

Kensur Lekden

by Prof. Jeffrey Hopkins

Kensur Ngawang Lekden (*mkhan zur ngag dbang legs ldan*) was born in 1900 in Yak-day on the border between the central and western provinces of Tibet. He was a singer and player of a guitar-type instrument before entering the Go-mang College of Dre-bung Monastic University. He trained for a while to develop the multi-tonal voice to become a chant-master but was encouraged to enter the scholarly path. He eventually earned the Ge-shay degree as second in the annual competition at the annual Prayer Festival.

He entered the Tantric College of Lower Lhasa, and became abbot prior to the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese Communists. At the time of the invasion, he had already been elevated to the position of “abbot emeritus” and, after fleeing to India, helped to reestablish centers of Buddhist learning and meditation in India. Events brought him to France where he tutored several monks, and in 1969 he came to the Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America in Freewood Acres, New Jersey (now the Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center in Washington, New Jersey), where I had studied and practiced from 1963 to 1968. I met him in 1969 during either spring vacation of my first year at the University of Wisconsin Buddhist Studies graduate program or during summer vacation.

On first meeting, we were sitting in what would have been the living room in an American ranch house but which was originally the temple in Geshe Wangyal’s monastery, adorned with multiple wall-hangings. He began speaking about the foundational topic of refuge in such a profound, eloquent, and moving way that tears came to my eyes. Soon I asked him for teaching on the view of emptiness in the highest philosophical school, the Middle Way Consequence School, and he started through testing me by teaching the introduction and non-Buddhist sections of Jam-yang-shay-ba’s huge *Great Exposition of Tenets*; I accepted the challenge, and in time he taught me the Consequence School section twice. The clarity and range of opinions that his expositions contained were exactly appropriate for me at a time when, after five years of motivational training by the charismatic and often chaotic Geshe Wangyal and after a fascinating introduction to the literature of tenets that study with Geshe Lhundup Sopa provided.

In January, 1970, I invited Kensur Lekden to teach at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, founded by the late Professor Richard Robinson and myself a month earlier. Kensur Rinbochay (Precious Former Abbot), an embodiment of the unified practice of sūtra and tantra and transmitter of ancient Tibetan knowledge of meditation, taught at Tibet House until August (exact date unclear), 1971, at which point he returned to the Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America. He passed away in the Fall of 1971 while I was studying with his student Ge-shay Ge-dün-lo-drö (*dge gshes dge ’dun blo gros*) in Hamburg.

Kensur Lekden

June 13, 1969, to February 10, 1971

Jam-yang-shay-ba’s *Great Exposition of Tenets*

Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, New Jersey, and Tibet House, Cambridge, Wisconsin

(Boxes 16-27)

Teaching Jeffrey Hopkins Jam-*yang-shay-ba*'s (*'jam dbyangs bzhad pa*, 1648-1721) *Great Exposition of Tenets* (*grub mtha' chen mo*), the longer title being *Explanation of Tenets: Sun of the Land of Samantabhadra Brilliantly Illuminating All of Our Own and Others' Tenets and the Meaning of the Profound [Emptiness], Ocean of Scripture and Reasoning Fulfilling All Hopes of All Beings* (*grub mtha'i rnam bshad rang gzhan grub mtha' kun dang zab don mchog tu gsal ba kun bzang zhing gi nyi ma lung rigs rgya mtsho skye dgu'i re ba kun skong*). Edition used: Musoorie, India: Dalama, 1962.

And (sporadically at first) Nga-*wang-bel-den*'s (*ngag dbang dpal ldan*, also known as *dpal ldan chos rje*, b. 1797) *Annotations for (Jam-*yang-shay-ba*'s) "Great Exposition of Tenets": Freeing the Knots of the Difficult Points, Precious Jewel of Clear Thought* (*grub mtha' chen mo'i mchan 'grel dka' gnad mdud grol blo gsal gces nor*). Edition used: Sarnath, India: Pleasure of Elegant Sayings Press, 1964.

Note: The Hopkins Archive version starts with Kensur Lekden reading the entire root text; actually recorded later, it is placed at beginning for the sake of convenience. **All other files are in the order of Kensur Lekden's teaching.**

Note: The outline from Jam-*yang-shay-ba*'s *Great Exposition of Tenets* is provided below from Jeffrey Hopkins' partial translation of that text in *Maps of the Profound*, together with the pages references to that translation.

NL_002_0002 to NL_002_0012

[J001 start to J011 35:40]

Preamble

6/13-69-6/17/69 at Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, NJ, during Jeffrey Hopkins' summer vacation after first-year graduate school at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0013 to NL_002_0018

[J011 35:40-J018 0:55]

Differentiation of Outer and Inner

6/17/69-6/20/69 continued at Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, NJ, during Jeffrey Hopkins' summer vacation after first-year graduate school at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0018 to NL_002_0022

[J018 0:55-J022 22:32]

Brief Indication of Outer and Inner

6/20/69 continued at Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, NJ, during Jeffrey Hopkins' summer vacation after first-year graduate school at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0023 to NL_002_0026

[J022 22:32-J026 18:12]

Introduction to Non-Buddhist Schools of Tenets

6/20/69-7/17/69 continued at Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, NJ, during Jeffrey Hopkins' summer vacation after first-year graduate school at the University of Wisconsin:

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[J026 18:12-J056 middle]

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Note: J054-J057 tapes missing (maybe they still exist at Gomang College in South India, where I donated the original series, but I doubt it). J056 middle thru J057 is Heart Sūtra, which led to reading the two truths section of the Consequence School. Kensur Lekden returns to the rest of the non-Buddhist schools later.

NL_002_0057 to NL_002_0072

[J058 start-J077 25:30]

Consequence School starting with two truths

7/20/69-7/30/69 continued at Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, NJ, during Jeffrey Hopkins' summer vacation after first-year graduate school at the University of Wisconsin:

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Note: This goes a little into the above final topic, at which point Kensur Lekden went to the beginning of the Chapter 12 Consequence School

NL_002_0073 to NL_002_0110

[J077 25:30-J114 34:25]

Entire Chapter of Consequence School

7/30/69-9/12/69 continued at Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, NJ, during Jeffrey Hopkins' summer vacation after first-year graduate school at the University of Wisconsin:

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Note: J114 34:25-37:10 Kensur Lekden reads out the beginning of Chapter 12 Consequence School to set up a dependent-arising for future continuation of our work.

Note: J114 37:10-J114end plus weirdly numbered J226 (undated but likely 10/12/69) Points in Ġön-chok-jik-may-wāng-bō's *Presentation of Tenets* that do not accord with Jam-yāng-shay-bā's *Great Exposition of Tenets* (Kensur Lekden is reading from something that he himself wrote, but I have not yet located).

NL_002_0111 to NL_002_0114

[V001 start-V004 18:05]

Introduction to Buddhist Schools of Tenets

12/21/69-12/22/69 at Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, NJ, during Jeffrey Hopkins' winter vacation from second-year graduate school at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0115 to NL_002_0124

[V004 18:06-V014 54:19]

Great Exposition School

12/22/69-1/2/70 continued at Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, NJ, during Jeffrey Hopkins' winter vacation from second-year graduate school at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0125 to NL_002_0135

[V014 54:19-S015 start-S024a end]

Sūtra School

1/2/70-1/3/70 continued at Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, Freewood Acres, NJ, during Jeffrey Hopkins' winter vacation from second-year graduate school at the University of Wisconsin through tape S017; then from S018 2/24/70-3/3/70 at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, while Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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Note: Kensur Lekden now returns to the Non-Buddhist Schools.

NL_002_0136 to NL_002_0140

[S025 start-N026-N029 36:36]

Remainder of Non-Buddhist Schools of Tenets

Shaiva

3/3/70-3/7/70 and 3/23/70 and 3/30/70 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, while Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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Note: Kensur Lekden now turns to Mind-Only School.

NL_002_0141 to NL_002_0145

[C001 start-C005 30:05]

Introduction to Great Vehicle Schools of Tenets

3/7/70-3/10/70 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, while Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0146 to NL_002_0174

[C005 30:05-C034 38:03]

Mind-Only School

3/10/70-4/5/70 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, while Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0175 to NL_002_0184

[N029 36:36-N039 31:47]

Vaiśeṣhika and Naiyāyika

5/22/70-6/2/70 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, after Jeffrey Hopkins

finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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[N039 31:47-N044 end]

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6/2/70-6/5/70 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, after Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0190 to NL_002_0217

[C034 38:03-C062 end]

Rest of Mind-Only School

[NOTE: waiting for C041-C062 will be named NL_002_0196-0217]

6/6/70-6/19/70 and 8/5/70-8/25/70 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, after Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0218 to NL_002_0233

[SV001-SV016 17:52]

Introduction to the Middle Way School

8/26/70-9/9/70 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, after Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0234 to NL_002_0305

[P001-P071 (including P045a and P045b)]

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9/10/70-12/28/70 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, after Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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NL_002_0306 to NL_002_0328

[SV016 17:52-SV039 29:03]

(Continued) Introduction to the Middle Way School

12/30/70-2/4/71 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, after Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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Beginning of Autonomy School

2/4/71-2/10/71 continued at Tibet House in Cambridge, Wisconsin, after Jeffrey Hopkins finished classwork and comprehensives at the University of Wisconsin:

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Note: Kensur Lekden did not finish the chapter on the Autonomy School.