

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

When I first laid my eyes on TME - Tibetan Medicine Education Center's course materials in January 2012, I was deeply impressed. It felt like a whole new world opened up right before me, like embarking on a life-changing adventure. Greedily reading through the opening chapters and getting a first glimpse of Sowa Rigpa's astounding medical as well as spiritual richness, I was blown away by the rigorous structure of its foundational text—the glorious *Four Tantras* (*Gyüzhi*)—in the overview that followed. These impressions have stayed with me ever since. Literature and enthusiasm alone, however, are not sufficient to effectively navigate this ocean of healing wisdom; we need a skillful guide, an experienced teacher. Listening to Gen. Arya Pasang Yonten's lectures, his generous replies to questions, and later participating in highly rewarding practical workshops and retreats, my heart was convinced time and time again that I had to look no further. It is this deep respect, gratitude, and reverence for Genla's teachings which propelled me since 2016 to help make the extensive materials he accumulated over four decades of study, practice, and instruction into a comprehensive textbook titled *New Light on Tibetan Medicine* (*Bod kyi gso rig 'od snang gsar pa*). Alongside finishing my PhD, setting up my own practice, a post-doctoral research project, and while learning more about *tsalung*, Tibetan medicine, religion, and language, I tried to dedicate as much time and effort as possible to editing his extensive book manuscript. Going through the manuscript chapter by chapter, word by word, it gradually became clear that there was too much material for one—even for two volumes! As I worked my way through the text to improve structure, flow, and layout, Genla had to deal with hundreds of questions and misunderstandings. I cherish our many digital exchanges and especially the days we actually sat next to each other, discussing difficult passages, looking up quotations and references, and sharing many stories on the way. Now, more than five years after the first edits and having set up Bedurya Publications in 2021, we have finally come to the point of publication. Sorry for the long wait! As the editor, it is my hope and wish that the *New Light* volumes bring you the same sense of excitement and discovery that I experienced at the beginning of my journey, acting as a trustworthy reference on your path,

and as a direct link to the blessings of the lineage holders of medicine.

Nevertheless, my contribution played only a minor role in how the content of the *New Light* series came together. Already in 2006, Dr. Pasang Yonten was collaborating closely with Sylvie Béguin to prepare the first English-language texts for both the New Yuthok Institute (NYI) in Milan and the future online courses provided by TME, a process which extended up to 2013 and resulted in 11 documents along with a still growing set of audiovisual educational supports. In addition to Sylvie's monumental efforts, these were further checked for language errors by Corine Colette (until she passed away in 2010), and later by Valerie Giese. In parallel, translations to Italian for the NYI students were prepared mainly by Roberto Potocniak, assisted by Carmelo Maiorca and Victorine Cumerio. Claudia Bottazzi drew many of the original illustrations, but to standardize the visual appearance of the newly conceived series, these drawings have been recreated, adapted, and/or replaced. Around this time, PADMA also supported the initial development of the book manuscript through a donation, for which TME is grateful.

To get the full picture, though, we need to trace the roots of this book back in time even further. During the 1970s, Pasang Yonten was inspired by the scholarship of his teachers to read and write, and to one day become an author. As lecturer and later college principal at Dharamsala Men-Tsee-Khang (1982–1989), he realized that in order to teach the foundations of humoral theory as expounded in the *Root and Explanatory Tantras* in a coherent manner, and to understand the body more fully, supplementary explanations were required. Based on extensive research and personal insights, he penned down a short treatise titled *Ten Sections on the State of the Body* (*Lus gnas skabs bcu pa*, finalized around 1986) in a small notebook, which summarizes the psychological origins of the three humors and their relationships with the elements, organs, channels, and chakras. This, in fact, was the very beginning of the text found in this volume. The *Ten Sections* were later expanded on in another notebook, which ultimately fed into documents that were used when Dr. Pasang started giving short seminars

in Germany (in 1992) and later Italy, initially focusing on the medicine trees of the *Root Tantra*. Progressively refining his knowledge and didactical methods by instructing German doctors proficient in biomedical anatomy and physiology, he quickly understood that non-Tibetan students generally do not have the time, interest, or ability to study the *Gyüzhi* verse by verse. Not giving up, he took on the challenge of transmitting the essentials of both theory and practice nonetheless, thus bridging the formidable cultural and geographical gap between the Himalayas and the Alps. From the point when TME's website was launched in December 2005, more and more of his repeatedly updated lecture notes—especially from the newly set up four-year course in Milan—were divided into parts and copy-edited, and several files were freely shared online. These materials were the source of the TME course texts, which were in turn the basis for *New Light*.

Genla long did not have any concrete plans to publish a Sowa Rigpa textbook, but he did write the TME texts in a scholarly way from the outset, adding quotations, references, footnotes, and for instance indicating topics that needed further research. This writing style confirms that the provided explanations were never intended as translations, repetitions of what he received from his teachers, or what can be found in traditional commentaries. Although these are of course indispensable, the emphasis here is placed more on contemporary understanding realized through personal and comparative research, drawing on multiple sources, and confirmed by experience. In this way, Pasang Yonten's didactic materials kept growing over the years in response to exchanges with students, new courses, seminars, workshops, and retreats, scientific collaboration and conferences, and clinical findings. This notwithstanding, care was equally taken to not stray too far away from the classics; the underlying rationale was to grasp their essential meaning, to revise and elaborate, not to contradict. Western European society and modern medicine have definitively influenced and enriched his expertise, but Tibetan sources—foremost the *Four Tantras*—have remained the central frame of reference.

This balanced yet innovative approach is reflected in the content of *New Light's Foundations*, of which I will now briefly list some of the more significant features. Sowa Rigpa's Buddhist foundations permeate this book and are discussed at in the chapters that provide traditional historical context (1 and 2), as well as in Chapter 4 on the mind, and Chapter 21 on ethics. I would also like to draw the reader's attention to the concise Medicine Buddha *sādhana* found in the Appendix, which was composed by Genla based on *Gyüzhi*'s ethical code and has since been recited by his students for numerous years. Tantric perspectives on the body have furthermore been incorporated where more strictly somatic

sources fall short, particularly in Part 6 on the channels and Chapter 18, which lays out the subtle *la* body, channels, and chakras. This tantric integration equally clarifies, amongst others, the activities of the brain and sense organs through the five minor winds (*yenlak gi lung nga*, see Section 6.3). Explicit but at times admittedly tentative links between biomedical and Tibetan medical terms and concepts, where traditional explanations are interpreted through the lens of pragmatic scientific observation, are repeatedly made. One pertinent example is the consideration of hormones by means of the neologism *kham kyi dangma* (Section 11.2), which play an incontrovertible part in bodily vitality and radiance (*dang*) as well as in female reproductive physiology (Chapter 12)—a topic which has also been given special attention. Other examples of this creative adaptation of tradition are the identification of *sinbu* as microorganisms (11.4), and the more precisely drawn distinctions between veins and arteries, and the lymphatic, endocrine, and nervous systems (17.5). Explanations on the solid and hollow organs have also been newly elaborated in Chapters 14 and 15, mentioning intriguing correspondences between the organs and particular emotions that are partly derived from clinical observations.

Overall, *Foundations* consist of seven parts and 21 chapters. Meticulously referenced, packed with specifically designed illustrations and tables, and with a glossary of more than 600 Tibetan terms, this book offers a solid theoretical foundation for understanding Sowa Rigpa's gross and subtle physiology of the body-mind while also providing essential links with Buddhist philosophy and practice. As the editor, I have strived to maintain Dr. Pasang's simple yet profound way of writing as much as possible, aiming to keep the text easily comprehensible. This equally applies to the quotations, which were checked together but kept as free translations. Although the actual content of this volume is not mine, and even though I cannot always vouch for its historical accuracy from a contemporary academic perspective, I apologize for any remaining inconsistencies. Finally, I would like to thank our dedicated team at Bedurya Publications for the amazing collaboration so far. Genla, Sylvie, Christine, Tiana, and Alexandre: *Merci!*

Dedicated to the flourishing of Sowa Rigpa, we are excited to continue the journey of making these precious teachings available worldwide. The story has only just begun. Look out for the next volumes of this series on diagnosis, treatment, and pathologies in due time. May a new light shine on the science of healing, reflecting wellbeing to all 10 directions!

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