

Of his four hands,  
 The palms of the upper two are held together.  
 In the lower two  
 He holds a crystal rosary and a white lotus.  
 Silks and precious ornaments adorn him.  
 He wears the hide of an antelope across his chest,  
 And a crown ornamented by Amitābha.  
 Seated with his two legs in the crossed thunderbolt position,  
 He leans his back against a pure moon.  
 He is, by nature, the epitome of all refuges.

Think that I and all sentient beings are praying to him, in one voice:

Lord,  
 You are unmarred by fault,  
 And white in body hue.  
 The perfect buddha ornaments your crown,  
 And you see beings with compassionate eyes.  
 I bow to you, Avalokiteśvara.

Recite that three, seven, or as many times as possible.

As a result of this one-pointed prayer,  
 Light beams radiate out  
 From the body of the noble one,  
 And purify defiled karmic appearances and confusion.  
 The outer container becomes the Land of Bliss.  
 The inner contents—the body, speech, and mind of beings—  
 Become the perfected form, teachings, and heart-mind of  
 Avalokiteśvara.  
 Appearance and sound turn into indivisible awareness-emptiness.

While meditating on that, recite the six syllables [the mantra *om maṇi padme hūm*]. At the end, remain absorbed in the own-state of no-conception about the three circles [doer, done-to, or deed].

My and others' bodies are the perfected form of the noble one.  
 Voices and sounds are the rhythm of the six syllables.  
 Memories and thoughts are the expanse of great primal consciousness.

Through the merit resulting [from performing this visualization]  
 May I quickly come to achieve [identification with] Avalokiteśvara,  
 And then may I establish every single being without exception in that  
 state.

# — 17 —

## A Fasting Ritual

Roger Jackson

Fasting rituals have been an important element of religious life in Tibetan culture areas for centuries. The collected writings of many of Tibet's greatest lamas include the texts of fasting rituals, and, in more recent times, anthropologists have explored the social and performative dimensions of the rite. In most places, the fasting ritual or *nyungne* (*smyung gnas*) is held annually and draws members of the laity to the local monastery or temple for three days of prayer, prostration, and ascetic practices focused on the great compassionate bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara or Chenrezi (*Spyan ras gzigs*). Though there is no solid historical evidence that the type of fasting ritual practiced in Tibetan culture areas originated in India, Tibetans writers do trace the lineage of its practice back to India, and the Tibetan rite clearly combines in it a number of elements that are crucial to Buddhism in India, and elsewhere in Asia.

Socially, the fasting ritual is an instance of a common Buddhist phenomenon: occasions on which laypeople are permitted for a time to participate in the life of their society's most valued religious institution, the monastery or temple. The hallmark of such occasions, whatever their locale or duration, is the assumption by laypeople of some of the vows incumbent upon monastics. In lands throughout Buddhist Asia, laypeople will gather on new- and/or full-moon days (in Tibetan areas, more often the lunar tenth or twenty-fifth days) at their local monastery or temple, observe eight vows (against killing, stealing, lying, sexual activity, using intoxicants, eating after noon, entertainment and ornamentation, and taking an exalted seat), and spend the day praying, making offerings, and listening to religious discourses. The eight vows also may be taken for life by men or women who wish to renounce the world outside the monastic context, or women who wish to live a monastic life but are barred from doing so by the loss of the lineage of ordination. Women also may take for life the same ten vows as a novice monk (the eight listed, with the seventh divided into two and the promise not to handle money added as the tenth). The Tibetan fasting ritual is most closely modeled on the traditions involving lay attendance at monasteries and temples on lunar cycle

days; however, it is scheduled less frequently, lasts longer, and is more demanding.

The fasting ritual is also an instance of a phenomenon that is not only Buddhist, but universal: asceticism. Such practices as fasting, silence, and celibacy have found a place in most of the world's religious traditions. Like all ascetic practices, they are aimed at reducing the individual's concern with outer, physical matters and increasing their concern with the inner and spiritual dimension of life. Most traditions believe that by undergoing the hardships involved in ascetic practices, individuals are "purified" and thereby made more capable of the sort of transformation that is held out as the ideal of human life—whether it is described as salvation, *nirvāṇa*, or living as God or the ancestors may prescribe. Buddhism often has been seen as a tradition that eschews asceticism. The Buddha, after all, tried and rejected the life of extreme austerity, and prescribed for his followers a "middle way" between asceticism and hedonism. It must be remembered, however, that the life of a Buddhist monk or nun was, by the standards of lay life in any culture or era, an austere one: celibacy was required, and while neither fasting nor silence was considered essential to spiritual progress, such practices often were adopted by the great meditators and adepts who have been the tradition's most charismatic and influential figures.

Cultically, the fasting ritual is an instance of the worship of Avalokiteśvara, the compassionate "Down-Looking Lord" who is perhaps the most popular deity of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Avalokiteśvara first assumes textual prominence in the Pure Land sūtras, where he is an attendant of the savior-buddha Amitābha ("Infinite Light"). In the *Lotus Sūtra*, he is described as a great being who hears the appeals of all those in distress and comes to their aid. In a sūtra devoted entirely to him, the *Karaṇḍavyūha*, he possesses his own pure land, on Mount Potala, to which he will bring all those who pray to him or recite his six-syllable mantra, *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*. In the tantric tradition, he takes on a variety of forms (often numbered at 108), any one of which a practitioner may ritually serve and contemplatively identify with. Wherever Mahāyāna spread in Asia, Avalokiteśvara followed: he was worshipped in Southeast Asia as Lokanātha, the "Lord of the World," in China, in a feminine guise, as the graceful savioress, Kuan Yin (Guanyin), and in Japan as the multifaceted, powerful Kannon. So important was he in Tibet that he came to be considered the father and protector of the nation, incarnate in the great early kings who promoted Buddhism and in the Dalai Lamas (see chapter 2). Avalokiteśvara also protects individual devotees from rebirth into the various realms of cyclic existence: the six-syllable mantra is often on the lips of the faithful, especially elderly laypeople. The particular form of Avalokiteśvara to which the fasting ritual is devoted is his most elaborate, that with eleven heads and a thousand arms. According to tradition, frustrated by the seeming infinity of beings to save, Avalokiteśvara felt his body and head split apart; his guiding buddha, Amitābha, restored him, giving him a thousand arms and eleven heads, Amitābha's own being topmost. The eleven heads express all moods and see in all directions; each of the thousand hands has in its palm an eye of wisdom, symbolic of Ava-

lokiteśvara's perfect fusion of compassion, discernment, and skill in assisting suffering beings.

The actual historical origins of the fasting ritual itself are obscure. The most common legend of its foundation traces it back to India and tells of a poor, detested Indian woman afflicted with leprosy, who in desperation worshipped Avalokiteśvara in something like a prototype of the fasting ritual. He cured her, and out of gratitude, she took full ordination as a Buddhist nun. It is in remembrance of her that participants in the fasting ritual imagine that the Long Request Prayer at the heart of the rite (section III.E.1) actually is recited by this nun, Lakṣmī. A second legend, related among the Sherpas of Nepal, tells of a group of seven demons who enjoyed feasting daily on humans. One female demon, Adakpalum, had five hundred children, and each of them captured and ate a human being each day. A great lama, Dzichen Rinpoche, managed to capture one of Adakpalum's sons and returned him to her only on the condition that she and her brood desist from cannibalism. They did so, and Adakpalum, having experienced the temporary loss of her son, came to understand how the families of her victims must feel. She repented and convinced her fellow demons to do likewise. Dzichen Rinpoche then prescribed for all of them as a penance three years of continuous practice of the fasting ritual. As a result of observing it purely, the former demons were reborn in Amitābha's paradise, Sukhāvātī, and because the fasting ritual proved so efficacious, it was institutionalized and prescribed for ordinary laypeople who wished to purify negative karma and accumulate merit.

As noted above, the fasting ritual is practiced throughout the Inner Asian area influenced by Tibetan forms of Buddhism, including Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, Mongolia, Tibet itself, and, since 1959, in the Tibetan diaspora. The ritual is most often undertaken on an annual basis, in the period preceding the celebration of Wesak, the anniversary of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and final *nirvāṇa* (May–June). Though the rite occasionally was performed by monks in the great Tibetan monasteries, it really is a layperson's practice and so has most often been practiced in smaller monasteries or temples that play a central role in the life of a lay community. Usually, the ritual will be conducted by the local lama or lamas, who often are monks but also (as in the Nyingma tradition) may be laymen; the vast majority of participants are laypeople, and the majority of those middle-aged or older.

The ritual itself formally takes two and a half days, though a day of preparations and a celebratory conclusion may draw the process out for four full days. On the day of preparation, the presiding lama or lamas generally will conduct a ceremony of propitiation to the earth-deities, who are urged to purify the place where the fasting ritual will occur. The lamas also will prepare the ritual altar, replete with water bowls, various offering substances (including specially molded dough offerings called *torma*), and images of the ritual's presiding deity, Avalokiteśvara. If necessary, the lamas may conduct a permission ceremony or empowerment, which will permit those participating in the ritual to visualize themselves as Avalokiteśvara—a quintessentially tantric procedure that requires formal initiation.

The actual fasting ritual begins the next day at dawn with the taking of eight vows. On this day, just one meal (almost always vegetarian) is taken, at noon. Most of the day is spent in three separate performances of the actual fasting ritual (section III), from going for refuge right through to the final dedication of merit. The centerpiece of each ritual session is the chanting of a long "vow prayer" directed to Avalokiteśvara (section III.E.1). As the practitioners recite it (seeing themselves as Avalokiteśvara), they prostrate their bodies fully toward the image of Avalokiteśvara on the altar, as well as toward a visualized Avalokiteśvara they picture constantly before them. The chanting of this prayer while one simultaneously prostrates and visualizes is believed to be especially efficacious in purifying negative imprints and generating merit.

On the second day of the actual ritual, precepts again are taken at dawn, but the strictures on participants on this day will be far more severe: no food at all is to be ingested, and not a drop of liquid is to be drunk—not even, it is said, one's own saliva! Also, apart from the chanting that is done during the three ritual sessions, silence is strictly observed: there is to be no conversation whatsoever. This second day of the ritual is the most grueling, for to chant and perform hundreds of prostrations on an empty stomach is no easy task; also, the elimination of speaking as an outlet adds psychological pressure to the physical duress. It is not unusual for participants to feel weak and highly emotional during the second day. Yet the hardship they are enduring is believed to serve as a powerful purifier, and it is borne stoically, if not always enthusiastically.

Silence and the fast are maintained until the morning of the third day. No precepts are taken, and after a final session of the ritual (in which the obligatory chants and prostrations are lessened), the participants are given a great meal to mark the formal conclusion of the retreat. The celebration often will continue through the day, culminating in an evening offering ceremony accompanied by a ritual feast, at the conclusion of which volunteers and donors will come forward to begin planning for the next year's fasting ritual. It might be noted that although the schedule just described is most typical, on occasion the ritual may cover the entire two weeks prior to Wesak, with pairs of one-meal and fast days following one another again and again. This makes for a retreat whose intensity and difficulty is comparable to that of the austere retreats in Zen monasteries (*rohatsu sesshin*).

In the context of the normative spiritual vision of the Tibetan Buddhist world, the major purposes of the fasting ritual are those already suggested: the purification of negative karma and the accumulation of merit. Given Buddhist assumptions about the infinity of previous rebirths we all have had and the deluded way in which we have conducted ourselves through most of those rebirths, it is axiomatic that we all bear with us in our mindstreams the seeds sown by countless actions motivated by greed, anger, and ignorance. According to karmic theory, each of these seeds must bear fruit and will do so when the appropriate conditions arise. In most Buddhist traditions, however, this rather gloomy prospect is mitigated by the assurance that—short of attaining a full enlightenment that will

destroy all previous negative karma—one may delay such fruition through cultivating positive actions and reduce or even eliminate some negative results through sincere repentance and purification. Generally, it is assumed that the more zealous the pursuit of purification, the greater the number of negative seeds that will be destroyed or damaged. Thus, an ascetic discipline like that imposed in the fasting ritual, in which repentance is expressed and penance performed in the presence of a loving and potent deity, is held to be especially efficacious. At the same time, the generation, during the ritual, of positive states of mind (devotion, compassion, some insight into the nature of reality) sows positive seeds in the mindstream, which will bear fruit in this and future lives, delaying the fruition of unpurified negativity, and increasing one's potential to attain the ultimate positive condition, enlightenment itself.

Typically, the normative view of the benefits of the fasting ritual is expressed in terms of its effects on the individual. Clearly, however, there is also a social dimension to the practice, unstated but highly important. On the broadest level, as a collective experience, the fasting ritual provides for the participants a natural sense of community, which ideally will extend beyond the ritual period and find expression in people's ordinary lives. The greater the proportion of a community that participates in the fasting ritual, the greater the ritual's effect on social cohesion will be. The fact that the ritual centers on the worship of the great merciful bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara, and that one attempts both to receive and to identify with his boundless compassion, only reinforces the potential for its effecting social cohesion: compassion and forgiveness are, obviously, of considerable social value, whatever their "karmic" effects on the individual. A further social function of the fasting ritual is to bring the lay and monastic communities together. Laypeople are permitted for a time to share in something resembling a monastic life-style, and thereby to gain access to the sort of religious power usually reserved for the clergy. Still, the ritual is overseen by lamas, and the attitude laypeople are likely to develop from the experience is perhaps less often one of spiritual self-sufficiency than of gratitude to and a renewed sense of dependence upon the clergy. A further social function that may be performed by the fasting ritual is that of easing the transition to a less active life for that considerable proportion of the participants who are older people. In Buddhist cultures, one form of "retirement"—especially for widows and widowers—is to join a monastery, and the fasting ritual clearly paves the way for this.

Both Tibetans themselves and Western scholars have tended to view Tibetan Buddhism as a "complete" Buddhism, one that weaves together into a single tradition virtually every strand of thought and practice that developed in the Indian Buddhism from which the Tibetans drew their inspiration. Such a characterization may be a bit simplistic, but there is an element of truth to it. From the eighth to the fourteenth century, Tibetans self-consciously appropriated as much of North Indian Buddhism as they could, and they attempted to organize a vast body of material into a coherent, integrated system. The fasting ritual exemplifies this, and we can see in it a subtle integration of the three major "vehicles"

of Indian Buddhism: Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and the tantric tradition, the Mantrayāna or Vajrayāna, which is itself a subset of Mahāyāna. Also, the ritual reflects a remarkable combination of three approaches to religiousness identified in India, and often seen as equally valuable but incompatible: ritual, knowledge, and devotion.

From the Tibetan perspective, the most important feature of Hīnayāna Buddhism is its promulgation of standards of morality. In particular, the Hīnayāna tradition has contributed to Buddhism as a whole the basic sets of vows to be observed by laypeople and monastics. Lay practitioners generally will observe a set of five vows, against killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and taking intoxicants; fully ordained monks will observe well over two hundred vows, and fully ordained nuns (who are rare outside China nowadays) will observe well over three hundred. The set of eight vows, which are taken by participants on the two full days of the fasting ritual, clearly fall somewhere in between lay and full monastic vows: they extend lay vows by forbidding all sexual activity rather than just sexual misconduct, as well as by severely restricting usual modes of eating and entertainment; at the same time, they fall well short of full monasticism by their failure to regulate behavior in anywhere near the detail that full vows do (see chapter 20). Though the eight vows taken by fasting ritual participants are regarded as "Mahāyāna" precepts, and the prayer that precedes them (section II) does employ distinctively Mahāyāna terminology, the vows themselves are identical to those taken by "Hīnayānists"; there is nothing specifically Mahāyānist about them, and they remain the most clearly Hīnayāna aspect of the rite.

Tibetan Buddhists are self-consciously Mahāyānist, so it is not surprising that the fasting ritual contains many elements typical of the Great Vehicle. We already have noted that one way of locating the rite in the history of Buddhism is by considering it as a manifestation of the cult of Avalokiteśvara. As noted above, only in Mahāyāna texts and cultures is Avalokiteśvara so important a deity, and only there does compassion receive so central an emphasis in religious rhetoric. Similarly, while the purification of negative karma and accumulation of merit that are immediate goals of the fasting ritual are common to Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna practices, the achievement of complete buddhahood that is the ultimate purpose of the fasting ritual is a uniquely Mahāyānist ideal: in the prayer preceding the taking of precepts (section II), one expresses the hope of achieving "the stage of fully completed buddhahood," and at the conclusion of each ritual session (section III.M), one prays that one may oneself someday "become a greatly compassionate one," equal in knowledge, compassion, and power to the Buddha himself. This sort of aspiration is encountered only infrequently outside the Mahāyāna.

Also, the ritual is framed in a distinctly Mahāyāna way. Though it begins like almost any Buddhist practice with an invocation of the three jewels of refuge, the Buddha, dharma, and saṅgha, the text immediately adds a uniquely Mahāyāna touch by insisting that the practitioner generate the thought of enlightenment, *bodhicitta*, the aspiration to attain the full enlightenment of buddhahood so that one may assist all sentient beings in their temporal and spiritual undertakings

(section II). This spirit is supposed to inform every action that one performs, within the ritual or outside it. As the ritual in general and (though it is not stated) each session begins with a distinctly Mahāyānist aspiration, so it concludes with one: the wish that any merit one may have accrued not be selfishly hoarded but, rather, be "dedicated" to the enlightenment of others (sections III.I, III.M, IV). In between the initial aspiration and final dedication, there is much else that is typically Mahāyāna: reference to the nature of the reality as emptiness (*śūnyatā*); active visualization of the deity one worships, Avalokiteśvara; praise of him in the most elaborate terms; and the performance for him of the seven-branch liturgy and various ablutions—all elements of proper ritual (*pūjā*) that Mahāyānists freely adapted from Hindu models.

The tantric tradition of Mahāyāna—known as the Mantrayāna or Vajrayāna—was the dominant style of Buddhism during the period when Tibetans absorbed the religion from India, and the fasting ritual, like virtually any Tibetan practice-tradition, is deeply influenced by tantric conceptions. Perhaps the most crucial of these is the idea that the practitioner must identify with the deity to whom the ritual is directed, in this case by visualizing himself or herself as possessing the body, speech, and mind of Avalokiteśvara. This "preenactment" of the wisdom, form, and functions one will attain at the time of enlightenment is known as "taking the goal as path" and is unique to tantric traditions of meditation. It cannot be practiced without a formal initiation from a lama, whether the initiation be a full empowerment imposing long-term vows and responsibilities upon the disciple or a permission ceremony of more limited scope. The fasting ritual is not only a rite of worship, purification, and merit-making, but a tantric *sādhana*, or meditative scenario, which involves first reducing oneself and one's environment to a natural state of emptiness; then from that state of emptiness generating the deity both in front of and as oneself; next drawing into the visualized deity, or "pledge being," the actual deity, or "wisdom being," and receiving blessings in the form of light from the actual deity; reciting various mantras of the deity's and performing various ritual movements, including prostrations and hand-gestures (*mudrā*); making offerings of dough-cakes, *tormas*, to transmudane and worldly divinities; and, finally, dismissing/dissolving the visualized deity—though afterward, one is to resume not one's ordinary form, but a simplified version of Avalokiteśvara, with whom one continues to identify (see chapters 13, 14, and 16).

As the fasting ritual reflects an integration of the three vehicles of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, so, too, does it integrate in a remarkable fashion the three "yogas," or approaches to the divine that have been singled out—and often considered quite separately—in Indian traditions: devotion, knowledge, and ritual. That devotion is central to the ritual is fairly obvious: verse after verse refers to the salvific, purifying powers of Avalokiteśvara, whose intervention is requested repeatedly in the most heartfelt manner. The verses of praise and request, in particular (sections III.E–F), stand as beautiful examples of what might be called Buddhist devotion-alism (*bhakti*). Knowledge, on the other hand, is not so obviously a part of the text—certainly, there is little in it that is overtly philosophical. However, the

tantric element of the ritual is predicated on the practitioners' ability to reduce themselves to emptiness, then to visualize themselves as Avalokiteśvara while simultaneously being aware of the visualization's empty nature. Also, by seeing themselves as Avalokiteśvara, practitioners imitate his omniscient mind, which has direct knowledge of all conventional and ultimate truths. All this, in turn, requires that one have at least an "imaginative" understanding of the nature of reality, which requires at least a general philosophical appreciation for ultimate truth—hence a certain type of knowledge. Indeed, it is important to remember that normative Buddhism in Tibet is essentially a gnostic enterprise, and that the most passionate devotee or obsessive ritualist must have knowledge of the true nature of things in order to attain the prescribed goal of full buddhahood.

The fasting ritual is, of course, above all a ritual—it is identified by the Tibetan word for rite or ritual, *cho ga*. What does this mean, though? In the most general sense, religious ritual involves the repeated performance of certain prescribed actions, which are believed to narrow the gulf between the human and the divine. In the fasting ritual, the divine that one hopes to effectuate is Avalokiteśvara, and the actions one performs are hallowed by tradition and intensified by repetition. What is more, tantric ritual is repeated, prescribed action that is deliberately integrative of the whole human person. Here, the practitioner's body (through prostration and hand-gestures), speech (through mantra and prayer), and mind (through visualization and contemplation) are all involved in the ritual process.

The fasting ritual, like so many Tibetan ritual practices, is like a fabric in which many diverse strands have been woven together: Hinayāna discipline, Mahāyāna worship and aspiration, and tantric meditative procedures; passionate devotion, detached understanding of reality, and detailed ritual performance; and, finally, activity by all elements of the participant's person: body, speech, and mind. Tibetan Buddhism may or may not really be "complete" Buddhism, but the fasting ritual provides compelling evidence that, at the very least, it is a complex and many-layered tradition.

The fasting ritual text translated below is entitled the "Nectar-Drop: The Extremely Condensed Fasting Ritual of Eleven-Headed Avalokiteśvara." It was composed by Tuken Chökyi Nyima (Thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma, 1737–1802), a great scholiast of the Gelukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. As with many ritual texts, Tuken's involves more than appears on paper. It is, after all, meant to be performed, and while in Tibetan traditions ritual performance is usually keyed to texts, it is by no means enslaved to them. Thus, depending on the circumstances of a ritual performance (the nature and capacity of the participants, the inclinations of the presiding lama), sections may be added or subtracted from the text, without the performance thereby ceasing to be "of" that text. Performances of Tuken's text often will involve changes of ordering (for example, the abbreviated sevenfold liturgy sometimes is recited much later) or the addition of other prayers and practices, most notably: refuge and thought of enlightenment prayers, which will be recited at the outset of every ritual session, prior to consecrating the offerings; the maṇḍala offering of Mount Meru, the continents and various pre-

cious substances, which may be added after the seven-branch liturgy; and a four-line version of the vow prayer, which may be recited in lieu of the long one as one prostrates. In addition, Tuken occasionally gives instructions in so sketchy a manner that interpolation is required to follow them; for instance, he specifies toward the beginning of the ritual session that one should "take refuge, generate the thought of enlightenment, and contemplate the four immeasurables." Each of these entails a specific prayer that must be recited, usually three times. Similarly, when Tuken incorporates into his text much material that he has drawn from earlier texts, he will give only the first line; the rest is to be supplied by the practitioner, who is presumed to know it.

In the translation below, prayers given by Tuken in abbreviated form have been spelled out fully; the only other addition made to the printed text is to supply section titles, so that the text's structure may be clearer. Sections that communicate instructions are set apart here in smaller type. Sections that are metrical in the original are broken into poetic lines here, though no attempt has been made to duplicate the original meter. Finally, mantras have been translated to the degree that their syllables have a discernible meaning; untranslatable syllables, such as *om*, *hūm*, and *phat*, have been left as they are. The mantras have been translated simply so the reader may get a sense of the mixture of semantic and lexical items of which they are composed; it must be recalled, however, that the power of a mantra resides not in its semantic sense but in the sounds themselves, each of which, and in various combinations, has particular divine associations. That is why Tibetans invariably write and recite mantras in the original Sanskrit, and in most cases have no idea what a mantra's "translation" (or, on occasion, original pronunciation) may be.

The translation is from *Spyan ras gzigs zhal bcu gcig pa'i smyung gnas kyi cho ga shin tu bsdu pa bdud rtsi thigs pa zhes bya ba*, from *The Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of Thu'u bkwan Chos kyi nyi ma* (New Delhi: Ngawang Gelek Demo, 1969), vol. 5, folios 233–46.

### Further Reading

An earlier translation appears in *Eleven-Headed Avalokiteśvara's Fasting Ritual Condensed into a Nectar Drop*, trans. Roger Jackson, with additional trans. by John Makransky (Oregon, WI: Deer Park Books, 1989). See also the Seventh Dalai Lama, *Nyung Nā: The Means of Achievement of the Eleven-Faced Great Compassionate One, Avalokiteshvara*, trans. Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche and George Churinoff (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995). For anthropological studies of this ritual in the Nepali context, see Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Sherpas of Nepal: Buddhist Highlanders* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), pp. 180–85; and Sherry B. Ortner, *Sherpas through Their Rituals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 33–60.

## Nectar-Drop: The Extremely Condensed Fasting Ritual of Eleven-Headed Avalokiteśvara

### I. AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Having prostrated with my body, speech, and mind to the lotus feet of the kindly guru,  
Who is the compassion of all the conquerers gathered into one,  
The one with a white lotus who performs as a saffron-clad monk,  
I will set down the practice of this fasting ritual.

### II. ONE-DAY MAHĀYĀNA PRECEPTS [DAYS 1 AND 2, AT DAWN]

Wishing to perform the fasting ritual of the eleven-faced noble Avalokiteśvara, you should arrange a drawing or actual statue of the body, etc., of the Greatly Compassionate One. Or, if they are unavailable, you should put white points in the center of a mirror, and in front of that put a vase two-thirds filled with pure water. Then, put into the vase the various Action Tantra substances. In front [of the vase] place three rounded tormas and arrange whatever offering is to be received. Then, at daybreak, when the lines of the hand can just be seen, after you have washed well, you should take the one-day Mahāyāna precepts. You should prostrate to the altar, conceiving it as the actual Greatly Compassionate One. First, take refuge [in the Buddha, dharma, and saṅgha], generate the enlightened thought, and contemplate the four immeasurables [love, compassion, joy, and equanimity].

All buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, with your divine wisdom please pay attention to me. As the previous tathāgatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened buddhas like a divine skillful wise horse, a great elephant, did what had to be done, accomplished all tasks, overcame all the burdens of the five aggregates controlled by delusion and karma, fulfilled all their aspirations by relinquishing their attachments, by speaking immaculately divine words and liberating the minds of all from the bondage of subtle delusions' impression, and who possess great liberated transcendental wisdom, for the sake of all that lives, in order to benefit all, in order to prevent famine, in order to prevent mental and physical sicknesses, in order for living beings to complete a buddha's thirty-seven realizations, and to receive the stage of fully completed buddhahood, I, who am named \_\_\_\_\_, from now until sunrise tomorrow shall take the eight Mahāyāna precepts just as you have done.

Three times.

From now on I shall not kill, nor steal others' possessions, nor engage in sexual conduct, nor lie. I shall avoid intoxicants from which many mistakes arise. I shall not sit on large, high, expensive beds. I shall not eat food at the wrong time. I shall avoid singing, dancing, and playing music, and I shall not wear

perfumes, rosaries or ornaments. As arhats have avoided wrong actions such as taking the lives of others, I shall also avoid actions such as taking the lives of others. May I quickly receive enlightenment and may the living beings who are experiencing various sufferings be released from the ocean of cyclic existence.

To keep morality purely, say twenty-one times:

*Om* maintain effective morality, maintain, maintain. Being of great purity, lotus-bearing, hold, hold with your hand. Look down continuously *hūṃ phaṭ svāhā*.

### III. THE RITUAL SESSION [3 TIMES ON DAYS 1 AND 2, 1 TIME ON DAY 3]

#### A. Consecrating the Offerings

Instantly I assume the form of the Greatly Compassionate One.

*Om padmanta kṛta hūṃ phaṭ*

*Om* naturally pure are all dharmas, naturally pure am I.

I become emptiness. From the state of emptiness comes the syllable *bhrūṃ*. From *bhrūṃ* comes a vast and delicate precious vessel. In it is an *om*. The *om* melts into light. From the light arises drinking water, foot-washing water, flowers, incense, lamps, perfume, food, and music. They are inherently empty. In appearance, they are themselves, but their function is to confer extraordinary undefiled bliss.

*Om* mouth-water *āḥ hūṃ*.

*Om* foot-water *āḥ hūṃ*.

*Om* flowers *āḥ hūṃ*.

*Om* incense *āḥ hūṃ*.

*Om* light *āḥ hūṃ*.

*Om* perfume *āḥ hūṃ*.

*Om* cakes *āḥ hūṃ*.

*Om* sound *āḥ hūṃ*.

#### B. Visualization

*Om* naturally pure are all dharmas, naturally pure am I.

I am in the state of natural emptiness that is the inseparability of the dharma-sphere and knowledge.

In my place and in the space in front of me is a lotus. On it is a moon-seat.

On the moon is a white *hrīḥ*. From it comes Avalokiteśvara.

His central face is white, the right is green, the left is red.

Above those, the central face is green, the right is red, the left is white.

Above those, the central face is red, the right is white, the left is green.  
 Above those is a dark blue wrathful face. Above that  
 Is the beautiful face of Amitābha. The two main hands  
 Are pressed together at the heart. The upper right holds a crystal  
 rosary,  
 The upper left a lotus. The lower right is in the gesture of supreme  
 giving, the lower left holds a nectar-vase.  
 The middle right holds a wheel, the middle left a bow and arrow.  
 The other nine hundred and ninety-two hands  
 Are in the gesture of supreme giving. In the palm of each  
 Is a mighty eye that gazes on sentient beings.  
 Avalokiteśvara is beautifully adorned with jewels,  
 And is clothed in flowing silk.  
 His body is a perfect enjoyment body, gloriously blazing with all major  
 and minor marks.  
 His two feet are placed together. The main gurus of the lineage  
 And a vast assembly of peaceful and wrathful deities surround him.  
 They are marked at their forehead, throat, and heart  
 By [om, āḥ, and hūm]. From the hrīḥ [at my heart and that of the front  
 visualization], light rays  
 Invite Guru Avalokiteśvara and his retinue from their true abode,  
 And they melt into nonduality with me and the front visualization. We  
 are empowered [by initiatory goddesses], then adorned by Amitābha.

### C. The Seven-branch Liturgy

#### 1. PROSTRATION

I prostrate to the gurus,  
 Who are the sum of all the buddhas' bodies,  
 Whose essence is Vajradhara,  
 Who are the root of the three jewels.  
 I prostrate to Avalokiteśvara,  
 Whose white form is clothed with no fault,  
 Whose head is adorned by a perfect buddha,  
 Who looks down on beings with compassionate eyes.  
 I prostrate with supreme faith,  
 With as many bodies  
 As the number of atoms,  
 To all those worthy of prostration.

Wherever in the world's ten directions  
 Reside all those lions among humans who come in the three times,  
 To them all, none excepted,  
 I prostrate with my body, speech, and mind.  
 With all the conquerors directly before my mind,

By the force of my prayer to practice the good,  
 I prostrate to all those conquerors  
 By bowing as many bodies as there are atoms in the world.  
 Seated on each atom are buddhas numerous as the atoms,  
 Each encircled by bodhisattvas;  
 Thus I visualize each and every dharma-realm filled up with  
 conquerors.  
 With oceans of unending praises of them,  
 With every sound in an ocean of songs,  
 I recite the virtues of all the conquerors  
 And utter the praises of every tathāgata.

#### 2. OFFERING

From the hrīḥ at my heart come offering goddesses with offerings for me and  
 the front visualization.

##### a. Short Offering Mantra

Om noble lord of the world and your retinue: accept mouth-water  
 svāhā.  
 Om noble lord of the world and your retinue: accept foot-water svāhā.  
 Om noble lord of the world and your retinue: accept flowers svāhā.  
 Om noble lord of the world and your retinue: accept incense svāhā.  
 Om noble lord of the world and your retinue: accept light svāhā.  
 Om noble lord of the world and your retinue: accept perfume svāhā.  
 Om noble lord of the world and your retinue: accept cakes svāhā.  
 Om noble lord of the world and your retinue: accept sound svāhā.

To those conquerors I make offerings  
 Of holy flowers and garlands,  
 Cymbals, balms, and superior umbrellas,  
 Superior lamps and holy incense.  
 To those conquerors I make offerings  
 Of holy garments and superior perfumes,  
 Incense and powders equal to Mount Meru,  
 All superior things specially arrayed.  
 I visualize for all the conquerors  
 Whatever offerings are excellent and vast.  
 By the strength of my faith in practicing the good,  
 I prostrate and make offerings to all the conquerors.

#### 3. CONFESSION

Whatever sins I have committed  
 With body, speech, and mind,  
 By force of attachment, anger, and delusion,

All those I confess.  
If you have time, recite the general confession [to the 35 Buddhas].

## 4. REJOICING

Whatever merit all the conquerors  
In the ten directions, the bodhisattvas, solitary buddhas  
And those training and beyond training may have,  
In all that I rejoice.

## 5. REQUESTING

Those who are the lamps of the world of ten directions,  
Who have awakened to the stage of enlightenment and attained  
nonattachment,  
I ask all those, my protectors,  
To turn the unexcelled wheel of dharma.

## 6. ENTREATING

To those who wish to show nirvāṇa,  
I make this entreaty with folded palms:  
For the benefit and happiness of all beings,  
Remain for as many aeons as there are atoms in a field.

## 7. DEDICATION

Whatever little merit I may have accrued  
By prostration, offerings, confession,  
Rejoicing, requesting, and entreating,  
I dedicate for the sake of the enlightenment of all.

## 8. ABBREVIATED SEVEN-BRANCH LITURGY

I prostrate respectfully with my body, speech, and mind to the lotus  
feet  
Of Guru Avalokiteśvara and his retinue.  
I present all real and imagined offerings.  
I confess all sins accumulated from beginningless time.  
I rejoice at the virtues of ordinary and holy beings.  
[I entreat you to] remain until cyclic existence is emptied.  
I request you to turn every dharma-wheel for the sake of beings.  
I dedicate all my and others' virtues to the great enlightenment.

## D. Recitation

On a moon-seat at my heart and the heart of the front visualization,  
There is a *hrīḥ*. There is a mantra rosary spinning around the *hrīḥ*.  
From the rosary emanate divine bodies and infinite light rays,

Which purify the sins, obscurations, and sufferings of the six classes of  
beings,  
Who attain the rank of noble. The conquerors  
Are delighted by a cloud of vast offerings.  
All their blessings and attainments are gathered into the form  
Of light rays and melt into me.  
From the fingers of the two visualized deities, myself and that before  
me,  
A stream of nectar falls, filling the vase [visualized earlier].

## 1. LONG MANTRA

Homage to the three jewels. Homage to the holy gnosis-ocean, to royally ar-  
rayed Vairocana, to the Tathāgata. Homage to all the tathāgatas, the arhats, the  
perfect buddhas. Homage to noble Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva, the great  
being, the greatly compassionate one. It is thus: *Om* hold, hold, be firm, be  
firm, support, support, make haste, find me, proceed, proceed, go forward, go  
forward, O blossom, O precious blossom, come, join, remove my mental ob-  
structions *svāhā*.

Twenty-one times or more.

## 2. SHORT MANTRA

*Om* jewel-lotus *hūṃ*.

As many times as possible.

## 3. HUNDRED-SYLLABLE MANTRA

*Om* lotus being, guard my vows; lotus being, let them be firm. Be steadfast for  
me, be satisfied, be nourished; be favorable for me. Grant me all accomplish-  
ments. Indicator of all karma, make glorious my mind *hūṃ*. *Ha ha ha ha hoḥ*.  
Blessed one, lotus of all the tathāgatas, do not forsake me, lotus being, great  
vow being *āḥ hūṃ phat*.

Three times

## E. Praises

The wisdom-being of my self-visualization melts into the front visualization.  
On top of my head appears the nun Lakṣmī, dressed as a renunciate. With her  
two hands pressed together at her heart, she asks for intercession.

## 1. LONG VOW PRAYER

*Om* I prostrate to the protector of the world.  
The one praised by the supramundane world.  
The one praised by the chief gods, Māra and Brahmā.



The one who is accomplished by the praises of the supreme royal master.

I prostrate to the supreme protector of the three worlds.

The one with the form of infinite tathāgatas, with a virtuous form.

The one with the crest-ornament of the infinite brilliance of the tathāgatas.

The one who clears up the ghosts' hunger and thirst by the supremely generous gesture of his right hand.

The one adorned by a golden lotus in his left hand.

The one shining with a red-yellow garland in his fragrant locks.

The one whose face is beautiful like the brilliant moon.

The one whose lotus-eyes are extremely noble and bright.

The one whose scent is perfect, like that of a snow-white shell.

The one marked by pearls of stainless light.

The one adorned with the beautiful rays of reddish dawn.

The one whose hands are like an ocean of sweetened lotuses.

The one with a youthful face the color of an autumn cloud.

The one whose shoulders are adorned by many jewels.

The one whose palms are young and smooth like the highest leaves.

The one whose left breast is covered with an antelope hide.

The one who is gracefully adorned with earrings and anklets.

The one whose abode is a supreme stainless lotus.

The one whose abdomen is smooth as a lotus petal.

The one bedecked with jewels in a magnificent belt of gold.

The one with a fine cotton garment around his hips.

The one who has crossed the great ocean of the master's supreme knowledge.

The one who has accumulated many wonderful merits.

The one who is the source of all happiness, who clears up aging and disease.

The one who has put the three realms behind him and shows the practice [for attaining the pure land] of Vajrayoginī.

The one who is the supreme living being, who conquers the trembling host of demons.

The one with lovely feet adorned by golden rings.

The one who liberates beings by practicing [love, compassion, joy and equanimity].

The one who strides like a proud elephant moving among geese.

The one who has completed the accumulations [of merit] and obtained the teaching.

The one who rescues beings from oceans of milk and water.

Those who habitually rise at dawn should respectfully think of the power of Avalokiteśvara.

If one celebrates him with these supreme epithets,

Then whether one must be born a man or a woman, in that and all future births

One will accomplish what is necessary for transcending the world.

This is to be recited twenty-one times, while prostrating.

#### F. Requests

O noble Avalokiteśvara, treasury of compassion,

You and your retinue please heed me.

Please quickly free me and mother and father

Sentient beings of the six realms from cyclic existence.

May I quickly arouse in my mindstream

The deep and vast supreme enlightened thought.

With your power, please quickly purify

My karma and defilements, accumulated from beginningless time,

And with your compassionate hands

Lead me and all beings into the pure land of Sukhāvati.

O Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara,

Please be my spiritual friends in all my lives,

Teach me well the precious good path,

And place me quickly on the level of a buddha.

This should be requested with intense longing.

#### G. Torma Offering

*Om padmanta kṛta hūṃ phaṭ*

*Om* naturally pure are all dharmas, naturally pure am I.

The tormas become empty. From the state of emptiness comes a *bhrūṃ*. From the *bhrūṃ* comes a wide and delicate precious vessel. Inside of it is an *om*. The *om* melts into light. From the light arise tormas. They turn into a great ocean of undefiled wisdom-nectar.

*Om āḥ hūṃ*

Three times

##### 1. FIRST TORMA

Offer the torma to the chief deity—the Greatly Compassionate One—and his retinue, by saying three times:

*Om* noble Avalokiteśvara and your retinue, please take this torma; take it and eat it, eat it.

Then offer:

*Om* noble lord of the world and your retinue, please accept mouth-water *svāhā*.

*Om* noble lord of the world and your retinue, please accept foot-water *svāhā*.

*Om* noble lord of the world and your retinue, please accept flowers *svāhā*.

*Om* noble lord of the world and your retinue, please accept incense *svāhā*.

*Om* noble lord of the world and your retinue, please accept light *svāhā*.

*Om* noble lord of the world and your retinue, please accept perfume *svāhā*.

*Om* noble lord of the world and your retinue, please accept cakes *svāhā*.

*Om* noble lord of the world and your retinue, please accept sound *svāhā*.

I offer this torma of a nectar-ocean

To noble Avalokiteśvara.

Accept it and grant me and all other beings

Superior and ordinary attainments.

## 2. SECOND TORMA

*Om* the syllable *a* is first because of the primordial nonarising of all dharmas *om āḥ hūṃ phaṭ svāhā*.

Three times. Then:

*Om* *ḍākinīs* and dharma-protectors and your retinue please accept mouth-water *svāhā*.

*Om* *ḍākinīs* and dharma-protectors and your retinue please accept foot-water *svāhā*.

*Om* *ḍākinīs* and dharma-protectors and your retinue please accept flowers *svāhā*.

*Om* *ḍākinīs* and dharma-protectors and your retinue please accept incense *svāhā*.

*Om* *ḍākinīs* and dharma-protectors and your retinue please accept light *svāhā*.

*Om* *ḍākinīs* and dharma-protectors and your retinue please accept perfume *svāhā*.

*Om* *ḍākinīs* and dharma-protectors and your retinue please accept cakes *svāhā*.

*Om* *ḍākinīs* and dharma-protectors and your retinue please accept sound *svāhā*.

I offer this torma of a nectar-ocean

To the assembly of dharma-protectors and *ḍākinīs*.

Please accept it and help me accomplish enlightened deeds,

Those that pacify, increase, empower, and compel.

## 3. THIRD TORMA

Say three times either "*Om* the syllable *a* . . ." or:

Homage! Seen by all the tathāgatas. *Om* maintenance, maintenance *hūṃ*.

I prostrate to the tathāgata Many-Jewels.

I prostrate to the tathāgata Holy Beauty.

I prostrate to the tathāgata Soft-and-Peaceful-Body.

I prostrate to the tathāgata Free-from-all-Fear.

I offer this torma of a nectar-ocean

To the lords of place and soil.

Please accept it, and without malice

Be my good and steadfast friends.

## H. Ablution

Next, pour the water from the physical vase onto the divine image appearing in the mirror:

With a stream of saffron-water nectar I bathe

The lamp of beings, the protector Avalokiteśvara.

May all the stains of beings' two obscurations be cleansed,

And may they have the fortune to obtain the three stainless bodies.

*Om* the glorious vows from empowerment by all the tathāgatas and the noble lord of the world and his retinue *hūṃ*.

I dry all those bodies by applying

A matchless cloth, clean and fragrant.

*Om hūṃ traṃ hrīḥ aḥ* purified body *svāhā*.

For the sake of training my mind, I offer jeweled clothes

Exquisite as a rainbow

And the cause of joy to anyone who touches them.

By this may I and others be adorned by the clothing of holy patience.

Because the conquerors are naturally adorned with the major and minor marks,

There is no need to adorn them with further ornaments.

By my offering superior jewel-ornaments,

May I and all beings attain the body adorned with the major and minor marks.

## I. Dedication

Through these virtuous actions of mine,

May a buddha quickly arise in this world.

May this buddha show dharmas for the sake of beings  
And quickly liberate sentient beings from their manifold sufferings and  
torments.

In this and all my lives,  
May I attain a good [rebirth] realm, a clear mind, and humility.  
Respecting great compassion and my guru,  
May I remain steadfast in Avalokiteśvara's vow.  
O Avalokiteśvara, whatever your form is like,  
Whatever your retinue, longevity and world-sphere,  
Whatever your superior good signs are like,  
May I and all others be only like that.  
By the power of offering and praying to you,  
Please pacify sickness and poverty  
In the world where I and others abide,  
And increase dharma and good fortune.

May the supreme enlightened thought  
That has not arisen arise;  
May that which has arisen not decline,  
But only increase more and more.

#### J. Hundred-Syllable Mantra

*Om* lotus being, guard my vows; lotus being, let them be firm. Be steadfast for  
me, be satisfied, be nourished; be favorable for me. Grant me all accomplish-  
ments. Indicator of all karma, make glorious my mind *hūṃ*. *Ha ha ha ha hoh*.  
Blessed one, lotus of all the tathāgatas, do not forsake me, lotus being, great  
vow being *āḥ hūṃ phat*.

Three times

#### K. Entreating Forbearance

O blessed one, greatly compassionate, pay heed to me.  
When we are beginners, our concentration is dimmed  
By the forces of sinking and scattering;  
Our recitations are impure and our rituals either excessive  
Or deficient. Please, O noble, greatly compassionate one, accept  
patiently our limited purity;  
May we not encounter obstacles.

*Om jewel-lotus hūṃ*.

Several times.

#### L. Final Purification

The noble, the Greatly Compassionate One, is a little closer in the space before  
me, at the head of his retinue. A stream of nectar falls from his body parts. It

bathes the outside, inside, and middle of my body and purifies without excep-  
tion all the illnesses, demons, sins, and obscurations of my three doors, to-  
gether with the propensities thereto.

Then pour and drink a little of the water used for washing and bathing.

#### M. Final Dedication

Through this virtue may I quickly become  
A greatly compassionate one  
And lead each and every being,  
None excepted, to his pure land.

#### N. General Instructions

There are three sessions on both the preparatory and the actual day. Take the one-day  
Mahāyāna precepts each day at dawn. The rest of the ritual is the same in all sessions.  
On the preparatory day, make a gold throne that supports the three white substances  
(curds, milk, butter). Do not eat from bronze vessels, leaves, or the palm of your hand.  
In the afternoon, take tea without sugar or honey. Apart from that, do not eat suitable  
(foods for the morning, such as) curds, milk, or fruit. At dawn on the day of the actual  
fast, you begin to observe silence. Do not eat even a single grain of barley or drink a  
single drop of water. Except for the precepts, (the ritual) on the third day is as on the  
day before, but the required recitations are fewer: it is suitable to say the praises merely  
five or seven times.

#### O. Special Offering Prayer

On the third day, after ablution, say:

*Om vajra muḥ*.

The wisdom-being of the front visualization returns to his natural abode. The  
pledge being melts into me. I become the one-faced, two-armed greatly com-  
passionate one. Atop my head is a white *om*. At my throat is a red *āḥ*. At my  
heart is a blue *hūṃ*. I am marked by these.

By saying this auspicious prayer, I am adorned.

#### IV. EPILOGUE

I have arranged this ritual with the intention of benefiting some householders and others  
of feeble intellect and energy. It is very important for those of forceful intellect, without  
believing these few words to be the essence, to practice the extensive rituals written by  
the earlier and later conquerors (Dalai Lamas) and by Panchen Chökyi Gyelpo. Even  
this abridged ritual should be known in detail from the great texts.

The sādhana of the noble, supreme lotus-bearer,  
The treasury of compassion who looks down

Perpetually with a thousand compassionate eyes  
 On the countless tormented and protectorless beings:  
 Rightly explained by my holy predecessors, it was a beautiful  
 Jeweled garland, a brilliant blessing, a mass of blazing light  
 Set in array. Why, then should one such as I  
 Add to the rosary his half-baked foolishness?  
 Nevertheless, in this case, with a respectful heart,  
 I have composed this brief collection of words  
 For the benefit of some present-day people  
 Who are trapped by low intelligence and wavering mind.  
 Through this virtue, may I and all other beings  
 Be held at all times by Avalokiteśvara.  
 May he quickly save us from the worldly ocean agitated by waves of  
 suffering,  
 And place us in a the bliss of a liberated state.

#### V. COLOPHON

This is the extremely condensed fasting ritual, called "Nectar Drop." Here in lower Amdo, the rituals found in the collected works of the great paṇḍitas are quite widespread. Still, some people of low intelligence need their mouths to be filled, so—entreated again and again by many great and ordinary monks and laymen, I have sent forth as a stream of water this ritual to be read by the ignorant.

# — 18 —

## Food, Clothes, Dreams, and Karmic Propensities

*David Germano*

One of the most vibrant and controversial traditions of Tibetan Buddhism is an ancient interlinked set of movements known as the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*). Centered in the Nyingma sect and the nominally non-Buddhist Bön lineages, over the centuries, it has to some degree served as a locus for ecumenical dialogue in Tibet. Its inception was in the eighth century under largely unknown circumstances, though its subsequent development was clearly a Tibetan phenomenon drawing on diverse strands from such sources as Chinese Chan, Indian Buddhism, Daoism, tantric Śaivism, and indigenous religions. Its controversial nature largely stemmed from its questionable claims of being largely Indic in origin, its strikingly antinomian language, and its creative innovativeness in the context of South Asian Buddhism.

While historically there have been many variants of the Great Perfection in the Nyingma tradition, the most interesting is arguably the Seminal Heart (*snying thig*) movement, which began in the eleventh century and was systematized in the fourteenth century by Longchenpa (Klong chen pa, 1308–1363). The tradition holds itself to be a revelation of hidden lineages brought to Tibet in the eighth century by the great Indian saints Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava, but most evidence points to it instead being a Tibetan reformulation of the Great Perfection from the eleventh century onward. Nyingmas began to incorporate a wide variety of meditative systems (often transforming them in the process) within the Great Perfection under the influence of new Tibetan Buddhist tantric traditions, even while preserving its rhetoric emphasizing the nonnecessity of formal meditative practice in light of all beings' primordial buddha-nature.

One of the clearest summaries of the Seminal Heart is Longchenpa's *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*), which, along with its companion work *The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* (*Theg mchog mdzod*), comprises a veritable encyclopedia of Seminal Heart thought and practice. The former's eleven

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## PRINCETON READINGS IN RELIGIONS

Princeton Readings in Religions is a new series of anthologies on the religions of the world, representing the significant advances that have been made in the study of religions in the last thirty years. The sourcebooks used by previous generations of students, whether for Judaism and Christianity or for the religions of Asia and the Middle East, placed a heavy emphasis on "canonical works." Princeton Readings in Religions provides a different configuration of texts in an attempt better to represent the range of religious practices, placing particular emphasis on the ways in which texts have been used in diverse contexts. The volumes in the series therefore include ritual manuals, hagiographical and autobiographical works, popular commentaries, and folktales, as well as some ethnographic material. Many works are drawn from vernacular sources. The readings in the series are new in two senses. First, very few of the works contained in the volumes have ever been made available in an anthology before; in the case of the volumes on Asia, few have even been translated into a Western language. Second, the readings are new in the sense that each volume provides new ways to read and understand the religions of the world, breaking down the sometimes misleading stereotypes inherited from the past in an effort to provide both more expansive and more focused perspectives on the richness and diversity of religious expressions. The series is designed for use by a wide range of readers, with key terms translated and technical notes omitted. Each volume also contains an introduction by a distinguished scholar in which the histories of the traditions are outlined and the significance of each of the works is explored.

*Religions of Tibet in Practice* is the fourth volume of Princeton Readings in Religion and the first substantial anthology of Tibetan religious literature to appear in English. The seventeen contributors are leading scholars of the religions of Tibet, each of whom has provided one or more translations of key works, most of which are translated here for the first time. Each chapter in the volume begins with an introduction in which the translator discusses the history and influence of the work, identifying points of particular difficulty or interest. The works they have translated here represent many genres; they are drawn from a millenium of Tibetan history and from many regions of the Tibetan cultural domain.

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