

*The Seed for Faith*  
*Guide to the Excellent Place*  
*for Practice, Yerpa*



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Cover image of the entrance to Dawa Phug, the Moon Cave at Yerpa, by John Hill, Wikimedia Commons.

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*Practice Requirements:*

Anyone may read this text.

# *The Seed for Faith*

## *Guide to the Excellent Place for Practice, Yerpa*

This is the supreme and holy residence, adorned with all the external and internal qualities, condensing all the virtues of the great eight hidden holy places and the 1,200 minor places and still exceeding all of them.

It's considered the residence of the innumerable manifestations of buddhas and their noble sons, the bodhisattvas, who performed great deeds in Tibet for the sake of the doctrine and sentient beings, like the great pioneers of the ancient and recent propagations of the Dharma.

Not only that, in particular it's said to be the residence of the three kings - Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen, and Triralpa Chen - the Second Buddha Padmasambhava, and the great being Atisha, together with their followers.

There is no doubt that the benefits that I am going to list will come later for the practitioners who properly perform with pure motivation virtuous activities such as meditation, prostration, circumambulation, recitation, and offering in this holy place.

On the contrary, if someone with contaminated motivations such as imitating others, being of competitive mind, and so on goes on pilgrimage there, there will be no special benefit. So I am going to tell briefly the story of this holy place for the sake of those who come to practice here with awareness and morality. There is the disadvantage of not developing respect and not performing prostration and offering in this holy place if someone is not driven by aspiration that

comes from the belief that comes in turn from knowing the story. So let me tell you the story of Yerpa.

As far as the first propagation of the Dharma, in the ancient time, the king Song-Gampo, an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, invited Kongjo, a manifestation of Tara, from China, and Tritsun, a manifestation of the Frowning One,<sup>1</sup> from Nepal to become his wives. At that time, the Dharma king established the moral law of the sixteen pure human behaviors, based on the ethics of the ten virtues, in order to make happiness prevail in Tibet. Regardless, the whole country was still controlled by demons that made both the people and environment degenerate. The queens, ministers, and people were very upset, since the situation was really tragic, as is mentioned in these stanzas:

Tibet is wrapped in darkness.  
 The powerful demons control valleys and mountains.  
 They make always the rain to hail, the crops sick;  
 They bring drought and famine, endangering life,  
 and people become strongly angry and miserly.

And so on.

The Dharma-protector king manifested a thousand eyes and a thousand arms, the whole country was filled with light, and from the sky rain fell, flowers blossomed on the earth, the plants and forest grew, rivers were replenished, and all sentient beings found happiness. After that, the king ordered the people to build not only the Rasa and Ramoche cathedrals, but also many other temples.

Queen Konjo examined the country with Chinese astrology and realized that Tibet was controlled by many demons and spirits that would not allow the construction of the Rasa cathedral. In fact, no matter how many stones were placed, those evil spirits would throw them away and make earthquakes. The walls erected during the day would collapse at night. People became increasingly discouraged, while demons and spirits would shout with joy and a strong wind would blow from the four directions. In such a situation, the manifestation emanated by the king prepared tormas and placed them in front of the

two Jowos and other deities, and called upon them as witnesses. He made the demons and spirits swear not to harm any longer.

The Buddha of Compassion appeared in the sky, looked at Drag Yerpa, and focused on it. In the meantime, the two queens went there, and all the Dharma protectors promised to dispel interferences, demons, and spirits, prostrated to the emanation-king, and in the self-generated Vajra Temple, the rock protector naturally appeared.

Close to the self-generated Vajra Temple, they built the Orange Monkey Temple, where the main objects of worship were Vairochana, 100,000 Mani mantras, and 100,000 tsa-tsas of stupas. The residence of the Dharma protectors was a nearby forest of junipers, etc. In this way, Yerpa became a place where the water was nectar to cure the 404 sicknesses. It was adorned with many objects of worship as well as many terma. Happiness was always arising, and ordinary conceptual thoughts were pacified. Whoever looked, listened, remembered, or touched this holy place was placed on the path to liberation.

Again, the king radiated rays of light from his heart in all ten directions, inviting the circles of tantric deities, buddhas and bodhisattvas, and also dakas, dakinis, and Dharma protectors who powerlessly gathered there. The stones and the ground itself emitted music and spirits, and the demons promised to be servants and messengers. The emanation-king made the prophecy that whoever was born at that time in Yerpa would be reborn in Sukhavati.

The king also said that for anyone who served and made offering to the objects of worship in his residence, Yerpa, it would be like making offerings and offering service to the buddhas themselves. Whoever built a single tsa-tsa stupa in Yerpa would accumulate more merit than building holy objects in the 3,000 world realms. To make just one offering in Yerpa would bring more merit than making a 100,000 offerings to the buddhas of the ten directions. Meditating a single day in Yerpa would be more beneficial than meditating for one year somewhere else. In brief, since the welfare of everybody in Lhasa depended on Yerpa, as long as Yerpa was not destroyed, Lhasa would not suffer any trouble. So taking good care of Yerpa was essential for religious and lay people alike. Whoever developed the wish to offer service in Yerpa would attain in the future the dharmakaya.

By motivating others in this direction verbally, one would attain the sambhogakaya. By repairing just a crack in a wall, one would attain the nirmanakaya, and by making offerings with pure motivation, one would purify the ten non-virtuous actions as well as the five uninterrupted negative karmas.

All the above benefits mentioned by the king were written down in the history of Yerpa by his Chinese wife Konjo. During the first propagation of the Buddhadharma, this was hidden underground as a treasure to be discovered by a fortunate one in the future. Thus, those are the real words uttered by Songtsen Gampo; they are not contaminated by ordinary beings.

Let me talk now briefly about the blessings given during the middle propagation of the Buddhadharma, by Guru Padmasambhava, the one endowed with five greatneses.

King Trisong Detsen, a manifestation of Manjushri, decided to build a temple in Samye. The Great Abbot Bodhisattva [Shantarakshita] was in charge of subduing the local spirits and demons, but he did not succeed, since he used peaceful means. It was then decided by the king to invite Guru Padmasambhava from India, and 500 people were sent there. Before they reached India, Guru Rinpoche, who knew of their coming, met them in Mangyul. From there, they traveled together, and on the way, Guru Rinpoche gradually subdued all the spirits and demons they encountered.

They went on to Samye and consecrated the ground and then went to Yerpa. There he built the Great White Stupa<sup>2</sup> with the first portion of the earth, stone, water, and wood excavated from the foundation of Samye monastery.

Guru Rinpoche meditated in the Moon Cave<sup>3</sup> and Lotus Cave.<sup>4</sup> He wrote a guidebook of this holy place together with a list of the termas he hid in the different caves of Yerpa.

For example, he wrote that he hid the terma concerning the accomplishment of the four directions' guardians in the Lotus Cave. In the Dakini Cave,<sup>5</sup> he hid the terma concerning the accomplishment of the four classes of dakini. In the Elephant's Trunk Cave,<sup>6</sup> he hid a copper red female dog filled with gold. In the Lotus Cave, he hid the terma concerned with enslaving the four classes of dakinis. In

the Long Life Cave,<sup>7</sup> he hid the terma concerned with seeing directly the yoga of transference.<sup>8</sup> In the Bird Cave,<sup>9</sup> he hid the terma that confers the ability to recognize parents of one's prior incarnation. Then we read:

At Tara's head, the rain-making terma; at Tara's right breast, children-making terma; at Tara's left breast, the long-life water terma; at Tara's genitals, the water terma; at Tara's right foot, the Shariputra's relics terma; at Tara's left foot, the Tathagata's relics terma; at Tara's two hands, the terma of various wealth vases.

Then we read:

In the Keru Stupa, he hid the White Conch Made by Man; in the Three-Pointed Stupa, the terma concerning the lineage of the previous kings and ministers. In the Stupa Having Many Corners, he hid the terma concerning the accomplishment of Guru Rinpoche's sacred dagger. In the area between those two stupas, he hid the terma concerned with enslaving the nagas; in the Small White Stupa, the terma concerning renunciation of Samsara. In the 108 Stupa, he hid a Brahmin skull filled with turquoise. In the Nine-Pointed Stupa, he hid a begging bowl filled with Shariputra's relics. At six feet and one cubit distance to the west of this stupa, in a clay pot, is hidden the *Thirteen Instructions on Interdependent Origination* terma and the *Lamp of the Path*, a text written by the Eighty-Four Mahasiddhas, and so on.

About these kinds of texts, Guru Rinpoche prophesied:

Whoever has the karma and merits may find those terma regardless if it is a man or woman, rich or poor, powerful or powerless. May that person spread those teachings and not keep them as his/her own property.

Also he said that in the future, the minister of the king of Samye, who will be born in the Pig Year, will discover this terma during the

night of the tenth day of the Saka Dawa month, but not other terms. This person will copy the text in golden letters. The first person who will see the area after the discovery will die. The area will experience a loss of prosperity afterwards. As far as the other terms, even though the king of Samye will pray for their discovery, he will not be able to find them. The person destined to discover them will come, and he will be somebody able to see about ten of his previous and future lives. He will bear a wheel of hair on his breast, and on each pore, three hairs. He will know his previous life's mother and she will also recognize him. When the two of them meet, they will find together the location of these terms. Nobody else will know they are mother and son, but if somebody comes to know, they will both have shorter lives.

Guru Rinpoche spent seven months meditating in the Moon Cave. When he first arrived, there was no entrance. He hit the rock with his katvanga three times, and three entrances opened. They symbolize the three gates of emancipation. Inside there were three rooms symbolizing the three kayas. The skylight in the cave symbolizes the wisdom seeing reality. Guru Rinpoche referred to it as a spontaneous place of realization. He said he had many places for practice, but among all of them, he spent longer time in the following three: Moon Cave in Yerpa, Sheldrag Cave in Yarlung, and Ketshang Cave in Chimpu of Samye. He said that these three major places are very special. He said whoever travels and does pilgrimage there will be included in the ranks of knowledge holders; whoever stays in retreat there will accomplish whatever he/she strives for; and whoever dies there will be reborn in the Khachö Pure Land.

Guru Rinpoche spent one month in the Lotus Cave. One day, he saw a small black scorpion, which was in reality an emanation of the powerful local earth spirit. He threw a sandal dagger the size of an eight-year-old boy, the support for the practice of Dorje Phurba.<sup>10</sup> He hit the scorpion, pacifying in this way the violent behavior of the three doors, and subdued him so that he could not harm any place in Tibet, particularly there. The phurba was put as a relic inside a stupa that came to be known as the Hundred Thousand Phurbas Stupa. It's said that if you circumambulate this stupa in a counter-clockwise direction

on the night of the fifteenth of the Tiger Month, all obstacles of the year, together with others' curses and bad dreams, will be eliminated.

Khadroma Yeshe Tsogyäl practiced in the Dakini Cave. And at Tara's right breast, Guru Rinpoche performed rituals on the tenth and twenty-fifth, so it came to be known as the Cave of the Tenth.<sup>11</sup>

The Great White Stupa contains relics of the tathagatas and a text written in lapis. On auspicious dates, it resonates its own produced sounds.

According to the Lhalung Pälgyi Dorje *Yerpa Guide*, at first Yerpa was a vultures' nest, then it became a trading zone for the Hor nomads, and finally it became a place of practice for scholars and ordained people.

Lhalung Paldor went to Samye with his father and brothers and got ordained by Santarakshita, Vimalamitra, and Guru Rinpoche. First he wanted to meditate in Samye, but somehow he couldn't, so he moved to Drabkyi Karmo. While he was digging to build a cave there, his chögö<sup>12</sup> was carried away by the wind and landed on a small juniper tree on Mount Lhari Nyingpo in Yerpa. Many experts on holy places saw that mountain as having the shape of Tara in meditative posture, with her right leg stretched, the left bent, and so on. He invited many people and built many stupas such as the Chokhang Chorten and Brakhung Karu Chorten.

While Lhalung Paldor was doing meditation, he received a letter saying that the evil king Langdarma was sending ordained people with weapons to hunt and to destroy many dens and lairs in the area between Lhasa and Samye, and also that he used ordained people as his seat, and so on. So in the message, they asked him to go back and help. He did not want to go, but later had a vision of a yidam telling him to go, so he left for Lhasa.

The coming of the evil king Langdarma was prophesied by Songtsen Gampo, who referred to him as the evil king who will come in the future and bear an animal in his name.<sup>13</sup> He was also prophesied by Guru Rinpoche.

When he arrived there, King Langdarma had just returned from a hunting trip. At Nethang near Lhasa, while the king was resting and sun bathing, Lhalung Paldor shot two arrows and killed him.<sup>14</sup> The

servants tried to catch him, but couldn't, and he escaped successfully and went back to Yerpa. In this way, Lhalung Paldor, manifestation of Chenrezig, accomplished the welfare of the people of Tibet.

At that time, there were not many practitioners in other areas, but in Yerpa, many practitioners gathered for twenty-two years. One day, the practitioner Nub Nyimäi Nyingpo hung his chögö on a beam of sunlight, and one morning, he walked on a beam of sunlight. One morning, the Venerable Palyang walked a snow lion with a green face. The snow lion later jumped away. This place has come to be known as Snow Lion Hill,<sup>15</sup> and a stupa was built there. One evening, Rab Dawa Dragpa hung his chögö on a moonbeam. Another night he went on the top of the Mount Lhari Nyingpo and rode down on a moonbeam.

The ascetic Namkhäi Nyingpo attained supreme spiritual accomplishment in the Sky Cave.<sup>16</sup> At Sog Kha, thirty-three practitioners had realizations including Berab Chösel and Ngenlam Gyälwa Chogying, who accomplished Hayagriva there. In the Bell Cave,<sup>17</sup> Khönlüi Wangpo attained the realization of the glorious Heruka in the Ghanatapada tradition. As a sign, he placed his bell in the sky. At that time, there were 108 meditators who accomplished their spiritual goals in the 108 caves of Yerpa.

As far as the last propagation of the Dharma, Ngog Jangchub Jungne built a chapel in Yerpa in which the main image was Vairochana surrounded by the eight spiritual sons. As door keepers, he placed the images of Hayagriva and Vajrapani. Hayagriva neighed three times, and since then, it has been considered a very blessed image. Also Martön Chökyi Jungne built a chapel in which the main image is Maitreya surrounded by the six male and female bodhisattvas. As door keepers he placed the wrathful Vajrapani and Red Hayagriva. Many holy beings saw them not as just images, but as the real deities.

There is a story regarding the area where Martön Chökyi Jungne founded the Mani Lhakang. Before the Mani Lhakang was built, there was a blind lady with her mute daughter. They had only a white goat, and every day the daughter would go to look for the lost goat in a small ravine not far from the house. One day, she found

the goat sitting on a stone and sprinkling it with her own milk. When the little girl licked the milk, suddenly she could talk. Then the goat made her understand she had to load the stone on its back and they went home. When the little girl talked to her blind mother, the mother could not believe it and said, "You are not my daughter, because she can't talk!" The little girl reported what happened and suggested that the mother place the stone on her eyes. Having done so, she could see clearly. The goat transformed into a sphere of light and disappeared in an instant. In the Mani Lhakang, there is a small rock with a white self-generated six-syllable Mani mantra, and even nowadays, the water in the Mani Lhakang is said to confer clear speaking ability as well as clear vision.

Regarding Jowo Atisha and his spiritual sons' stay in Yerpa, we read that when Atisha saw this place for the first time, he said that the ten peaks at Yerpa represent the ten bodhisattva grounds and the ten transcendental perfections. He saw in the cloud formations above Yerpa many devas making offerings in a rainbow light in order to complete the two accumulations, and on the left and right side of Yerpa, many offering goddesses holding flowers, incense, light, musical instruments, and so on. At the feet of the mountains, he saw nagas, smell eaters, spirits, etc. respectfully making offerings. In this splendid scenario, he saw the gurus, buddhas and bodhisattvas, the Sixteen Arhats, dakas, dakinis, and Dharma protectors.

While Ngog Legpäi Sherab was abiding at Sangphu, he had a vision of Manjushri, who told him, "You are a brilliant scholar of all the different fields of learning, so don't be attached to this place. Go instead to Yerpa and engage in teaching activities for the sake of the many students waiting for you there."

One day Atisha commented that all those peaks in Yerpa were manifestations of Jetsun Drölma. He saw many accomplished yogis going and coming, and he said all of them were manifestations of Dromtönpa Gyälwäi Jungne, and that the 108 practitioners of the past were manifestations of himself and his students. 

While Atisha together with Dromtönpa and Ngog Legpäi Sherab were performing Medicine Buddha ritual in front of the image of Jetsun Maitreya, at the stage of the blessing the ground, an actual

celestial mansion manifested. Dromtönpa went to the East holding incense and a yak-tail whisk. At the same time, a blue rainbow formed at the entrance of the cave. The Eight Medicine Buddhas actually arrived riding on the rainbow as invited and so, according to the sutra, they performed prostration, offering, prayers of aspiration, and so on. Then Jowo-je emanated from his heart the Great Abbot Bodhisattva together with all the lineage lamas and said, "I am inseparable from them!" Then Dromtönpa emanated from his heart all the Dharmarajas of Tibet, starting from the king Nyatri Tsenpo and showed them to Ngog Legpäi Sherab while saying, "They are all inseparable from Dromtönpa!" Then from the heart of Maitreya, a monk was emanated. He talked with Atisha for some time, and finally they both melted into light and absorbed into Maitreya's heart.

Ngog said that he was very scared and made supplication. Atisha came back, and when asked where he went, he replied: "I went to enjoy Tushita! This image of Maitreya is the lord himself!" In this way, they performed many unbelievable transcendental activities.

During three years, Atisha taught the Father Dharma, the Son Dharma, the Uncle Dharma, the Kadampa's Sixteen Drops, and the Kadam Norbüi Zhü Len.

During this time, a Thousand-Armed Chenrezig was erected as support for Dromtönpa's meditation. When Dromtönpa offered a begging bowl filled with gold to Atisha, he said that in order for Dromtönpa to complete the accumulation of merit, he could have an image of Atisha made. Atisha painted an image of himself surrounded by Khutön Tsöndrü Yungdrung, Ngog Legpäi Sherab, Dromtönpa, and Nagtsho Lotsawa. In his sleeping cave, Atisha made images in clay and cloth of himself, Dromtönpa, Nagtsho Lotsawa. In the main image of Atisha is incorporated a tooth of the master himself. During their stay in Yerpa, they erected many stupas, images, etc., and these were all consecrated by Atisha himself.

Later on, Yerpa declined as a spiritual place and became a place of residence for lay people. Chöje Kumara Buddha did a lot of restoration work, expelled the lay people, and established a meditation center. He was also helped by the Nedong king, his ministers, and by his younger brother. They established their residence there and erected many images. Slowly many others erected stupas and images,

and Yerpa flourished again.

In conclusion, this holy and excellent spiritual place has been said to be the main cause for the well-being of Tibetans in general and in particular for the religious and temporal wishes of the people of Lhasa to be fulfilled by the holy beings who came here during the first, middle, and last propagations of the Dharma. That means the Dharmaraja ancestors, Guru Rinpoche and his disciples, and Jowo Atisha and his disciples. They all said that any religious practice performed here becomes the cause [to accumulate] a much larger amount of merit than at other holy places. So practitioners of sharp faculties endowed with the wealth of qualities of the arya beings who wish to successfully complete the two accumulations should come here.

*Notes:*

1. A wrathful form of Tara.
2. Tib. *Chorten Karchen*.
3. Tib. *Dawa Phug*.
4. Tib. *Pema Phug*.
5. Tib. *Khadro Phug*.
6. Tib. *Langna Phug*.
7. Tib. *Sog Phug*.
8. Tib. *pho ba grong 'jug*.
9. Tib. *Cha Phug*.
10. Skt: *Vajrakilaya*.
11. The 10th of the lunar month is known as the “waxing tenth,” while the 25th of the lunar month is known as the “waning tenth.” Thus the cave is called the Cave of the Tenth.
12. Upper yellow shawl or robe.
13. The Tibetan word *lang* means elephant.
14. The much more popular version of this episode is that Lhalung Paldor killed the evil king Langdarma by shooting one arrow while the king was reading the inscription on the stone pillar in front of Lhasa cathedral.
15. Tib. *Senghe Gang*.
16. Tib. *Namkha Phug*.
17. Tib. *Drilbu Phug*.

*Colophon:*

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# *Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition*



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