

The Legend of the Great Stupa

mChod rten chen po bya rung kha shor gyi lo rgyus thos pas grol ba

The Life Story of the Lotus Born Guru

Zab pa skor bdun las O rgyen nam thar dpag bsam ljong shing

Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal



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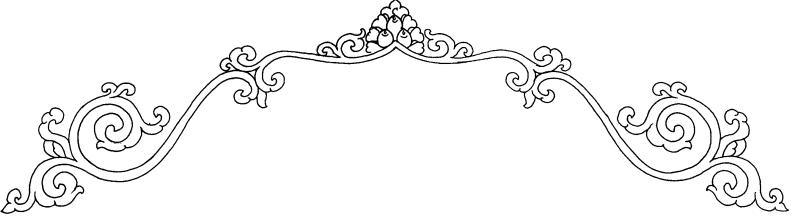
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*This book is dedicated to
the lamas of the ancient tradition
and the present generation of Dharma students.*



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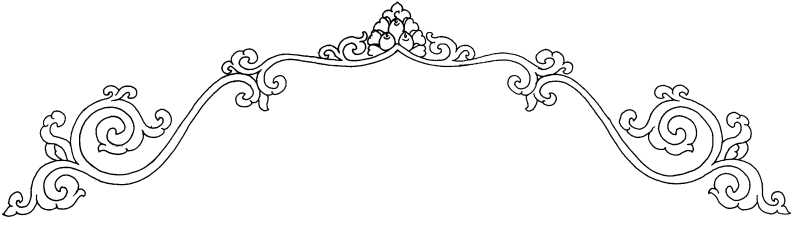
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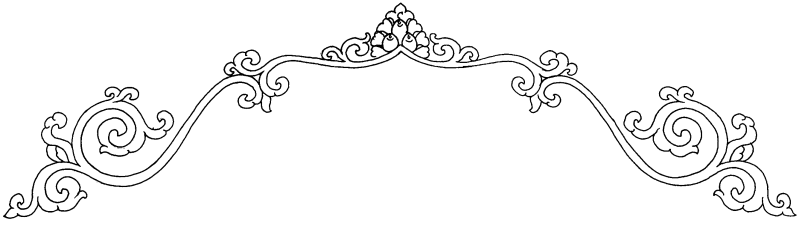
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Preface

The Tibetan people, many now refugees in India, maintain the living tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism. In an age when the influence of Western rationalism has penetrated and transformed the way of life of cultures throughout the world, their vision of the universe is unique. As reflected in the two translations contained in this book, the universe is viewed as a field of spiritual powers that may be directed toward either good or evil. These powers, if harnessed correctly, could harmonize existence for the benefit of all.

The texts presented here have wide appeal to the Tibetan public as well as to those who have engaged the rigorous training necessary to comprehend and transmit the Vajrayana teachings. The same sophisticated faith that fostered these legends aeons ago gives the Tibetan people today the strength to continue manifesting a degree of peace and contentment that is almost unknown in industrial society. These translations are offered here in the hope that they may help Western people grasp the



Preface

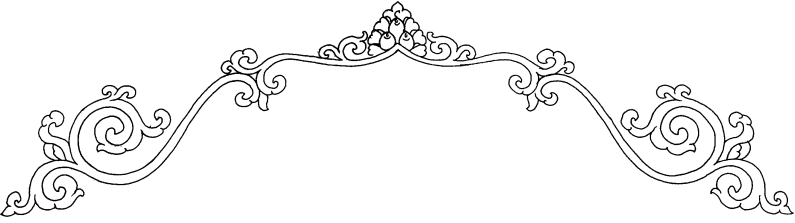


intuitional and subtle levels upon which this ancient culture built its strong and compassionate way of life.

The translation of the Legend of the Great Stupa was initiated and blessed by His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, the spiritual leader of the Nyingma school from the early 1960s until his passing away in 1987. The Life Story of the Lotus Born Guru was transmitted by Kanjur Rinpoche and his son, Pema Wangyal, to Keith Dowman.

This book represents the combined effort of peoples in the East and the West. It is through the guidance and generosity of Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche, Head Lama of the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center in Berkeley, California, and the efforts of his students that this publication was made possible.

*All thoughts vanish into emptiness
Like the imprint of a bird in the sky.*



Introduction

The Legend of the Great Stupa, known in Tibetan as mChod rten chen po bya rung kha shor gyi lo rgyus thos pas grol ba, focuses on incarnation, adoration, disaster, and rebirth to convey the power of meritorious action, aspiration, and vow. It is a Tibetan means of instructing the visionary along the spiritual path, a path that begins with an initial flash of insight into the possibility of enlightenment and ends with the attainment of complete realization. Given in a narrative between Guru Padmasambhava and his entourage of disciples, this teaching takes place in the temple mandala of Samye Ling, the most ancient of the revered shrines of Tibet. The text has been used in ritual for several centuries to eradicate habitual mental patterns of distortion and stupor by evoking a focused concentration upon sound and meaning. The efficacy of this ritual, which is known as Liberation through Hearing, must be personally experienced.

The text belongs to the category of scriptures called thos drol [pronounced terdol], which means that the illumination and



The Legend



insight generated by concentrating on the sound and by understanding the full meaning of the words destroy the mind's bondage to habitual patterns of behavior and naive conceptions of the nature of the cosmos. Any trace of skepticism, any reservation or doubt, undermines the potential for attaining this result. The hearer must have complete faith in the power of the spoken word and in the infallible intuition of the Great Guru in whom the words arose. Although the intellect may fail to follow the many threads implicit in the text, and although what is not written is often more significant than what is, the sound and meaning of this teaching can release the mind from the narrow groove of biased judgment and tangled emotion, enabling it to derive meaning from seeming paradoxes.

In Dharma, the written word is held as sacred as the Buddha, the Enlightened Being from whom it arose, and every word written by a lama has the mark of truth upon it. The reader who practices Dharma reads with an open mind, without erasing, interpolating or modifying the meaning. He or she allows the words to form mental patterns as the author intended, keeping faith that these patterns are efficacious in producing a desirable end. Since a critical intellect reinforces a self-centered attitude that undermines the effectiveness of the ritual recitation, applying it does not help the practitioner who wishes to understand the deeper significance of the teaching. If the practitioner engages the teaching with a focused, receptive mind, the terdol will instruct as it illuminates as it sounds.

In this form of sacred literature, the mood, the nature of the moment to be perfected, and the internal coherence of the metaphor take precedence over a literal rendering of historical events. In Tibetan Buddhadharmadharma-related literature, history



is treated as an analogue to progress on the Bodhisattva Path, physical geography parallels and symbolizes the structure and topography of the mind, biography details the means of attaining enlightenment, and philosophy describes the various visions that appear at different levels of experience. While Western science has enabled humanity to develop and manipulate the material environment to solve the perennial problems of food, shelter, and clothing, and also to gratify lusts, the culture of Tibet, the Land of Snows, has directed humans to harmonize the elements within their own being, to incorporate the internal compassion which flows from this harmony, and to experience exterior existence with simple sensual attentiveness and spontaneous and continuous communication.

THE REAL STUPA

The cohesive theme of this legend, the Great Stupa, is a symbol of the complete, perfect enlightenment of a Buddha. The Stupa brings ultimate and relative reality together in a unitary representation. In its ultimate reality, the Stupa is indestructible and inviolate. It is the pure, all-permeating foundation in which all things have an essential identity. It is infinite and eternal simplicity. For until the Bodhisattva has transcended all obscurations of view and mastered the innumerable emotional perversities which destroy intense and clear experience, ultimate reality remains only the potentiality of Buddhahood—the innate perfection which is known, though darkly and tentatively, to exist. Absolute perfection cannot be realized by the intellect alone, for it is the essence of the mind. The conditioned and the differentiated cannot know such a Oneness free from describable



characteristics. Oneness is unthinkable, inconceivable, and ineffable. It is immaculate, beyond reproach, and it defies specification.

In its relative aspect of reality, the Stupa symbolizes spatio-temporal manifestation, subject to birth, maturation, decay, and eventual dissolution (i.e., the human body and the universe in which it finds itself). The sensual, the aesthetic, and the formless realms are traditionally distinguished within this relative nature of things. The sensual realm is the means by which Bodhisattvas can express themselves in a spontaneous flow of action. Their choice of action is designed to restore that which is degenerate to its pristine originality. The aesthetic realm is an ocean of vibration that becomes increasingly turbulent as it separates from its own peaceful depths. Sensitive to the least quiver of pain and pleasure, the aesthetic impulse formulates its own antidote to disharmony in the guise of a divinity to be expressed through sensual media. The formless realm contains the varying degrees of shunyata that approach ultimate reality. Taken together, the ultimate and the relative, indivisible and indissoluble, compose the symbolic nature of the Great Stupa.

CONSTRUCTION OF BUDDHAHOOD

Shamvara, the poultrywoman who aspired to build the Great Stupa, was bound to create unitary perfection within herself. The path that she followed began with utter devotion to the Guru Buddha and ended when the final remnants of distinction between the doer and the action, between the thought and its expression, and between expectation and fulfillment were eradicated. Leading from anxiety and tension to perfect illumination, this path gave her a threefold reward in triple perfection.



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The triple perfection is Buddha-body, Buddha-speech, and Buddha-mind. Buddha-body is the attainment of fluid action in every sphere. It allows the psycho-physical aspects of one's being to react to events without hesitation, with confidence, and with definitive control. One who attains the Buddha-body is capable of realizing the potential inherent in every situation and exemplifies the highest quality of life. This result is achieved by selfless action and devotional practice, every action becoming an offering to the Great Stupa, the Wish-Fulfilling Gem, the Fulfiller of all Prayers.

Buddha-speech is the attainment of the Inner Voice, the Voice of Buddha, the Instructor, expressing in pure vibration the quality of experience and directing one towards perfect action. Buddha-speech is achieved after all selfish motivation has been eliminated from interpersonal communication and all selfish aspiration has been destroyed. Here the Great Stupa becomes the divinity in which all other deities are dissolved, purifying the practitioner with light and fire.

Buddha-mind is the attainment of the awareness that reduces all perception to its essential Openness, while remaining identified with the substance of all things from which compassion arises. Here the Great Stupa becomes the Body of Infinite Truth, Dharmakaya.

Every aspirant who enters the path of the Mahayana commits himself or herself to the humanistic ideal of releasing all sentient life from the bonds of emotional distortion and limited vision. The means of attaining this end is self-perfection. Here spiritual growth is paralleled by the physical construction of the Great Stupa, carried out by Shamvara, a great yogini and an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. Avalokiteshvara, the guardian



protector of Tibet, embodies the divine compassion from which the accomplishment of the Bodhisattva vow is derived. His name means Lord Who Sees in All Directions. In sacred art, he is represented as having one thousand arms that radiate from his body on all sides, with the eye of wisdom gazing out from each open palm. Continuously active in liberating beings from inhibiting concepts and emotional blockages, Avalokiteshvara works to destroy lifeless images and vitalize dead faculties. In this legend, the construction of the Great Stupa symbolizes the power of the Bodhisattva vow. The work of Shamvara and her sons gives form to the potential of enlightenment, causing the light of Dharma to shine through the darkness of the Kaliyuga.

EXPERIENCE OF TIME

The Legend of the Great Stupa should be read with an understanding of its place in time. The enlightened view of time is at once historical and metaphorical. Time is divided into successive aeons (kalpas). The aeon in which we live is called the Bhadrakalpa, the Fortunate Aeon, fortunate because during this time one thousand Buddhas will appear to liberate beings imprisoned in samsara. Each aeon has three eras (yugas). The first era, the Satyayuga, is characterized by complete purity wherein no limitations deplete the perfection of Buddhahood. The second era, the Dharmayuga, is characterized by a human lifespan of eight thousand years. At the beginning of the third era, the Kaliyuga, the human lifespan is one hundred years. It is said that during the Kaliyuga a human lifespan is reduced from one hundred to ten years.

During the Dharmayuga, Buddhas instruct, but the task becomes increasingly more difficult as the weight of the era



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increases, until in the Kaliyuga the pure teaching can no longer be heard. The Great Stupa was constructed during the time of Kashyapa Buddha when the duration of a human life was 20,000 years and the pure teaching could still be heard by all humanity. The Buddha Shakyamuni, the Lord of the Shakya clan and the Buddha of our time, was born when the human lifespan was one hundred years. He taught the doctrine which would last throughout the initial stages of the Kaliyuga.

The Kaliyuga is the time just prior to the destruction of the world. It has five distinctive characteristics: diminution of lifetime, vicious and self-centered living, unchecked lust and avarice, materialistic philosophies, and belief in the inevitable conflagration. The legend prophesies that the vibration of these times will damage the fabric of the Great Stupa; the text clearly describes the portents that herald the decay and destruction of the higher life. As the yuga progresses, the frenetic acceleration toward final annihilation destroys the vestiges of the Buddha Shakyamuni's doctrine. The legend predicts that unless the teachings of Tantra are heard and practiced as enunciated by the incarnate forms of the Bodhisattvas, whose merit accumulated in previous existences gives them indomitable courage to tame the overstimulated and inflamed animal senses, the Great Stupa's outer form will be finally and unalterably destroyed.

The diminution of lifetime can be understood on the two levels that also accompany the idea of rebirth. First, it can be understood on the physical level in which the body is born, nurtured, matured, aged, and then decomposed to return to the elements from which it was contrived; and second, it can be understood on the mental level in which experience, as a continuum in constant flux, changes with each instant of experience.



The mental life of an experience, which in Buddhist terminology is called a 'dharma', is a fraction of the larger stream that is Dharma. Each dharma varies in length according to the knower's degree of concentration. During the Kaliyuga the poisonous passions, particularly lust, avarice, acquisitiveness, jealousy, and envy, cause loss of concentration. Mind streams away from its peaceful center in search of the objects of its desire or retreats from objects that repel it. Finally, the pace of life increases as the length of life diminishes.

On the mental level, the aeon represents a unit of time within the inner sphere of mentality or spirituality. The aeon may be experienced in deep meditation, free of the heavy materializing forces of physical movement and energy. The era is experienced as the rate of vibration increases. As the Kaliyuga draws to its conclusion, the rate of vibration, the unit of mental time that is experienced, becomes infinitesimal until the increasing speed and fractioning of particles of time results in the final annihilation of all form in conflagration. It is said that at this time the Buddha Maitreya, the embodiment of loving kindness, will appear, and the duration of a man's lifetime will once again become 84,000 years.

THE LIVING BUDDHA

During the Kaliyuga, opportunities arise to free oneself from approaching destruction. The disciplines of the Hinayana and Mahayana, although crucial, are inadequate to combat the intensifying forces of passion. However, the Vajrayana provides the means of overcoming man's impulsive nature. The teaching of the Hinayana prescribes total rejection and renunciation of passion; the Mahayana prescribes the antidote and neutralization



of passion, and the Vajrayana prescribes the understanding of passion by the homeopathic method of controlled action.

In the legend, the coming of a Tulku is prophesied. In the Vajrayana, a Tulku, or enlightened being of the latter days of the Kaliyuga, will be known as a Tantrika, a yogin who has mastered the discipline of apprehending the essential purity inherent in every experience. This being will be a master of placing experiences of every contingency on a thread of pure consciousness just as a skilled jeweler strings pearls. With such understanding, this being can master the art of magical transformation, the ability to alter vibration in order to placate, instruct, subdue, and otherwise exemplify mastery over the dark forces that motivate the human mind. Fully awakened, this being will be identical to all Buddha Nature; the foundation in virtue will be secure, and the ability to discriminate between what must be developed and what must be renounced will be as acute as that of the Pratyekabuddha hermit of the Hinayana tradition. This being will be fearless in demonstrating the ways in which the precious human body may be used to create life, light, and love.

METHODS OF CONSTRUCTION

At the consecration of the Great Stupa, the builders' purity of mind permitted their single-minded prayers for rebirth to be fulfilled. The sons of the poultrywoman-Bodhisattva who completed the structure were beings who matured through rebirth into the founders of the Inner Way in Tibet during the Kaliyuga. Further, by means of the metaphor of the Great Stupa, these same beings are shown the cause of their spiritual power, the means of sustaining it, and the dangers that may limit it. Within the Vajrayana, many means of Stupa construction are presented.



With the practice of a physical yoga, hathayoga (asanas and pranayama), the body becomes responsive to an extraordinary degree, reflexes become immediate, and sensory perception becomes characterized by extraordinary clarity and distinction. The practice of mantra, concentration upon the recitation of a string of particular sounds, heightens awareness of the subtle level of consciousness that processes incoming vibrations and determines the quality and meaning of the verbal expression that arises from it. The practice of shamatha and vipasyana, calming and insight meditations, produces a sensitivity of awareness to whatever arises in consciousness. These disciplines, all of which are efficacious in building a Great Stupa within the aspirant, create the kind of delicate response of one thought to another that makes wishes come true.

On the path, there is no external manipulator who determines that certain individuals shall have their desires sated. Rather the wish for enlightenment inexorably grows from a seed, becoming strong aspiration as the trunk and branches, and gaining fulfillment as the leaves and the fruit. This is the universal process of spiritual development. When thoughts arise like so many sharks gnashing their teeth in the ocean of mind, the profound disturbance and conflict preclude any gradual development of a single impulse to dominance. If in the stillness and tranquility of the ocean of mind a single fish swims, the entire volume is affected by it—whether the fish is black or white is immaterial.

PROPHECY OF DISASTER

At Samye Ling, the first monastery built in Tibet, Guru Padmasambhava, the Lotus Born Guru and tantric mendicant



who possessed great power of conversion through magical means, taught Trisong Detsen, the Dharma king who patronized the early Buddhist teachers, and twenty-five close disciples. All traditions of the original Dharma transmission to Tibet (Nyingma) descended from them. Thus the early history of Tibet is outlined in the opening two chapters of the Legend, while the latter three chapters prophesy its later history. The Mongol invasion is mentioned. The coming of the Muslims to India and the destruction of Vajrasana (which is now the restored Bodh Gaya) is predicted and many allusions to minor political changes in the borderlands are made. It is significant to note that during the storms of 1969 the pinnacle of the Stupa was destroyed by lightning and that the son of the abbot who presides over the monastery was arrested for dealing in ritual artifacts stolen from the temples of the Kathmandu Valley.

Interpreting the chapters on prophecy from this familiar and popular text, the Tibetan people see the above events as indications of the depth to which man has sunk during the Kaliyuga and interpret the predictions of Chinese aggression against Tibet and India as contemporary fulfillments. Indeed, the prophecy that predicted the devastation in Tibet if the degeneracy of the Kaliyuga was not stemmed by the incarnation of the Tantrika has already been fulfilled, and the hordes of refugees that the text prophesied would stream into northern India have already arrived. The monasteries have been burned and the scriptures trampled. The landowners who remained tied to their property and the priests and monks who remained in their monasteries have been murdered. The faith of refugees suffering the pangs of subservience in an alien culture is supported by the promise that, providing the Great Stupa is repaired, they will return to their homeland for sixty years of peace and prosperity.



TREASURE FROM BAUDHA

The actual Stupa at Baudha, called by the Tibetans Jarungkhashor, stands at the center of the Kathmandu Valley. Surrounded by mountains, it rises like a jewel point in the center of a natural mandala, and is thus the focus of all vibration in the valley. The Great Stupa has stood longer than folk memory recalls. Pilgrims travel from the northeast frontier of India in the east and from the Hindu Kush on the west to perform their ritual observances before and around it. Every visitor, mendicant, priest, scholastic abbot, or trader traveling through Nepal from India to Tibet has prayed there for safety as they pass over the high Himalayas and through the brigand-infested valleys.

The four major traditions of Tibetan Buddhism treat the Great Stupa with equal devotion. Lamas, monks, and nuns of all schools gather at the Great Stupa to pray, and monasteries of all Tibetan traditions can be found in its environs.

This text, which is used by all devotees at the Stupa and throughout the Tibetan-speaking world, is a Nyingma text. It is a Terma, a teaching spoken by Guru Padmasambhava that was transcribed into code and hidden by Yeshe Tsogyal, the Dakini consort of the Great Guru. During the Guru's time in Tibet, thousands of Termas were hidden in secret places—caves, rocks, rivers, and streams, in temples, images, and stupas—to be rediscovered, decoded, and transmitted when the people of any time, but particularly in the time of the Kaliyuga, needed a different form of instruction to cure their spiritual maladies. In this way, not only were the relevant injunctions made available at all times, but also ancient traditions, eternally relevant, could be revived by the Guru's own formulation derived from his own



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perfect practice. Wherever yogins meditate, wherever deities have been invoked, wherever the soil has been impregnated by the enlightened mind, there Termas may be found.

This Terma was recovered by a nun from the image of Mahavairochana in the upper chamber of the Temple of Samye Ling. Mahavairochana represents the infinite expanse of the blue light of full consciousness, and the upper chamber signifies the center of the mandala—unity and formlessness. But the time for its recovery was found to be unpropitious, and so the Terma was reconcealed on the southwest side of the lion throne of the Red Stupa. The Red Stupa signifies that the obscuration caused by lust is the object of meditation purified by the recitation of this text. The southwest side of the lion throne means that the text bestows liberation on Zangdok Palri, the Copper-Colored Mountain, the pure Buddhland of Guru Padmasambhava.



EH MA HO!!

***Obeisance to the Gurus
of the three lineages
of the Buddhas' Bodies!***

***To the Buddha
of Boundless Light
in the Body of Infinite Simplicity!***

***To the Bodhisattva
of Great Compassion
in the Body of Visionary Enjoyment!***

***To the Lotus Born Guru
in the Body of Incarnate Compassion!***