15th Karmapa on the *Most Secret Quintessence of Vajrakīlaya and Immortal Life-Essence Bindu:*

Treasures of long-life practice of Padmasambava and Mandāravā

Translated and edited by Adele Tomlin
Introduction

For Ğakini day today am happy to offer this article (and new translation) of the 15th Karmapa’s lineage and works on a treasure cycle, Immortal Life-Essence Bindu, the long-life practice of Guru Rinpoche and Mandāravā. Reading some of the Karmapas’ Collected Works is a voyage of discovery of how amazingly diverse and rich their textual and spiritual legacy is, and how they were masters of many different practices and traditions. Such as the 8th Karmapa’s compositions on the ‘Single Intention’ of Drigung Jigten Gonpo. Other not so well-publicised facts about the Karmapas are their connection to treasure termas and treasure-revealers, such as Chogyur Lingpa (14th Karmapa).

Recently, I translated a text by the 15th Karmapa, Khakhyab Dorje, Aspiration for the Prospering of Ultimate Meaning Teachings, which he composed at the suggestion of Zilnon Namkhe Dorje( zil gnon nam mkha’i rdo rje) (1868-20th c.), a well-known twentieth century treasure-revealer. Zilnon revealed several treasures, two in particular, Most Secret Activity Quintessence of Vajrakīlaya (Dorjé Purpa Yangsang Trinlé Chüdril/rdo rje phur pa yang gsang phrin las bcud dril), and the Immortal Life-Essence Bindu (Chime Saktik/chi med srog thig) cycle. According to Gyatral Rinpocheiii:

The Immortal Life-Essence Bindu originated at the time of Guru Rinpoche, who traveled to Nepal with his Indian consort, Mandāravā, in order to accomplish immortality. They went to the cave way up in the mountains in Nepal, the famous long life Maratika cave. There in the cave they practiced for three years this particular method […]. After three years they achieved immortality, passing beyond death. The practice is very, very profound. While Guru Rinpoche and Mandāravā were in the cave practicing, Buddha Amitayus, the Buddha of Long Life, actually came and gave the empowerment, transmissions, and teachings to them directly. The directness of his presence was just like pouring water from a full vase into an empty one. It was not a dream. After three years of retreat, practicing the long life methods in the cave, the two of them, Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) and Mandāravā his consort, both achieved the state of Buddha Amitayus: immortality. They passed out of the round of cyclic existence through the force of the practice to become fully enlightened. After this Guru Rinpoche travelled to Tibet, taking with him the scripture of the teachings that had been given to him by Amitayus. In Tibet, he then decided to bury the teachings as a terma, and prophesized the time of its revelation, and the details surrounding that revelation. He gave the full transmissions to two of his main disciples, who were two of the original twenty-five disciples. One of them was Vairochana, and the other Nanam Dorje Dudjom. Afterwards, the termas were concealed physically as well as within the minds of the disciples.

Zilnon Namkhe Dorje then subsequently transmitted the terma to two of his main students, first to the 15th Karmapa and then after that, to Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdral Yeshe Dorje (1904-1984).
The 15th Karmapa lineage of *Immortal Life-Essence* was passed from Karmapa to his son, the second Jamgon Kongtrul, who passed it onto 16th Karmapa, Rigpe Dorje. I am assuming that this was then passed on to other Karma Kagyu lamas but have been unable to ascertain to whom and when.

This research post aims to give a little more detail about the texts composed by the 15th Karmapa on these two treasures, with a small catalogue I have compiled from his *Collected Works*. I have also included a new translation of the 15th Karmapa’s short *Immortal Life-Essence Bindu Lineage Supplication Prayer*, which is recited at the beginning of practices connected to the cycle. First, some biographical information about the treasure-revealer, Zilnon Namkhe Dorje and the revelation of the treasures.

**Most Secret Activity Quintessence of Vajrakīlaya treasure**

In 1902, on the northern part of Pemakö, southeast Tibet, on the slopes of the mountain Namchak Barwa, Zilnön Namkhé Dorjé revealed a Vajrakīlaya practice called *Most Secret Activity Quintessence of Vajrakīlaya*. The terma revelation consisted of an image of Vajrakīlaya and Ṛkākīśī script on a yellow scroll (shog ser). Why this Kīlaya treasure was revealed first and not the *Immortal Life-Essence*, is various, according to Dudjom Rinpoche in his commentary, the reason why the longevity cycle would be included in a Kīlaya cycle is because it is very important to dispel obstacles before embarking on a longevity practice. He compares it to a situation to protecting crops from harm, or a travelling merchant needing an armed escort to accompany him. This is why longevity practices are frequently combined with wrathful deities like Hayagriva and Kīlaya'.

**Immortal Life-Essence Bindu treasure**

In 1904, in the Mönkha Sengedzong, the 'Mon Kha Lion Fortress’ cave of Yeshe Tsogyal associated with her Vajrakīlaya practice, in Bhutan, Zilnön Namkhé Dorjé revealed the *Immortal Life-Essence Bindu* terma as an ancillary practice of the *Most Secret Activity Quintessence of Vajrakīlaya*. According to Gyatrul Rinpoche:

At the end of the 19th century, these two disciples, [Vairochana and Nanam Dorje Dudjom reincarnated] in the form of one lama who was a great Tertön, known as Zilnön Namkai Dorje. Zilnön Namkai Dorjé went to Bhutan to the practice cave of Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal where he found this terma by pulling it out from behind a rock in the cave. This was not done in secrecy, but rather as a public treasure. This means that when it was revealed, it was revealed in the presence of many hundreds of people. All the people came to witness the revelation, at which time rainbows appeared in the sky, the sound of roaring dragons reverberated throughout space along with countless other wonders. Then for many years he kept the terma secret. It was meant to be revealed for the first time to the terma’s owner. That owner was Dudjom Rinpoche.
Although the Immortal Essence is an ancillary practice to those in the main treasure of Vajrakīlaya, it is said that in the twentieth century its textual corpus grew to such an extent that as to rather overshadow the texts of the original cycle within which it is contained.

**Immortal Life-Essence Texts**

The first two texts from the Immortal Life-Essence terma were composed by Zilnön Namkhé Dorjé:

- A daily sadhana, condensed version of the practice (Tshe drub yang zab snying po) in the Wood Dragon Year (1904), and
- the main ritual manual (Las byang), composed in 1908.

Afterwards, he transmitted it to the 15th Karmapa who composed texts on it in the 1910s. Those written by Karmapa within his own *Collected Works* take up almost three-quarters of a volume:

- An extensive empowerment manual
- A medium empowerment manual
- A concise empowerment manual
- A torma empowerment manual
- A daily Immortal Life Bindu Sadhana based on the pure vision of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo
- Recollected notes on the Immortal Life Bindu Sadhana based on the pure vision of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

Those composed by the Karmapa included within the *Collected Works of Dudjom Rinpoché* are:

- Lineage Supplication Prayer
- Main empowerment text
- Longevity empowerment Text
- Two fulfilment practices
- a very short fulfillment recitation (*skong ba*)
- a Dharma Protector practice
- supplementary texts (*Zur ’debs*)

May this short article and new translation be of benefit in preserving and promoting the teachings of the 15th Karmapa, and the treasures of the Immortal Life-Essence Bindu. May all attain enlightenment and immortality!

Adele Tomlin, August 2020
Billowing Clouds of Siddhis
Supplication to the Immortal Life-Essence Bindu Lineage
By 15th Karmapa

From the space-like dharmadhātu, vast pure realm
In the palace of the unique, immortal bindu
I supplicate Bhagavan Amitayus,
May we attain the long-life empowerment of unchanging primordial-wisdom!

The syllable EH in the centre of blissful dharmadroya realm
In the mandala of the perfected sambhogakaya of four joys
I supplicate Bhagavan Chandali¹⁰,
May we attain the long-life empowerment naturally without cessation!
In the totally pure appearance, Lotus-Net realm
In the palace of Lotus Light
I supplicate Sugata Thothreng Tsal [Padmasambhava],
May we attain the long-life empowerment of stainless deathlessness!

In the vast, all-pervasive realm of Samantabhadra
In the palace of the coiled bliss-emptiness bindu
I supplicate Machig Tshogyel [Yeshe Tshogyel],
May we attain the long-life empowerment of the immortal vajra!

In the form of an immortal vase, stainless, beyond intellect,
In the mandala of the expanding, all-embracing primordial-awareness
Vairocana and Dorje Dudjom,
I supplicate, please bestow the siddhi of immortality!

In the pure realm compassionate display for those who need to be tamed
To the supreme Dharma Lord of ordinary beings of great fortune
Who transmits the oral lineage and more,
I supplicate, may we spontaneously accomplish the two benefits!

In the dharmakāya expanse, primordially pure, essence luminous-clarity
The nature of the unceasing, immortal divine mandala
To the compassionate expressive display of speech and words
I supplicate, may the great blessings of long-life empowerment descend!

To the mandala of the three roots and root lineage gurus
By the blessings of this devoted supplication
May we complete the generation and perfection stages of the path, and
The flawed body be liberated to the form of luminous immortality!

May the ripening of the bindu of great bliss that purifies the moving winds
Accomplish the vajra primordial awareness that conquers the ‘demon’ of dualistic clinging
And attain the long-life empowerment, the primordial nature of immortality!
As long as space continues uninterruptedly, without possession
May Amitayus, indivisible from Buddha’s
activity of unceasing, compassionate display,
Bestow the blessing power of ripening and liberating wanderer’s realms!

Catalogue of 15th Karmapa, Khakyab Dorje texts on the Termas: 
Most Secret Activity Quintessence of Vajrakīlaya and Immortality Life-Force Bindu

Volume Three

- **Supplementary Notes to Long Life Sadhana of Vajrakīlaya based on teachings of Jamgon Kongtrul**

  gter gsar rdo rje phur pa yang gsang bcud dril gyi cha lag /tshe sgrub 'chi med srog thig gi zur 'debs 'chi med nor bu'i phreng ba - Vol.3: 211-266.

  supplementary notes to a long life sadhana of Vajrakīlaya, based on teachings of 'jam mgon kong sprul and according to the rdo rje phur pa yang gsang bcud dril, a gter gsar of zil gnon nam mkha'i rdo rje; written in 1916 at mtshur mdo, at the request of zil gnon nam mkha'i rdo rje himself

- **Extensive root-empowerment into the long life sādhana of Vajrakīlaya at request of Zilnon Namkhe Dorje**

  gter gsar rdo rje phur pa yang gsang bcud dril gyi cha lag tshe sgrub 'chi med srog thig gi rtsa ba'i dbang bskur rgyas par phye ba 'chi med nor bu pad ma'i phreng ba - Vol.3: 267-466, 100 ff. (pp. 259-458).

  Extensive root-empowerment into the long life sAdhana of Vajrakīlaya, according to zil gnon nam mkha'i rdo rje's gter gsar rdo rje phur pa yang gsang bcud dril; written in 1916 at the palace of mkha' spyod thugs kyi 'khor lo in mtshur phu, at the request of zil gnon nam mkha'i rdo rje; edited by 'jam dpal tshul khrims.

- **Middle-length empowerment into the long life sādhana of Vajrakīlaya**

  gter gsar phur pa yang gsang bcud dril gyi cha lag tshe sgrub 'chi med srog tig gi dbang gi mtshams sbyor nyung ngur spros pa 'chi med nor bu'i bum bzang - Vol.3: 466-514.

  middle-length empowerment into the long life sAdhana of Vajrakīlaya, according to the gter gsar rdo rje phur pa yang gsang bcud dril of zil gnon nam mkha'i rdo rje; written in 1911 at the request of zil gnon nam mkha'i rdo rje himself.

- **Short empowerment into the long life sādhana of Vajrakīlaya**

  gter gsar phur pa yang gsang bcud dril gyi cha lag tshe sgrub 'chi med srog tig gi tshe dbang snying po bsdus pa 'chi med chu rgyun - Vol.3: 515-540, 13 ff. (pp. 507-532)

  Content synopsis: abridged empowerment into the long life sAdhana of Vajrakīlaya, according to the gter gsar rdo rje phur pa yang gsang bcud dril of zil gnon nam mkha'i rdo rje; written in 1913.

- **Torma empowerment into Vajrakīlaya**

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Content synopsis: bali empowerment into Vajrakīlaya, according to the rdo rje phur pa yang gsang phrin las bcud dril of zil gno nam mkha'i rdo rje; written at the sgrub sde chen mo lhun grub pho brang of the mtshur mdo'i gan+d+ho la'i yang dben; edited by 'jam dpal tshul khrims

**Volume Six**

*Daily Practice of Long-Life Mother, Pema Chandali based on pure vision of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo*

dag snang pad+ma tshe'i snying tig 'chi med tsaN+Da II'i sgrub thabs rgyun khyer du dril ba tshe dbang gter gyi bum bzang
tshe yum tsaN+Da li'i rgyun khyer, Vol. 6: 351-352, 1 f. (pp. 343-344).

*Recollected notes on the sādhana practice of Pema Chandali*
dag snang 'chi med tsaNDa II'i sgrub thabs kyi zin brtus pas 'grub pa tshe dbang bcud 'dren - Vol. 6: 353-384, 16 ff. (pp. 345-376).
recollected notes on the invocation of the sAdhana practice of padmatsaNDaII, based on a dag snang of pad+ma 'od gsal mdo sngags gling pa; written at the request of the sku zhabs of thim ’dzong pa

*From Dudjom Rinpoche’s Collected Works* (TBRC W20869), Volume 14 (Pha):

**Billowing Clouds of Siddhis: Supplication to the Immortal Life-Essence Bindu Lineage**

rdo rje phur pa yang gsang bcud dril gyi cha lag tshe sgrub 'chi med srog thig gi brgyud ba'i gsol 'debs dngos grub sprin phung / Vol.14: 158-159, TBRC W20869, 1 ff. (pp. 155-156).

**Clouds of Indestructible Vajras: Fulfilment Ritual Text**

'chi med tshe phrin gyi skong ba mi shigs rdo rje brtsegs ba'i sprin phung / Vol.14: 182-185, TBRC W20869, 2 ff. (pp.179-182). This shorter text is given as an alternative by Didjom Rinpoche to his own text.

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1This article and translation are also published online here: https://dakinitranslations.com/2020/08/14/15th-karmapa-on-the-immortal-life-essence-bindu-treasure-long-life-practice-of-padmasambhava-and-mandarava/
See also his profile at TBRC P2746.


The main (easily accessible) academic English language source published on these two treasures, is that of *The Creation and Transmission of a Textual Corpus in the Twentieth Century: The ‘Chi med srog thig’,* by Cantwell and Mayer (2010) which has been very useful for some of the biographical background but does not contain detailed bibliographical information on the texts composed by 15th Karmapa. Rigpa Shedra has also published some online information about it, however, there are some errors, which this post corrects.

Ibid., p67.

Fifth of the eight sacred places in Tibet and Bhutan blessed by Guru Padmasambhava for the practice of the Eight Herukas, Monkha Senge Dzong (mon kha seng ge rdzong) is the place related to the Heruka of the Activities Family, Vajrakilaya, where Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal attained realization.

I had the good fortune to visit this place in 2019.


In the Chimi sogthig ritual (Cantwell & Mayer, 2008), his recovery included examination of (1) the decline of life force and breath, (2) the loss of body and mood, (3) the interruption in the subtle neurological, respiratory and libido processes (rtsa-rlung-thigle) (Dudjom 1999: pp. 110-122). Accordingly, a comprehensive method of recovering longevity encompasses five elements (Samuel, 2008b): (1) ritual seeking jinlab (byin rlaps) from the assembly of Amitayus Buddhas and protector deities: (2) burnt offerings to the fire gods of wisdom (yeshey kyi me lha); (3) casting away of effigies of scapegoat as substitutes for meat, blood and life force to repurchase bla and life force (sha rin khrag tsab srog gi glud, see Dudjom 1999: 354); (4) consumption of herbal pharma products and other essences such as that of minerals (Dudjom 1999: 449-450); (5) the ultra secret practice of union following sbyor dnyos rje gsum (Dudjom 1999: 492-506); (6) longevity blessing (tse dbang), and (7) psycho-physical yogic exercise to work on subtle parts of neurological, respiratory and libido systems; and, more importantly, (8) visualisation and meditation that activates perceptual mechanism in a different way and reorients consciousness. In the case of longevity blessings with longevity nectar (’chimed rdu tsi), longevity arrow-silk (tse dhar) and longevity pill (tse ril), the recipient visualizes Amitayus blessing the recipient with healing power and energy through the performing lama.

For more on the Dudjom lineage and his works, see CANTWELL AND MAYER (2010) and GYATRUL RINPOCHE (1985).

The consort of Buddha Amitayus.

Vairochana (rnam par snang mdzad) is the chief buddha of the Buddha family, or the great Dzogchen master and translator, Vairotsana. Zilnon Namkhe Dorje was considered to be an emanation of him.
Nanam Dorje Dudjom (snam rdo rje bdud 'joms) (8th-9th cent.) was one of King Trisong Detsen’s ministers, sent to Nepal to invite Padmasambhava to Tibet. He became one of Guru Rinpoche’s main twenty-five disciples. When receiving empowerment from Guru Rinpoche, his flower fell on the mandala of Vajrakilaya. Through the practice he became an accomplished mantrika, who could fly with the speed of the wind and pass through solid rock. Zilnong Namkhe Dorje was considered to be an emanation of him. For his biography see https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Nanam_Dorje_Dudjom.