineage.

Photograph by Christoph Schönherr



His Eminence Namkha Drimed Rinpoche and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche reads along in the root text while His Eminence bestows a tri during the start of the Rinchen Terdzö. Throughout the event, the Sakyong displayed the qualities of the perfect student. His actions were those of someone completely attentive and humble in the presence of His Eminence, soft and gentle while being alert and strong.

Photograph by Christoph Schönherr



Dungse Lhuntrul Dechen Gyurme Rinpoche (left)

Every morning, while his Eminence did his preparatory practices out of view behind a curtain near the empowerment shrine, Lhunpo Rinpoche sat on a small throne in the front of the main shrine room and gave the reading transmission for the Rinchen Terdzö. More than half of the Rinchen Terdzö is read aloud during the lung; the rest is read during the empowerments. The reading transmission includes the ‘small letters’ or notes for the practices, the instruction manuals, life stories of the tertöns and visionaries who discovered the termas, and the life stories of Padmasambhava. Here, Lhunpo Rinpoche is assisting Namkha Drimed Rinpoche during an empowerment during the end of the Rinchen Terdzö.

Photograph by Christoph Schönherr

Gyetrul Jigme Rinpoche (above)

Jigme Rinpoche teaches widely in the West and is the head of Rigon Thubden Mindroling monastery in India. His teaching style is lively, engaging, and full of humor. Jigme Rinpoche posed for this portrait during the morning breakfast break.

Photograph by Walker Blaine



Sisters and brothers

Six of His Eminence's seven children attended the Rinchen Terdzö. Namkha Drimed Rinpoche's eldest son, Tenzin Nyima Rinpoche, is abbot of Rigon Tashi Chöling monastery in Tibet and was unable to attend.

From the left: Lhunpo Rinpoche, the Sakyong Wangmo Dechen Chöying Sangmo, Semo Palmo, Semo Pema Dechen, Jigme Rinpoche, and Semo Sonam Palzom.

Photograph by Christoph Schönherr



Sangha watching lama dances

Photograph by Walker Blaine

GENEROSITY



The Sakyong Wangmo Dechen Chöying Sangmo making a mandala offering to His Eminence Namkha Drimed Rinpoche

Offerings of gratitude are made when requesting and after receiving teachings. At the start of every empowerment, the students visualize offering the whole universe with all its beings, wealth, and enjoyments to the teacher and the lineage. While building a physical representation of the universe with rice heaped according to a traditional Buddhist cosmology, one makes imaginary offerings as vast as possible in order to open up to the teacher's mind. In this photo, the Sakyong Wangmo makes an elaborate mandala offering to His Eminence on behalf of the entire assembly at the start of the day.

Photograph by Walker Blaine

OUTSIDE THE MONASTERY



View from the monastery roof at dawn (upper left)

Photograph by Christoph Schönherr

Stupas (upper right)

A stupa is a symbolic representation of the Buddha in meditation that is empowered as a living embodiment of wisdom. The specific design of a stupa can reflect a moment or period in the Buddha's life, such as his attainment of enlightenment or the month when he performed a variety of miracles. These nine stupas are just down the road from the monastery and are a pilgrimage spot for Tibetans in the village.

Photograph by Walker Blaine

Village road (lower left)

Photograph by Christoph Schönherr





Skeleton dancer

Photograph by Christoph Schönherr



The dance masters (upper right)

Tulku Kunchap Rinpoche (left) and Lhunpo Rinpoche (right) were the ceremonial masters for the dances.



Feathers (lower right)

Photographs by Christoph Schönherr