

Gelug

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For the river in Romania, see [Gelug \(river\)](#).

Gelug	
<u>Tibetan</u> name	
<u>Tibetan</u>	དགེ་ལུགས་པ་
showTranscriptions	
<u>Chinese</u> name	
<u>Traditional Chinese</u>	格魯派 / 黃教 / 新噶當派
<u>Simplified Chinese</u>	格鲁派 / 黄教 / 新噶当派
showTranscriptions	
Part of a series on	
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Statue of Je Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelugpa school, on the altar in His Temple (his birthplace) in [Kumbum Monastery](#), near Xining, [Qinghai](#) ([Amdo](#)), [China](#). Photo by writer [Mario Biondi](#), July 7, 2006



Gelug Lineage [Refuge Tree](#) thangka depicting Je Tsongkhapa at the pinnacle of the tree

The **Gelug** ([Wylie](#): dGe-Lugs-Pa) is the newest of the schools of [Tibetan Buddhism](#).^[1] It was founded by [Je Tsongkhapa](#) (1357 – 1419), a

[philosopher](#) and [Tibetan religious](#) leader. The first [monastery](#) he established was named [Ganden](#) (which gives an alternative name to the Gelug school, the **Ganden-Pa**), and to this day the [Ganden Tripa](#) is the nominal head of the school, though its most influential figure is the [Dalai Lama](#). Allying themselves with the [Mongols](#) as a powerful patron, the Gelug emerged as the pre-eminent Buddhist school in [Tibet](#) and [Mongolia](#) since the end of the 16th century.

The Gelug school was also called the "New Kadam", because it saw itself a revival of the [Kadam](#) school founded by [Atisha](#).^[2]

"[Ganden](#)" is the Tibetan rendition of the Sanskrit name "[Tushita](#)", the [Pure land](#) associated with [Maitreya Buddha](#). At first, [Tsongkhapa](#)'s school was called "Ganden Choluk" meaning "the Spiritual Lineage of Ganden". By taking the first syllable of 'Ganden' and the second of 'Choluk', this was abbreviated to "Galuk" and then modified to the more easily pronounced "Gelug".^[3]

□

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Origins and development[[edit](#)]

The [Kadam](#) school was a monastic tradition in Tibet, founded by [Atisa](#)' s chief disciple [Dromtön](#) in 1056 C.E. with the establishment of [Reting Monastery](#). The school itself was based upon the [Lamrim](#) or "Graded Path", approach synthesized by Atisa. While it had died out as an independent tradition by the 14th century, this lineage became the inspiration for the foundation of the Gelug-pa. ^[4]

Tsongkhapa[[edit](#)]

The Gelug school was founded by [Je Tsongkhapa](#), an eclectic Buddhist monk who traveled Tibet studying under [Sakya](#), [Kagyu](#) and [Nyingma](#) teachers, such as the Sakya Master [Rendawa](#) (1349 – 1412) and the Dzogchen master Drupchen Lekyi Dorje. ^{[5][6][7]}

A great admirer of the [Kadam](#) school, Tsongkhapa merged the Kadam teachings of [Lojong](#) (mind training) and [Lamrim](#) (stages of the path) with the [Sakya](#) Tantric teachings. ^[8] He also emphasized monasticism and a strict adherence to [vinaya](#) (monastic discipline). He combined this with extensive and unique writings on [Madhyamaka](#), the [Svatantrika–Prasaṅgika distinction](#), and [Nagarjuna](#)' s philosophy of [Śūnyatā](#) (emptiness) that, in many ways, marked a turning point in the history of philosophy in [Tibet](#). ^{[9][10]} Tsongkhapa' s Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path (Tib. [Lam Rim Chenmo](#)), is an exposition of his synthesis and one of the great works of the Gelug school.

Tsongkhapa and his disciples founded [Ganden monastery](#) in 1409, which was followed by [Drepung](#) (1416) and [Sera](#) (1419), which became the

"great three" Gelug monasteries. After the death of Tsongkhapa the order grew quickly, as it developed a reputation for strict adherence to monastic discipline and scholarship as well as tantric practice. ^[11]

Tsongkhapa had two principal disciples, [Gyaltsab Je](#) (1364—1432) and [Khedrup Gelek Pelzang, 1st Panchen Lama](#) (1385—1438).

Establishment of the Dalai Lamas^[edit]

In 1577 [Sonam Gyatso](#), who was considered to be the third incarnation of Gyalwa Gendün Drup, ^[12] formed an alliance with the then most powerful [Mongol](#) leader, [Altan Khan](#). ^[12] As a result, Sonam Gyatso was designated as the [3rd Dalai Lama](#); "dalai" is a translation into Mongolian of the name "Gyatso" ocean, ^[12] and Gyalwa Gendün Drup and Gendun Gyatso were posthumously recognized as the 1st and 2nd [Dalai Lamas](#). ^[13]

Sonam Gyatso was very active in proselytizing among the [Mongols](#), ^[13] and the Gelug tradition was to become the main spiritual orientations of the Mongols in the ensuing centuries. ^[13] This brought the Gelugpas powerful patrons who were to propel them to pre-eminence in Tibet. ^[13] The Gelug–Mongol alliance was further strengthened as after Sonam Gyatso's death, his incarnation was found to be Altan Khan's great-grandson, the [4th Dalai Lama](#). ^[13]

Emergence as dominant school^[edit]

Following violent strife among the sects of [Tibetan Buddhism](#), the Gelug school emerged as the dominant one, with the military help of the Mongol [Güshri Khan](#) in 1642. According to Tibetan historian [Samten Karmay](#), Sonam Chopel ^[14] (1595–1657), treasurer of the Ganden Palace, was the prime architect of the Gelug's rise to political power. Later he received the title *Desi* [Wylie: sde-sris], meaning "Regent", which he would earn through his efforts to establish Gelugpa power. ^[15]

The fifth Dalai Lama was the first in his line to hold full political and spiritual power in Tibet. He established diplomatic relations with [Qing Dynasty](#) China, built the [Potala Palace](#) in Lhasa, institutionalized the Tibetan state [Nechung oracle](#) and welcomed Western missionaries. From the period of the [5th Dalai Lama](#) in the 17th century, the Dalai Lamas held political control over central Tibet. ^[16] The core leadership of this government was also referred to as the [Ganden Phodrang](#).

Scottish Botanist [George Forrest](#), who witnessed the [1905 Tibetan Rebellion](#) led by the Gelug Lamas, wrote that the majority of the people in the [Mekong](#) valley in [Yunnan](#) were [Tibetan](#). According to his accounts, the Gelugpas were the dominant power in the region, with their Lamas effectively governing the area. Forrest said they used "force and fraud" to "terrorise the... peasantry". ^[17]

After the [Incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China](#), thousands of Tibetan monasteries were destroyed or damaged, and many Gelug monks, including the [14th Dalai Lama](#) fled the country to India. The three major Gelug monastic colleges (Sera, Drepung and Ganden) were recreated in India. The Dalai Lama's current seat is [Namgyal Monastery](#) at [Dharamshala](#), this monastery also maintains a branch monastery in [Ithaca, New York](#).

Teachings[[edit](#)]

Lamrim and Sunyata[[edit](#)]

The central teachings of the Gelug School are the [Lamrim](#) teachings of Tsongkhapa's *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (*Lamrim chenmo*), which is based on the teachings of the Indian master [Atiśa](#) (c. 11th century) in [A Lamp for the Path to Awakening](#). As the name indicates, this is a hierarchical model in which the practitioner accomplishes varying stages based on the classical Indian Mahayana model of the [Bodhisattva](#) "five paths and [ten levels](#)". One initially begins with the desire to seek a good rebirth, and then moves to seeking liberation for oneself (Sravaka motivation), and then to seeking [Buddhahood](#) so as to aid the liberation of others ([Mahāyāna](#) motivation), further adding [Vajrayana](#) methods to aid in the speedy attainment of Buddhahood. Higher motivations build on, but do not subvert the lower ones. ^[18]

Tsongkhapa outlines the three major features of the path thus: ^[19]

The intention definitely to leave cyclic existence ([samsara](#))

Generating the intention to attain awakening for the sake of all sentient beings

The correct view of emptiness ([shunyata](#)).

The correct view of emptiness is initially established through study and reasoning in order to ascertain if phenomena are the way they appear. Gelug texts contain many explanations to help one obtain a conceptual understanding of emptiness and to practice insight meditation (*vipasyana*). Gelug meditation includes an analytical kind of insight practice which is "the point-by-point contemplation of the logical arguments of the teachings, culminating in those for the voidness of self and all phenomena."^[20] The presentation of [samatha](#) and [vipaśyanā](#) in Tsongkhapa's Lamrim is also based on eighth-century Indian teacher [Kamalaśīla](#)'s [Bhōvanōkrama](#), or 'Stages of Meditation'.^[21] The highest view of emptiness is considered to be the [Prāsangika Mādhyamika](#) of [Candrakīrti](#), as interpreted by Tsongkhapa. Another important text of Gelug teachings is the *Book of Kadam* also known as the *Kadam Emanation Scripture* which includes teachings from Kadam masters like Atisha and Dromton.^[22]

Vajrayāna Practice^[edit]

The tantric practices of the Gelug are also integrated into the stages of the path model by Tsongkhapa's *The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra*. This is combined with the yogas of [Anuttarayoga Tantra istadevatā](#) such as the [Guhyasamāja](#), [Cakrasamvara](#), [Yamāntaka](#) and [Kālacakra](#) tantras, where the key focus is the direct experience of the indivisible union of bliss and emptiness.

The Guhyasamāja tantra is the principal one. As the [Dalai Lama](#) remarks,

There is a saying in the Gelug, 'If one is on the move it is Guhyasamāja. If one is still, it is Guhyasamāja. If one is meditating, it should be upon Guhyasamāja.' Therefore, whether one is engaged in study or practice, Guhyasamāja should be one's focus."^[23]

Tsongkhapa also incorporated the tantric practice of the [Six Yogas of Naropa](#), and [Mahamudra](#), from the [Dagpo Kagyu](#) lineages. This tradition was continued by the [first Panchen Lama](#), who composed *A Root Text for the Precious Gelug/Kagyü Tradition of Mahamudra*.^[24] The Gelug tradition also maintains [Dzogchen](#) teachings; [Lozang Gyatso, 5th Dalai Lama](#) (1617–1682), [Thubten Gyatso, 13th Dalai Lama](#) (1876–1933), and [Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama](#) are some Gelug-pa Dzogchen masters.^[web 1] Likewise the practice of [Chöd](#) was taught by Gelug-pas such as Kyabje Zong Rinpoche.

Vinaya[[edit](#)]

The Gelug school focuses on ethics and monastic discipline of the [vinaya](#) as the central plank of spiritual practice. In particular, the need to pursue spiritual practice in a graded, sequential manner is emphasized. Arguably, Gelug is the only school of vajrayāna Buddhism that prescribes monastic ordination as a necessary qualification and basis in its teachers (lamas / gurus). ^{[[citation needed](#)]} Lay people are usually not permitted to give initiations if there are teachers with monastic vows within close proximity.

Study[[edit](#)]



[Play media](#)

Monks debating at [Sera monastery](#), Tibet, 2013.

The Gelug school developed a highly structured system of scholastic study which was based on the memorization and study of key texts as well as formal debate. The primary topics and texts used in study are: ^{[[25](#)]}

Monastic discipline (’dul ba, [vinaya](#)): Vinaya-sutra by Gunaprabha

[Abhidharma](#): [Vasubandhu](#)’ s [Abhidharmakosha](#)

[Epistemology](#) (tshad ma, pramana): which is based on [Dharmakirti](#)’ s [Pramanavarttika](#), a Commentary on [Dignaga’ s] ‘Compendium of Valid Cognition’ ,

[Madhyamaka](#): [Chandrakirti](#)’ s [Madhyamakāvatāra](#).

[Prajnaparamita](#): Maitreya’ s [Abhisamayalankara](#).

Six commentaries by Tsongkhapa are also a prime source for the studies of the Gelug tradition, as follows:

The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path (*Lam-rim chen-mo*)

The Great Exposition of Tantras (*sNgag-rim chenmo*)

The Essence of Eloquence on the Interpretive and Definitive Teachings (*Drnng-nges legs-bshad snying-po*)

The Praise of Relativity (*rTen-'brel bstodpa*)

The Clear Exposition of the Five Stages of Guhyasamāja (*gSang-'dus rim-lnga gsal-sgron*) and

The Golden Rosary (*gSer-phreng*)

According to Georges Dreyfus,

For each topic studied, the procedure is similar. The process starts with the heuristic memorization of the root text and sometimes of its commentaries. It continues with the interpretation of the root text through commentaries, and culminates in dialectical debate. ^[26]

After the study of the exoteric texts, a monk may then enter the esoteric study and practice of [tantric](#) texts, particularly the Guhyasamāja, Yamāntaka, and Cakrasamvara tantras. ^[27]

A monk who completes all his study may then attempt for a [geshe](#) degree, a rare and difficult title to obtain which can take 15 to 25 years to complete. ^[28]

Each Gelug monastery uses its own set of commentarial texts by different authors, known as monastic manuals (Tib. *yigcha*). The teachings of Tsongkhapa are seen as a protection against developing misconceptions in understanding and practice of [Mahāyāna](#) and [Vajrayāna](#) Buddhism. It is said that his true followers take *The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* as their heart teaching.

The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path was completely translated into English in a three volume set in 2004, under the title *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. The translation took 13 years to complete, and was undertaken by scholars at the Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center, a non-sectarian Tibetan Buddhist educational center in Washington, New Jersey. ^[29] A translation is also available in Vietnamese. ^[30] In 2008, the [14th Dalai Lama](#) Tenzin Gyatso gave a historical five day teaching on the text at Lehigh University. ^[31]

Monasteries and lineage holders[[edit](#)]



[Ganden monastery](#), Tibet, 2013



Sera Mey, [Sera Monastery](#), India

Monasteries[[edit](#)]

Tsongkhapa founded the monastery of [Ganden](#) in 1409 as his main seat.

[Drepung Monastery](#) was founded by Jamyang Choje, [Sera Monastery](#) was founded by Chöje Shakya Yeshe and the [Gyalwa Gendün Drup](#) founded [Tashi Lhunpo Monastery](#). Before the Chinese occupation Ganden and Sera each had about 5,000 monks, while Drepung housed over 7,000.

[Labrang Monastery](#), in Xiahe County in Gansu province (and in the traditional Tibetan province of Amdo), was founded in 1709 by the first Jamyang Zhaypa, Ngawang Tsonдру. Many Gelug monasteries were built throughout Tibet as well as in China and Mongolia.

Lineage holders[[edit](#)]

Tsongkhapa had many students, his two main disciples being [Gyaltsab Je](#) (1364 – 1431) and [Khedrup Gelek Pelzang, 1st Panchen Lama](#) (1385 – 1438). Other outstanding disciples were Togden Jampal Gyatso, Jamyang Choje, Jamchenpa Sherap Senge and Gendün Drup, [1st Dalai Lama](#) (1391 – 1474).

After Tsongkhapa's passing, his teachings were held and spread by Gyaltsab Je and Khedrup Gelek Pelzang, who were his successors as

abbots of [Ganden Monastery](#). The lineage is still held by the [Ganden Tripas](#) - the throne-holders of Ganden Monastery - among whom the present holder is Thubten Nyima Lungtok Tenzin Norbu, ^[32] the 102nd Ganden Tripa (and not, as often misunderstood, by the Dalai Lama).

Among the main lineage holders of the Gelug are:

The successive incarnations of the Dalai Lama (also commonly referred to as "Gyalwa Rinpoche")

The succession of the [Panchen Lama](#), the Chagkya Dorje Chang, Ngachen Könchok Gyaltsen, Kyishö Tulku Tenzin Thrinly, Jamyang Shepa, Phurchok Jampa Rinpoche, Jamyang Dewe Dorje, Takphu Rinpoche, Khachen Yeshe Gyaltsen

Successive incarnations of Kyabje Yongzin [Ling Rinpoche](#)

Successive incarnations of Kyabje Yongzin [Trijang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso](#)

See also[[edit](#)]



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Notes[[edit](#)]

- [^] [Georges Dreyfus, *The Shugden Affair: Origins of a Controversy \(Part I\)*. Official website of the Office of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. Archived 2013-11-03 at the Wayback Machine](#)

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- [^] Mullin 2001, p.367.
- [^] Bernstein. Tearing the Yellow Hat in Two: Conflict and Controversy in the Evolution of Gelugpa Buddhist Authority in Tibet, page 6.
- [^] Powers, Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, 2007, page 469
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- [^] Powers, Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, 2007, page 476
- [^] [Jump up to: ^a ^b ^c McKay 2003](#), p. 18.
- [^] [Jump up to: ^a ^b ^c ^d ^e McKay 2003](#), p. 19.
- [^] also Sonam Choephel or Sonam Rabten

- ^ [Samten G. Karmay, *The Great Fifth*](#)
- ^ *Waddell, L. Austine (1895). The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism: with its Mystic Cults, Symbolism and Mythology, and in its Relation to Indian Buddhism. London. p. 63. [OCLC 475275688](#). And as we have seen in the previous chapter, the Ge-lug-pa sect in 1640, under its fifth Grand Lama, leapt into temporal power as the dominant sect in Tibet, and has ever since remained the Established Church for the country.*
- ^ [Short 2004](#), p. 108.
- ^ Harvey, Peter. An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices (Introduction to Religion) 2nd Edition, page 208.
- ^ Powers, Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, 2007, page 482
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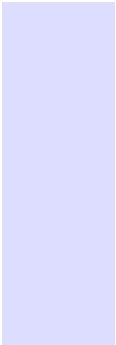
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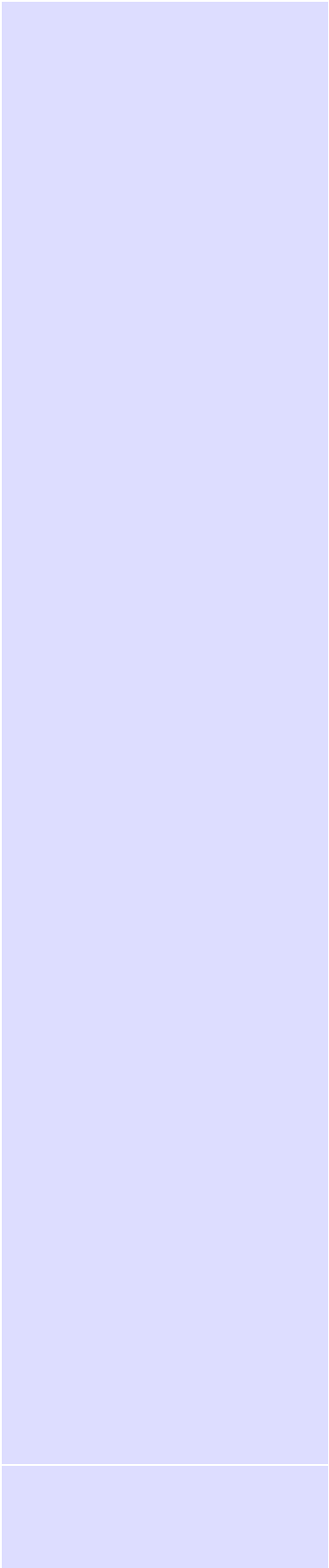
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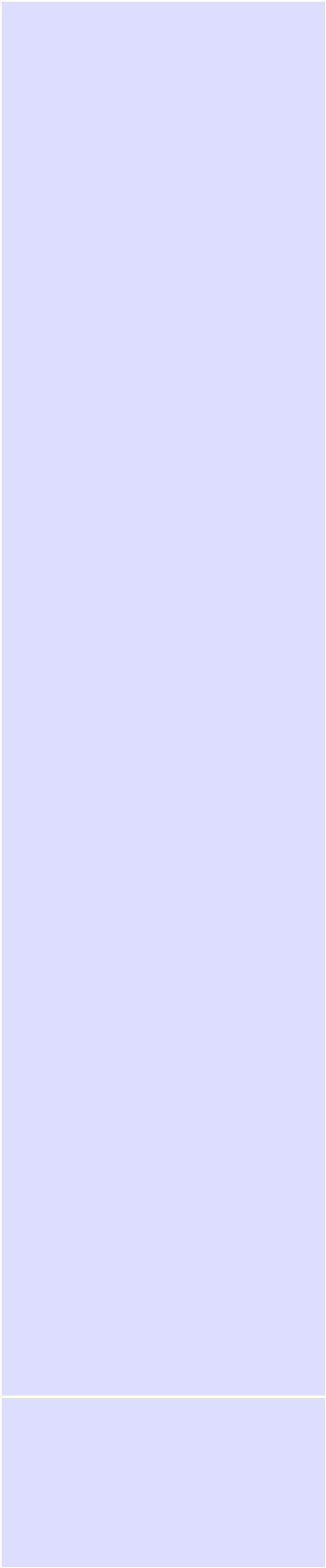
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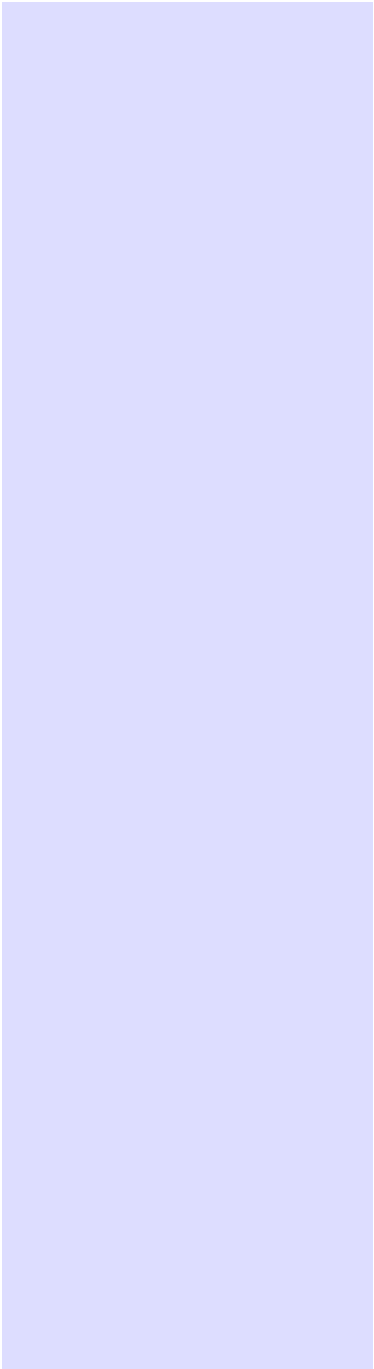
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