

Bulletin of Tibetology



NEW SERIES

1988

No. 1

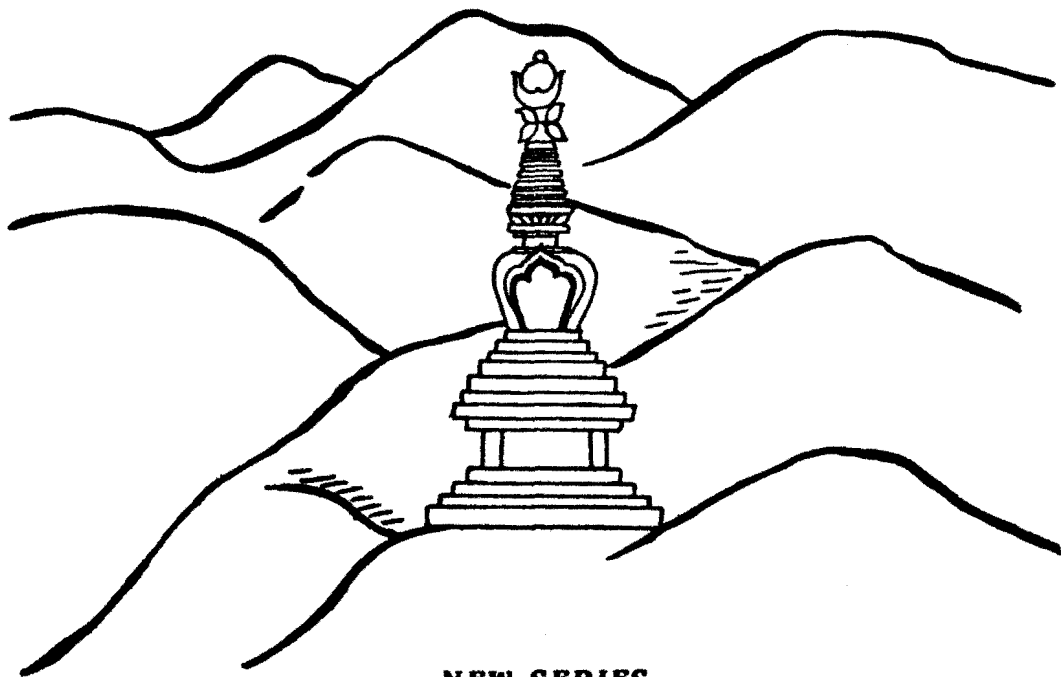
18 February 1988

**SIKKIM RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY
GANGTOK, INDIA**

- The *Bulletin of Tibetology* seeks to serve the specialist as well as the general reader with an interest in this field of study. The motif portraying the Stupa on the mountains suggests the dimensions of the field -

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SAHASRA BUDDHA

Nirmal C. Sinha

I

The only image permitted in Theravada temples is that of the historical Buddha, Gautama Sakya Muni. In Mahayana temples—in the Himalayas, Tibet and Mongolia—besides the historical Buddha designated simply Buddha (T. Sangay) or Sakya Muni (T. Sakya-Thubpa), there would be many images ranging from Three to Thousand according to size and resources of temple or monastery concerned. Sahasrabuddha (T. Sangay Tongda) was no doubt the ideal count by 9th century A.D. when Mahayana pantheon was sculptured and painted in Samye (Central Tibet) and Tun Huang (northern outpost of ancient Tibetan empire). Sanskrit-Tibetan Lexicon *Mahavyutpatti* (Circa 820 A.D.) testifies to the usage of Sahasra Buddha as then current. In *Bhadrakalpa Sutra*, now available only in Tibetan translation, the number recorded is 1000.

The figures are those of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, historical and legendary, besides the Goddesses. Figures of patrons and protectors of Dharma would be permissible in paintings and iconography as such persons no doubt had taken the Refuge in Dharma (T. Cho) and believers would admire them if not adore them as Bodhisattvas (T. Changchub Sempa).

Since Dharmaraja (T. Chogyal) was Bodhisattva par-excellence and Asoka Maurya was the first and greatest Dharmaraja, Mahayana pantheon had a place of high honour for Asoka. Following the Indian tradition the first and greatest Chogyal of Tibet, Song-tsen Gampo was apotheosised. Mahayana was preached by Nagarjuna a contemporary of the Kushanas in North India and the Satavahanas in South India. This preaching by Nagarjuna was described by Mahayana believers as Second Turning of the Wheel of Law and Nagarjuna was in Mahayana tradition the Second Buddha. Nagarjuna and the Mahayana exponents like Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dignaga and Dharmakirti were thus placed high in Mahayana pantheon. In Tibetan tradition Guru Padmasambhava, Atisa Dipankara and Tibetan saints like Marpa and Tsongkhapa were included in the pantheon and placed as high as Gautama Buddha or Nagarjuna. In fact a Guru like Padmasambhava or Tsongkhapa would dominate the gallery of icons or the

In Roman transcription diacritical marks for Sanskrit and Tibetan words are omitted, except for quotes from other writers. Sanskrit words are spelt thus: Tathagata (for Tathāgata), Asoka (for Aśoka) or Nirmanakaya (for Nirmāṇakāya). Tibetan words are transcribed as pronounced thus: Lama (Blama), Sangay (for Sangs-rgyas) or Chogyal (for Chhos-rgyal).

portrayal of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in mural or scroll painting. In Mongolia Atisa Dipankara is equated to Gautama Buddha. In short for an ordinary believer or an average pilgrim the expression Sahasra Buddha (T. Sangay Tongda) was not exactly or approximately the names enumerated in a scripture like *Bhadrakalpasastra* (T. Dode Kalsang). The ordinary believer was as anxious to have a vision of Gautama Buddha as of the Guru known to him. The average pilgrim would esteem the Guru nearer and dearer than the historical Buddha. An ancient Tibetan adage runs thus: "When there was no Guru the name of Buddha was not known even". This was not unlike the Hindu tradition of venerating the Guru as Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara.

'Thousand' is no doubt a notional figure which could be less finite and more infinite. In all animate beings, Semchen Thamche, there would be Buddha potential, developing or developed. Whether well versed or not in *Avatamsaka Sutra* (available in Tibetan translation), a Mahayana believer feels that "there is not even one living being that has not the wisdom of the Tathagata. It is only because of the vain thoughts and affections that all beings are not conscious of this".

II

The concept of multiple Buddha was not a Mahayana innovation. The concept is writ large in Pali, that is Hinayana Canon.

Gautama Buddha did not claim to be first Enlightened One; on the other hand he spoke of the previous Buddhas. *Samyutta Nikaya* records that Gautama emphatically asserted that his path of Enlightenment was not new and that there were a number of Enlightened Ones before him. He said "I have discovered an ancient path, the Buddhas of ancient times trod this path."

Seven Manusha Buddhas reported from Nepal, Tibet and Mongolia are: 1. Vipasyin, 2. Sikhin, 3. Visvabhu, 4. Krakuchanda, 5. Kanaka Muni, 6. Kasyapa and 7. Sakya Muni. Sanskrit *Saddharmapundarika* as well as Pali *Mahapadana Sutta* list the same names.

The six antecedent saints as precursors of Gautama Buddha may not be all myth. Firm unimpeachable testimony about Kanaka Muni is borne by no less an authority than Asoka Maurya. The Minor Pillar Edict from Nigali Sagar records thus: "When king Devānāmpriya Priyadarśin had been anointed fourteen years, he enlarged the Stupa of the Buddha Kanakamana to the double (of its original size).

"And when he had been anointed (twenty) years, he came himself and worshipped (this spot) (and) caused (a stone pillar to be set up)." Eng. Tr. Hultsch.

The most celebrated among the precursors of Sakya Muni is Dipankara in Pali, Sanskrit as well as Tibetan traditions. In some reckoning Dipankara was the first Buddha and was the 24th predecessor of Buddha Sakya Muni. Obviously Dipankara was a figure of legendary past and could not be called

a Manusha Buddha in the period when Nirmanakaya concept was an established one.

If Dipankara was the greatest Tathagata before Gautama Buddha the concept of Tathagata itself is central to any discussion about the lineage of Buddhas or about the multiple Buddhas.

Tathagata would mean: (one) thus gone or (one) thus come. In Hinayana tradition, that is, Pali literature the meaning of this epithet is not clear though it was used in Gautama Buddha's life time, vide for example *Malunkya Putta Sutta*. The epithet was widely used later and it is widely used in Theravada countries today. Pali Nikayas suggest that the expression was pre-Buddhist and this suggestion is warranted if Gautama Buddha had at least six precursors. In Mahayana tradition Tathagata (T. Deshin-shepa) meant 'one who was gone in the same way as his predecessors.

Whether called Tathagata or Buddha the number of such beings in Mahayana tradition would be infinite through all time; past, present and future. The concept of thousands of Buddhas grew in the first four centuries A.D., that is, from Nagarjuna onwards. The numerous Buddhas in the mystic vision of Mahayana saints are one; the myriad emerge from and merge into the Sunya (void), the Absolute in the teachings of Gautama Buddha and Nagarjuna.

8 | The doctrine of eternal and universal Buddha inspired the mystics' quest for a Primordial Form of Adi Buddha. The quest began with a single form like Samantabhadra or Vajradhara and culminated into five forms designated Pancha Tathagata or Pancha Jina in eighth century A.D.; centuries later in the Himalayas the five were called Pancha Dhyani Buddha. These are Vairochana or the Brilliant, Aksobhya or the Imperturbable, Ratnasambhava or the Jewel-born, Amitabha or the Infinite Light and Amoghasiddhi or the Unfailing Success.

These Five are spiritual offspring of the Primordial Form and these Five have their emanations or reflexes. These Five and their emanations have their own Consorts. All these figures originating in the vision or meditation of the mystic saints along with the Mundane Buddhas constitute the Mahayana pantheon conventionally called Sahasra Buddha or Thousand Buddhas. The pantheon thus has three tiers; the top tier is composed of the Five, the middle tier consists of further emanations or reflexes and the bottom tier is composed of the Historical Buddha and his precursors and successors. For the believers the Three tiers are three Bodies: Dharmakaya or the Cosmic Body, Sambhogakaya or the Body of Bliss, and Nirmanakaya or the Mundane Body.

III

The Mahayana concept of Three Bodies was a development of the earlier concept of Two Bodies, namely, that Gautama Buddha had a Dharmakaya and a Rupakaya. Dharmakaya stood for Dharma as Buddha's real form and Rupakaya stood for Buddha's mundane or transitory form. In Mahayana

Rupakaya came to be designated Nirmanakaya and an intermediate Body designated Sambhogakaya emerged.

The Trikaya are: Dharmakaya or Cosmic Body which is Absolute or Reality; Sambhogakaya or Body of Bliss which in a personal manner blesses the believers; and Nirmanakaya or Mundane Body which appears on earth to teach Dharma.

The philosophy underlying the theology of Trikaya (T. Ku-sum) is well expressed in the words of TRV Murti.

"As the Dharmakāya, Buddha fully realises his identity with the Absolute (dharma-tā, śūnyatā) and unity (samatā) with all beings. It is the oneness with the Absolute that enables Buddha to intuit the Truth, which it is his sacred function to reveal to phenomenal beings. This is the fountain-source of his implicit strength which he concretises in the finite sphere. The Sambhoga Kāya is the concrete manifestation to himself (svasambhoga) and to the elect (paramsambhoga) the power and splendour of god-head. In furtherance of the great resolve to succour all beings, Buddha incarnates himself from time to time in forms best calculated to achieve this end (nirmāṇakāya)." *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism.*

The forms of the Five Tathagatas, Jinas or Buddhas and their emanations as also the different forms of the historical Buddhas are more relevant than their underlying philosophy in this account of the Mahayana Pantheon. The Five Buddhas represent or embody the five cosmic elements as the Five in totality are identical with the cosmos or universe. The five elements are Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Space with Consciousness as the all pervasive overall element. The colour and forms of the Five Buddhas are given thus in Sadhana Mala 'The Jinas (victorious ones) are Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, Amoghasiddhi and Akṣobhya. Their colours are white, yellow, red, green and blue and they exhibit the Bodhyangī (teaching), Varada (boon), Dhyāna (meditation), Abhaya (protection) and Bhūṣpaṇśa (earth touching) pose of hands respectively." Eng. tr. Bhattacharya.

If the Five Buddhas are portrayed in one canvas Vairocana is in centre with Akṣobhya in east, Ratnasambhava in south, Amitabha in west and Amoghasiddhi in north. Their respective consorts are Vajradhātvisvari, Lochana, Mamaki, Pandara and Tara. Their respective emanations are Samantabhadra, Vajrapani, Ratnapani, Avalokitesvara and Viśvapani.

Since Dharmakaya (T. Choku) is the Absolute, its form is Sunya and for the mystics a Kapali (skull) is the best Rupa for meditation. For other believers, one of the five primordial Buddhas—Vairocana (T. Nampor Nangzed), Akṣobhya (T. Mitrukpa), Ratnasambhava (T. Rinchen Jugne), Amitabha (T. Opame) and Amoghasiddhi (T. Donye Dubpa)—is the sacred illustration of Dharmakaya. The symbols, pose of hands, or mode of sitting of a figure make the icon familiar.

The Sambhogakaya (T. Longchyo Zogku) are emanations from the five primordial Buddhas in their different forms. The number of such emanations by ninth century as recorded in Mahavyutpatti was ninetytwo. In *Nispannayogavali* a work of eleventh century the Bodhisattvas recognised as Sambhogakaya are fortyeight. Whatever was the final number-fortyeight, ninetytwo or more—all the four sects of Tibet agree in counting a set of eight as topmost. These are Manjusri (T. Jampalyang), Vajrapani (T. Chana Dorjee), Avalokitesvara (T. Chenrezi), Kshitigarbha (T. Sayi Ningpo), Sarvanivaranaviskambhi (T. Deppathamched Nampershelba), Akasagarbha (T. Namkhe Ningpo), Maitreya (T. Jampa) and Samantabhadra (T. Kuntu Sangpo). This is in conformity with the pre-ninth century Indian tradition.

The Sambhogakaya icons are, in the believer's esteem, far more concrete than the Dharmakaya figures. The believers adore the Samboghakaya Bodhisattvas as personal god-heads and experience in prayer and meditation no distance or impersonal quality as with the Sunyata (T. Tongpanyi). Manjusri the embodiment of Knowledge (Prajna/Sherab) was in the beginning the first or topmost. Later, sometime after sixth century, Avalokitesvara the embodiment of Compassion (Karuna/Ningje) came to occupy the top position among the celestial Bodhisattvas and finally emerged as the head of the entire Mahayana pantheon.

These celestial Bodhisattvas have their distinctive symbols and respective Consorts. They are depicted in various forms. Avalokitesvara has two popular forms: one four handed and other eleven headed. A total of one hundred and eight forms of Avalokitesvara are found in Nepal. Manjusri has no less than a dozen forms. Two forms of Manjusri are famous: one with Sword of Knowledge in right hand and Book of Knowledge in left hand and the other with two Wheels of law in his hands and riding the Lion of Knowledge in blue colour.

Tara is Consort of Avalokitesvara while Prajnaparamita is Consort of Manjusri. The Consort goddesses have also variant forms. Tara for example has a set of twenty one forms. Green Tara may be depicted in eight forms. The Consort deities need a separate notice. Here it is necessary to state that these feminine deities constitute the essential part of the esoteric mystic pantheon. Icons of Yuganaddha (T. Yab Yum) depicting Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the embrace of their consorts, must be mentioned here as part and parcel of Sahasra Buddha; this theme of Yuganaddha also needs separate notice.

Nirmānakaya (T. Tulku) or Manusha Buddha par-excellence is Gautama Sakya Muni, the historical Buddha as distinct from a legendary Buddha or a Buddha of meditation. When Buddhism came to be recorded in stone, wood or plastic medium Gautama Buddha and his six precursors, described earlier, were depicted as Seven Mortal Buddhas. Meanwhile Mahayana

teachers like Nagarjuna came to be recognized as Manusha Buddha. Later in Tibet and Mongolia, Buddha Sakya Muni was adored as Dharmakaya after his Mahaparinirvana and the saints or teachers like Nagarjuna, Padmasambhava and Atisa would be cited as Nirmanakaya. Following the Indian tradition Tibetan saints like Marpa or Tsongkhapa would be depicted as iconic forms of Manusha Buddha. The first Tulkus (Nirmanakayas) to be recognized in Tibet were Chogyal Songtsen Gampo and his scholar minister Thumi Sambhota; the Chogyal was recognized as incarnation of Chenrezi (Avalokitesvara) and the minister was recognized as incarnation of Jampalyang (Manjusri). The Tibetan custom of recognizing incarnations of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of meditation among the believers in Tibet was confirmed according to tradition by Atisa who was in Tibet (1042-1054).

Gautama Buddha may be depicted in various forms with varying modes of sittings, varying poses of hands with one or more Extraordinary Marks like the Ushnisa. The Buddhas or Bodhisattvas who came after Gautama Buddha were depicted with symbols or objects connected with their lives and teachings. Thus Nagarjuna is depicted usually as receiving the book of Prajnaparamita from the Naga princess, Padmasambhava with the Vajra (Dorje) or Thunderbolt in his right hand and a Kapali or skull in his left hand and Dipankara Atisa with a metal Stupa (T. Chorten) on his right and a wicker basket (containing scriptures) on his left. The Tulkus or incarnations in Tibet and Mongolia were fairly numerous and a good number of such Tulkus would also be accommodated in the pantheon depicted in murals or sculptures. All these figures can be identified by the symbols peculiar to them.

If a temple has only Three Images, the set may be of the Buddhas of Past, Present and Future, that is, Dipankara, Sakyamuni and Maitreya; or of Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya. In Nepal Three Images representing Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are come across.

IV

Western visitors to the Himalayan monasteries often enquire about the comparative numerical superiority between Puranic Hindu and Mahayana Buddhist Pantheons. It is indeed a moot question which is difficult to answer categorically. Both Hindu and Mahayana deities passed through phenomenal proliferation for centuries. Finds of new deities or new variants of the deities are reported from time to time. A few years ago an Indian archaeologist reported the find of Avalokitesvara with twelve hands. Why and how numerous deities entered into the Mahayana Pantheon may be read from the point of view of Tantra. In the words of the leading scholar in the field, Benoy Tosh Bhattacharyya, the process may be described thus:

“The individual soul is known in Buddhism as the bodhisattva or bodhicitta, while the infinite of the universal Soul is called Sunya. When they combine in the state of the highest meditation and concentration, an artificial condition, in a way akin to deep sleep, is brought about, and the deity appears in the mind-sky in flashes and sparks. The nature of the Bodhicitta

being finite, it is not possible to realize the Infinite in its entirety, that is to say, the result of the mystic experience of the bodhicitta also remains finite. And as the object for which the worshipper sits in meditation is different in different cases, the deity visualized also becomes different. It is the bhāvanā (desire) of the worshipper, which is of the nature of psychic force, that reacts on the infinite Energy, giving rise to different manifestations according to the nature of reaction. The nature of this reaction is of illimitable variety, and thus the resultant deity also appears in an infinite variety of forms, and this is the chief reason why we find large number of gods and goddesses in the pantheons of both the Buddhists and the Hindus." (*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Volume I, Ch. Mahayana Pantheon).'

About the imagery of the deities Hindu and Mahayana concepts are not identical. The Puranic Hindu view was that the Devas were actually present on this earth in the ancient most past and that the Devas gradually left this earth as not worthy for their stay and were merged in the ether. A concise notice from the Puranic text *Viṣṇudharmottara* was made by JN Banerjee thus:

"The *Viṣṇudharmottara* tells us that the gods were worshipped in their visible forms, not images, in the Satya yuga; in the Treta and Dvapara yugas, worship was done both in their visible forms and in their images. In the treta yuga they were worshipped in the house and in the dvapara in the forest; in the Kali yuga, however, the practice of building houses of gods (i.e. temples) in town was begun. The enshrinement of the gods (i.e. their images) should be done in land suitable for such purpose, which should be donated according to the rules followed in gifts of Lands." *The Development of Hindu Iconography*.

In Mahayana Tantra the images or forms of the deities were as in the vision or meditation of the Mahasiddha (master mystic). The artist whether from the clergy or from the laity had to draw or depict the image to the satisfaction of the mystic. The mystic process of visualisation of the deity is described in *Advayavajra Sangraha* thus:

"The form of the deity is an expression of the sunya. Such expressions are by nature non-existent. Whatever there is as expression, it must be sunya in essence."

"From the right perception of sunyata proceeds the germ-syllable; from the germ-syllable proceeds the conception of an icon; and from the icon, its external representations. The whole process therefore is one of dependent origination". Eng. Tr. Bhattacharyya.

It may be noted that as in prayer or meditation so in painting or sculpture, Gautama Buddha's basic teaching of Pratitya-Samutpada (T. Tendal) was the inspiration to realize excellence. Modern aesthetics may or may not appreciate this process but must listen to the believer's word if unrealistic, grotesque forms are to be understood. A free translation of an ancient saying chanted by the believers may be made: "One who perceives the Cause and Effect nexus perceives the Truth, One who perceives the Truth perceives the Buddha".

(1)

देवानंपिथेन पिथद्वसिन लाजिन चौदसवशामिसितेन
बुधस कोनाकमनस थुवे द्वितियं वढिते
....सामिसितेन च अतन आगाच महीयते
.... पापिते

अशोक अनुशासनः निगाली सागर

(2)

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णु गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुरेव परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

(3)

देवीभागवत्

सत्ययुगे देवानां प्रत्यक्षपूजनं - त्रेताद्वापरयोः
प्रत्यक्षपूजा प्रतिमासु च - तत्रापि त्रेतायुगे गृहे
द्वापरे चारण्ये - कलौ च देवायतननिर्मितिर्नगरेषु
समारब्धा, भूमिद्वानं विधायैव देवायतनप्रतिष्ठा
कार्या, देवालययोग्यभूमि.... ।

(4)

विष्णुधर्मोत्तर

स्फूर्तिं च देवताकारा निःस्वभावाः स्वभावतः ।
यथा यथा भवेत् स्फूर्तिः सा तथा शून्यतात्मिका ॥

शून्यतावोधितौ बीजं बीजाद्विभ्रं प्रजायते ।
विभ्रं च न्यासविन्यासौ तस्मात्सर्वं प्रतीत्यजम् ॥
अद्वयवज्रसंग्रह ॥

(5)
जिनो वैशेचनो रव्यातो रत्नसम्भव एव च ।
अमिताभामौघसिद्धिरक्षोभ्यञ्च प्रकीर्तितः

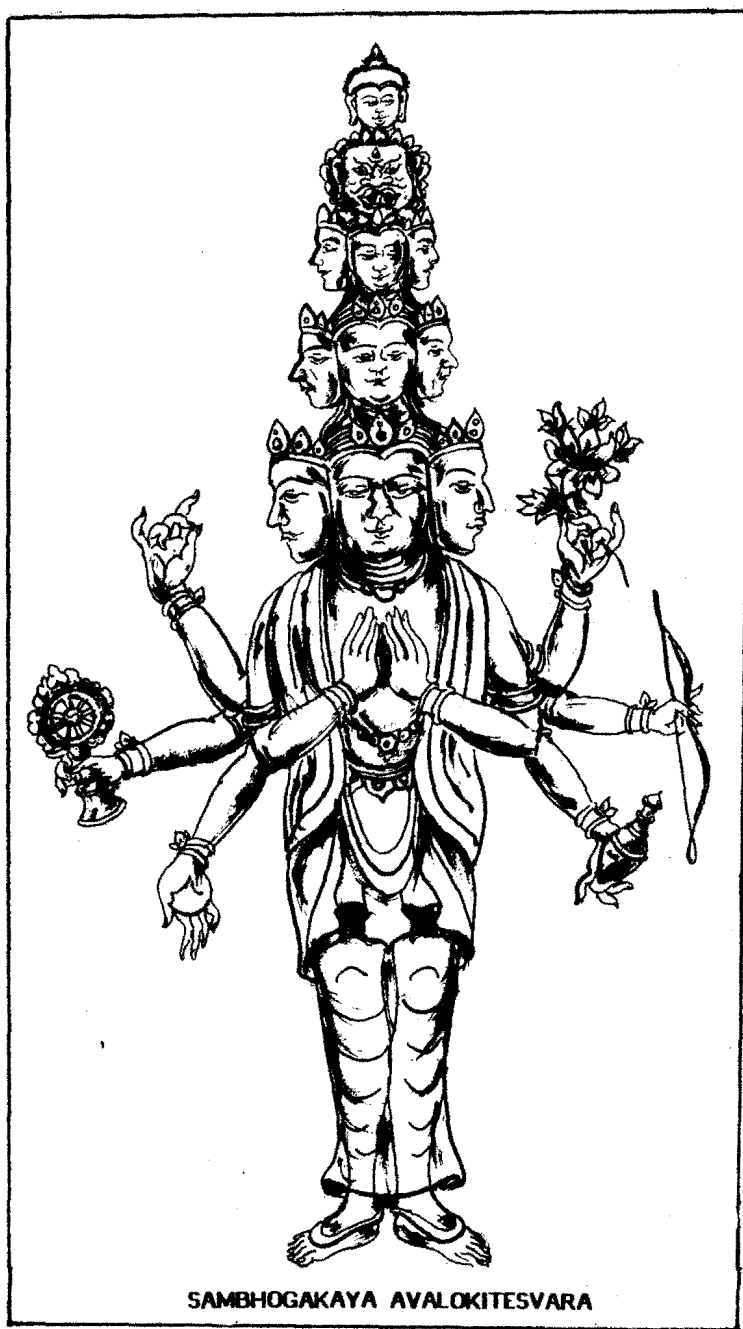
वर्णा अमीषां सितः पीतो रक्तो हरितमैचकौ ।
बौध्यङ्गी वरदो ध्यानं मुदा अभय-भूस्पर्शौ ॥

(6) साधनमाला
यः प्रतीत्यसमुत्पादं पन्थति स धर्मं पन्थति ।
यः धर्मं पन्थति स बुद्धं पन्थति ॥

बुद्धवचन



DHARMAKAYA AMITABHA



SAMBHOGAKAYA AVALOKITESVARA



NIRMANAKAYA SAKYAMUNI

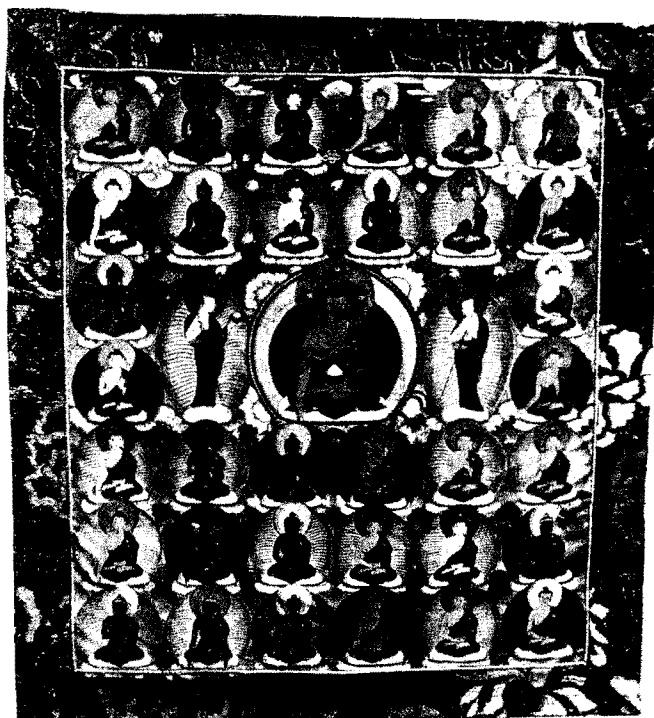


PADMASAMBHAVA





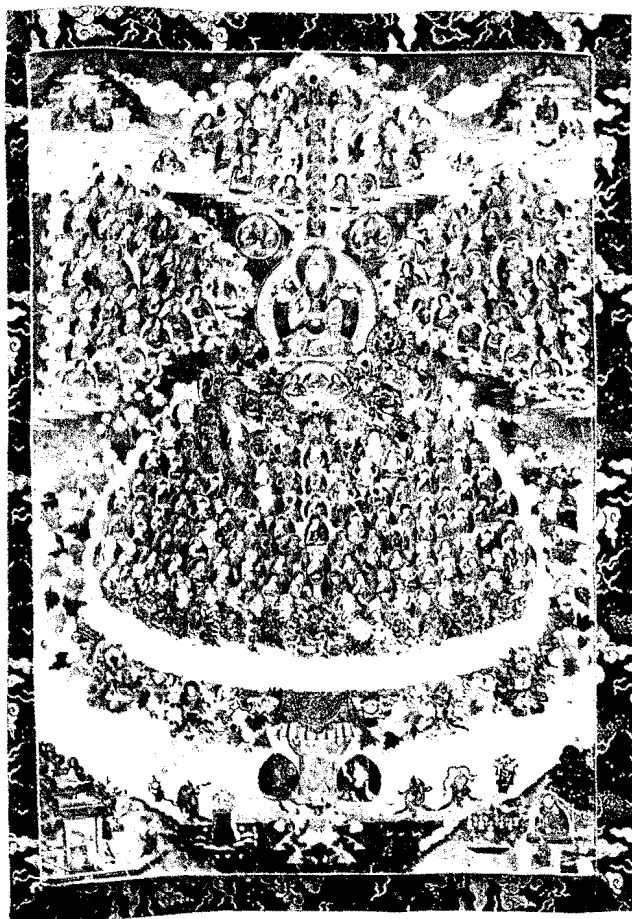
MILAREPA



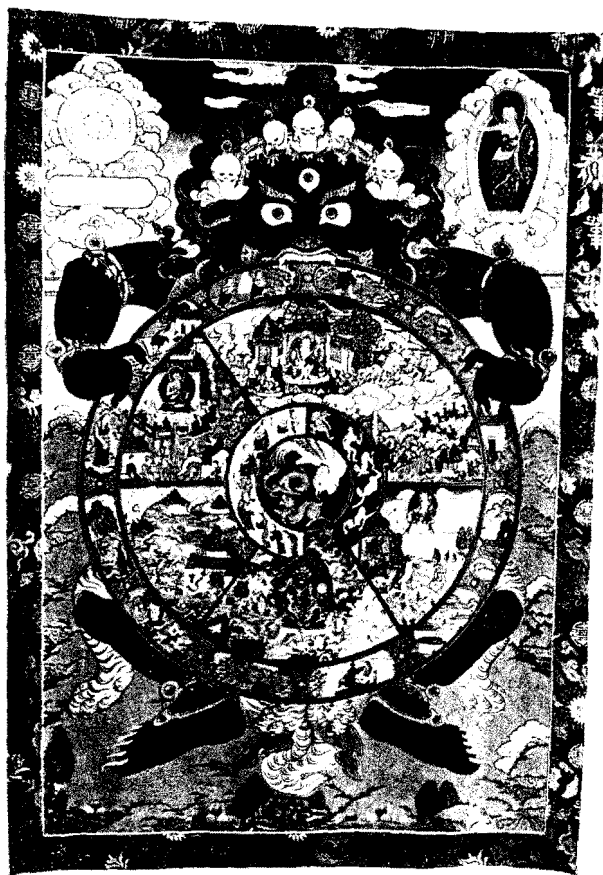
TUNG SHA
Thirtyfive Buddhas who receive confession



GAUTAMA SAKYAMUNI & OTHER BUDDHAS
including celestial Buddhas
Bodhisattvas and Master Exponents



TSHOG ZHING
Assembly of Buddhas : Tsongkhapa in centre



SIPA'I KHORLO
Wheel of Life depicting six worlds of existence

TIBETAN LAMAS IN WESTERN EYES

H.E. Richardson

The quiet competence with which many Tibetan exiles from their own land have found success in a new life in India, Europe and America is a fine example of their national resilience and initiative allied to a natural friendly charm and good manners.

That is no surprise to those who knew them in Tibet and I remember when Dr. David Snellgrove and I went in 1960 to discuss the future of the Tibetan refugees with the U.N. High Commission and were faced by a generally gloomy view that they would find it very difficult to adapt themselves to strange conditions, we vigorously maintained that, given a helping start, the Tibetans would rapidly do very well in their new surroundings.

Now among the many successful and popular figures in a variety of activities, there are many learned Lamas. Some have established teaching and meditation centres where they inspire their disciples by their dedicated sincerity and conviction. The most notable of the Lamas is, of course, the Dalai Lama.

On 17th March after two shells from Chinese batteries had fallen in the grounds of his summer palace when the hope of finding a peaceful outcome for the growing tension and hostility between Tibetans and Chinese had broken in violence, His Holiness left his capital secretly at night to seek refuge in India. A month later, after a journey full of danger and hardship, he arrived at Tezpur in Assam. Instead of the careworn exile some may have expected, the assembled pressmen saw a serene figure of great dignity and presence. He might have been a ruler secure in his throne paying a ceremonial visit; but behind the ease of manner and unfeigned friendliness many could perceive the spiritual depth which without affectation set the Dalai Lama apart from familiarity and made him effortlessly master of his surroundings.

There is beyond doubt something about a high lama that is outside the ordinary experience of our Western civilization. Even among the lesser lamas, of whom there were many, I found as well as calmness, benevolence, dignity and humour, the unfeigned certainty – so much part of the man that it would never occur to him to analyse or explain it – that he was not only the person we see but the same who had lived in the bodies of many predecessors. He is as sure of that as that he is himself. I shall not speculate

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how that comes about: but now H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama has become an international figure, the friend of religious and political leaders all over the world but also accessible with direct simplicity to many thousands of ordinary people whom he influences by his teaching of peace, mutual understanding and goodwill. I am not going to attempt the impossible task of explaining him; charisma is not something to be put into words, only to be experienced in personal contact. What I set out to do is to recall how some earlier lamas, who were never seen outside Asia, appeared to the eyes of the rare western visitors who chanced to see them in the seven centuries or so preceding this.

The first foreigners to meet Tibetans were Franciscan friars in the 13th century, braving the arduous journey to the court of the Mongol Khans who took pleasure in assembling round them representatives of every available religion whose blessings they accepted, indeed demanded, indiscriminately. They also enjoyed hearing debates between champions of the different faiths. In 1254 William of Rubruck met at that court a red-robed Tibetan priest with whom he had a long conversation - in what language it is not specified - and from whom he acquired some ill-digested information. He also saw a ten-year old child-monk said to be a reincarnation of two predecessors. He took part in a debate with the Buddhists in which he claims to have triumphed. If the Tibetans were his opponents they probably enjoyed debating then as much as they do today and, in the end, it was they who won the Khan's favour. William brought to the west the first version of the six letter prayer which he represents as Om Mani Baccam. About half a century later another Franciscan, John of Montecorvino, was at the Mongol capital in Peking where he met a red-hatted "Tibetan" pope - the Grand Trutius, (perhaps the Tisri who was at that time Sa-skya Lama Ye-shes Rin-chen) but he has nothing significant to say about him.

Then and for many years to come, foreigners who came in touch with Tibetans were mainly missionaries and so, professional critics and rivals of Buddhism. Further, lack of a common language stood in the way of mutual understanding. An exception, at least to the extent that he was a layman, was Marco Polo who was in China and Mongolia some years before Montecorvino. It is not clear whether he actually spoke to a Tibetan but he has a good deal to say about the priesthood whom he describes in general as "idolaters" and "Baksi". He never uses the word lama but mentions some idolaters as leading an ascetic life in great monasteries where the monks were of a superior kind. Marco's chief interest was in the more spectacular activities of the Bakshis who were able to control the weather and to perform miracles such as raising the Khan's drinking cup from one place to appear on the table in front of him. These persons whom he describes as generally dirty and unkempt, resembling perhaps some types of modern *ngags-pa*, were also credited with good deeds such as persuading the Khan to make charitable donations to the poor.

After the fourteenth century there was a long interval before a further meeting between foreign missionaries and Tibetans; and the scene moved from the east to the western spheres of Tibetan influence when the Jesuit Antonio d'Andrade paid a short visit in 1624 to the kingdom of Tsaparang. His mission had been sparked off by a report from a Portuguese merchant Diogo d'Almeida who claimed to have lived two years in Tibet, perhaps Ladakh, and affirmed that there were traces of Christian practices in that country, among them a bishop called Lama. That appears to be the first mention of the word in the western vocabulary. Andrade won favour with the lay ruler of Tsaparang who pressed him to return, describing him in a letter as his Lama. Andrade did go back the following year and met many lamas with whom he could communicate after a fashion through one of them who spoke Hindi. But close relations or any real study of Tibetan religion were not possible because his patron, the king, was on very bad terms with his priesthood who before long brought about his fall; and with it the Christian mission too came to an end.

A nearly simultaneous Jesuit mission reached central Tibet by way of Bhutan under fathers Cacella and Cabral. In Bhutan they saw the great reverence in which the Dharma Raja - the Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che - was held and the great state in which he lived but they were still seeking for traces of Christian practice and did not get the least idea of Tibetan religious beliefs. When they went on to Shigatse they became, like the Jesuits in Tsaparang, involved in rivalry between their protector the lay king and the lamas of differing sects, and learnt little more about Lamas and their ways except that they gradually perceived that they were not relics of past Christianity. Moreover they did not display the bigotry of another pair of Jesuits, Grueber and D'Orville, travelling from China to India who were the first foreigners to see Lhasa. They declined to seek a meeting with the Dalai Lama, describing him as "that devilish god the father who puts to death those who refuse to adore him". Doubtless he kept that ungracious thought to himself at that time for he admits that they were treated with great kindness by the Dalai Lama's own brother.

At last, in the early years of the 18th century there came to Lhasa the first foreigner to acquire a sound knowledge of Tibetan and an insight into Tibetan thought and learning. It is difficult to exaggerate the greatness of Ippolito Desideri and impossible in a few words to summarize his achievement. On his arrival at Lhasa in 1716 he was graciously received by the actual ruler, Latzang Khan. Within nine months he had learned enough Tibetan to write, in traditional verse-form, an exposition of Christian doctrine which he presented to the King and which created a great stir of interest. The King arranged for him to continue his studies first in Ramoche and later in Sera where he was allowed to celebrate mass for himself. His command of Tibetan led to many discussions with learned lamas and he was engaged on

composing a refutation of Buddhism when his studies were interrupted by the Dzungar invasion. The work, sadly now lost, was completed just before he had to leave Tibet in 1721. Later he wrote a careful account of Tibet, its people, customs, administration and, of course, its religion. In general he shows a respect for the institutions and conduct of the lamas and monks; and he found, as has been agreed many times since, that there is much in common in the moral principles and aims of both faiths; but his Christian beliefs made him denounce some aspects of Tibetan Buddhism as idolatrous and abominable. The sticking points then as later were Tibetan denial of a God and their doctrine of transmigration. Although he knew many lamas and had one special favourite who taught him Tibetan, he paints no picture of the character and personality of any of them; it is only of his patron Latzang Khan, to whom he was much indebted and whom he obviously liked, that he gives any personal description.,

He records the amazing veneration accorded to the Dalai Lama and to other lamas too: "would to God", he says "that Christian Catholics showed one-hundredth part of such sentiments to ... Religious of our Holy Church". And having seen the devotion of the common people to "Urgyen" which made them ready to sacrifice everything they had rather than give up their faith in him Desideri comments "I confess I blamed myself and was ashamed to have a heart so hard that I did not honour, love and serve Jesus, sole Master, sole and true Redeemer, as this people did a traitor and deceiver".

Desideri's view of reincarnating lamas carries Christian logic to a conclusion which modern readers may find an excess of dogma. He was impressed by the recognition of past possessions and associates and by the claims by newly discovered lamas to remember past existences and he rejects the idea that this is simply due to deceit and collusion; so, since it cannot be the work of God, it must be that of the Devil. But his careful examination of other Tibetan religious doctrines is generally impartial and acute.

The Capuchin missionaries who briefly preceded Desideri and continued after his departure until 1745, like him, enjoyed the protection and friendship especially of the lay chief administrator, Pholha Miwang, and also of the Dalai Lama and other monks. But they had no one of the calibre of Desideri among them and although several of them must have acquired the rudiments of Tibetan, only one, the gentle, devout, Orazio Della Penna is said to have been fully proficient in the language. They had many close acquaintances among the lamas with whom they held lengthy discussions; and they met the VIIth Dalai Lama on several occasions. They seem to have been more concerned with preaching their own beliefs than with attempting to understand those of the Tibetans and some of their letters show an

amusing naivety. They claim to have proved in argument with learned lamas that the Buddha was neither a deity nor a saint, that it was no sin to kill animals, and that the lamas with whom they were debating could not possibly be reincarnations. The lamas listened attentively. Orazio himself presented the Dalai Lama with a copy of his work refuting Buddhism. The Lama accepted it with interest and politely advised Orazio not to condemn the religion of other people. Nevertheless, one of the Capuchins reported that the Dalai Lama was teetering on the verge of conversion. All such optimism came to an abrupt end when a handful of lowly Tibetans whom they had converted were persuaded to disown their loyalty to the Dalai Lama. After being given every opportunity to recant, they received a comparatively mild flogging of twenty strokes and the fathers who tried to intercede were told by their patron Pholha Miwang that they should not interfere with the faith of other people, adding "we do not do so". After a short time when Pho Lha and the Dalai Lama declined to receive them, they were once more granted audience and were treated with the customary kindness but it was made clear that their actions were, in Tibetan eyes, an unworthy and discourteous return for years of tolerant hospitality. That was in effect the end for the Capuchin fathers and for a permanent Christian mission in Central Tibet. Dispirited and out of funds, the good Orazio Della Penna, who had been for twenty two years in Tibet, left Lhasa in April 1745 only to die of weariness and sorrow at the age of sixty five soon after his arrival in Nepal.

Nearly thirty years later there was a mission of quite a different sort when Warren Hastings despatched George Bogle as his envoy to Tashilhunpo with the aim of encouraging friendship and commerce between India and Tibet. Bogle, an intelligent, observant and cheerfully sociable Scot, was singularly fortunate to meet in the person of the Third Panchen Lama the most powerful and popular figure in Tibet at the time and he has left the first lively description of a great Lama as a warm human personality as well as a charismatic leader.

On his first receptions at Tashirabgye Bogle was charmed by the engaging manner of the Lama and thereafter for the best part of five months was frequently in his company and in that of his hospitable, light-hearted family. The Lama clearly enjoyed Bogle's presence and treated him with the greatest consideration, sending dress and food to make his stay more comfortable. Bogle attended the Lama on his journey to Tashilhunpo, at formal reception and at religious ceremonies; and, more important, he had about thirty private meetings when the Lama who had a fair knowledge of Hindi, received him with friendly informality, spoke freely about all aspects of the political situation and approved of Bogle's hopes of closer relations between India and Tibet. Bogle was regularly invited to religious services and, from courtesy and in the interest of occupying his time, he always attended. He has described well enough what he saw of temples, services

and so on but shows no real interest in the meaning of it all and on the one occasion when the Panchen initiated a conversation about religion Bogle seems to have absorbed little of his explanation of Buddhist doctrines and, on his part, made it clear that he was no missionary with an evangelistic axe to grind, and was politely vague and non-committal in his interpretation of Christian tenets. They came to the usual agreement that the moral aims of their faiths were similar.

His close acquaintance with his host moved Bogle to admiration, respect and affection. He wrote :

"His disposition is open, candid, and generous. He is extremely merry and entertaining in conversation and tells a pleasant story with a great deal of humour and action. I endeavoured to find out, in his character, those defects which are inseparable from humanity, but he is so universally beloved that I had no success and not a man could find in his heart to speak ill of him."

He has much more to say about his gentleness, his preference for conciliation, his diplomatic sagacity, and of the profound veneration and devotion in which he was held; and, in general he says "I never knew a man for whom on so short acquaintance I had half the heart's liking".

No foreigner has lived on terms of closer confidence and intimacy with a Great Lama; and Bogle parted from the Panchen, his family, Tibet and its people, with genuine sadness. Later, writing to his sister, he regrets the absence of his friend the "Teshu Lama" for whom I have a hearty liking and could be happy again to have his fat hand on my head".

Bogle may not have achieved any great practical success but he had paved the way for future friendly relations and Hastings determined to follow this up by another mission. Sadly the Panchen and Bogle were not to meet again; the former died in China in 1780 and Bogle a year later in Calcutta.

So, the next envoy to Tashilhunpo, in 1783, was Captain Samuel Turner, an English officer in the East India Company's army. Hastings was good at choosing men and Turner like Bogle was able, observant and intelligent, also he was patient and able to get on well with Tibetans but from the rather formal language of his account he seems to have lacked Bogle's warm spontaneity and sense of fun, and he did not have Bogle's advantage in meeting any figure comparable to the Third Panchen Lama for at his visit the new reincarnation was only eighteen months old; but he has left, in the

rather staid language of the eighteenth century, an enchanting account of his reception by the child:

"The Lama's eyes were scarcely ever turned from us and when our cups of tea were empty he appeared uneasy, throwing back his head and contracting the skin of his brow, and continued to make a noise, for he could not speak, until they were filled again. He took some sugar out of a golden cup ... and stretching out his arm made a motion to his attendants to give it to me". Turner then addressed the child briefly for "it was hinted that notwithstanding he is unable to reply, it is not to be inferred that he cannot understand". During Turner's speech "The little creature turned, looking steadfastly towards me, with the appearance of much attention while I spoke, and nodded with repeated but slow movements of his head, as though he understood and appreciated every word but could not utter a reply. His parents who stood by all the time eyed their son with a look of affection and a smile expressive of heartfelt joy at the propriety of the young Lama's conduct. His whole attention was directed toward us; he was silent and sedate, never once looking towards his parents, as if under their influence at any time; and with whatsoever pains, his manners may have been so correctly formed, I must own that his behaviour, on this occasion, appeared perfectly natural and spontaneous, and not directed by any external action, or sign of authority"

The child, Bstan-pa'i Nyi-ma, grew up to be a personage of almost equal importance to his predecessor, Bogle's friend, and lived to the age of seventy three.

The promising start to relations between India and Tibet was stultified by the closing of the country after the Gorkha invasion in 1792, and it was left to Thomas Manning, a sensitive, intellectual, English eccentric to find his own way to Lhasa in 1811, apparently without serious obstruction. Manning was a friend of Charles Lamb who was fascinated by his "incomparable genius, congenial nature, sparkling eccentricity and addiction to occasional levity"; he was also a considerable linguist who became specially attracted to China and having mastered the language and manners, wanted to travel in remote parts. He arrived at Calcutta in Chinese dress which did little to disguise his nationality, and with a Chinese servant and the help of Chinese living in Tibet, he found his way through Bhutan to Lhasa. His fragmentary diary, though containing several significant observations, is largely given up to the discomforts of the journey. At Lhasa he paid his respects to the Chinese Amban and seems to have received official hospitality from the Tibetans, apparently in his role as a foreign physician. He had no difficulty in securing audience of the Ninth Dalai Lama, Lung-rtogs rgya-mtsho. At his reception Manning prostrated himself three times and offered a scarf and presents. His

account is another classic : "The Lama's beautiful and interesting face engrossed almost all my attention. He was at the time about seven years old (actually, he was just six); had the simple, unaffected manners of a well-educated princely child. His face was, I thought, poetically and affectingly beautiful. He was of a gay and cheerful disposition; his beautiful mouth perpetually unbending into a graceful smile, which illuminated his whole countenance. Sometimes, particularly when he had looked at me, his smile almost approached to a gentle laugh. No doubt my grim beard and spectacles somewhat excited his risibility". There was an exchange of formal questions and compliments before Manning withdrew. He says: "I was extremely affected by this interview with the Lama. I could have wept through strangeness of sensation. I was absorbed in reflections when I got home". He paid five more visits to the Lama but has left no detailed comment on those occasions.

In 1845/46 missionaries appeared once more at Lhasa. The Lazarist fathers, Evariste Huc and Joseph Gabet had set out in 1844 from the borders of China, north of Peking, on instructions from the Pope to survey the mission field in Mongolia. A long journey brought them at the end of 1845, by way of Nagchukha to Lhasa where they were received kindly by the Tibetans but with suspicious hostility by the Chinese Amban who evicted them after about three months and compelled them to return eastwards through Tibet instead of proceeding by the short journey to India. During their stay, like all missionaries before them, they received the patronage of the lay authority, in this case the senior minister, Shatra, whom they wrongly describe as the Regent. They were allowed to make a chapel and preach their faith and they had the usual anodyne discussions about religion with Shatra and a few monks. Owing to a smallpox scare they were unable to meet the Dalai Lama, Mkha's-grub rgya-mtsho, who was then about eight years old, and have little to say about him as a person. But they were much impressed by what they heard of the Panchen Lama, the same whom Turner had met in 1784, now sixty-five years old, a figure of majestic presence with a great reputation for sanctity and learning. He had also acted as Regent for eight months from September 1844 to May 1845. Petech appears to state that he remained at Lhasa until about September 1846 but this seems improbable for the missionaries evidently did not meet him but were advised to go to Tashilhunpo to do so, which they were unable to do.

After the Lazarists the age of explorers and adventurers in the competition to be first into Lhasa, set in. The arrogant bullying and not infrequent deceit by some of these travellers did nothing to enhance the reputation of foreigners in Tibetan eyes. They met few Tibetans of any standing, had no common language and were generally more interested in the topography than the people.

It was not until the mould of exclusion was broken by the rough wooing of the Younghusband expedition that a Great Lama was seen again by foreigners. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama after his enforced flight to China was met by the American diplomat W.W. Rockhill who spent a week with him at Wu-tai shan. He comments on the Lama's undoubted intelligence and ability, great natural dignity, quick temper but kindly cheerfulness; his thoughtfulness and courtesy as a host. He also describes his personal appearance in considerable detail. The Vicomte D'Ollonne also met the Dalai Lama at Wu-tai shan for a short rather formal visit from which he got an impression of the Lama as a statesman and man of action. Later, the friend of longest standing and closest intimacy was Sir Charles Bell who looked after the Dalai Lama when he took refuge in India in 1910 and was in constant contact with him when he was invited to Lhasa in 1921. Bell has written about the Dalai Lama with deep affection and respect in 'Portrait of the Dalai Lama', which I cannot attempt to summarize: enough to quote him that the Dalai Lama and he were "men of like minds". From Bell's account the powerful personality of the Lama emerges clearly but it is as a strong-minded man of action and administrative ability and political interests rather than of deep spirituality and that is the impression conveyed not only by Rockhill and D'Ollonne but also by the Japanese Kawaguchi and by Political Officers who visited Lhasa after Bell until the death of the Dalai Lama in 1933. He was nevertheless profoundly learned in Buddhist doctrine but apparently in an intellectual way and he was eager in his position as head of the church to see that the standard of teaching and achievement in religious studies was improved.

By contrast, his contemporary the Sixth Panchen Lama impressed all who met him by his gentleness and spirituality. Sir Frederick O'Connor, who was fluent in Tibetan, enjoyed a warm friendship with him beginning with visits to Tashilhunpo in 1904 and 1905; he later accompanied the Lama on his visit to India. O'Connor tells a pleasant story that on their first meeting, the Panchen Lama, referring, without the need of explanation, to the visits of Bogle and Turner to two of his predecessors, expressed his pleasure at meeting British officers "again" and recalling the happy relations he had had with them. He also showed O'Connor a number of presents - watches, china, silver and so on - received on those early occasions. O'Connor writes with affection of the gentle and saintly character of the Lama and the love and reverence of his people towards him. Unfortunately he was drawn innocently into a short-lived plan in which O'Connor, perhaps carried away by his admiration for the Lama, sought to set him up as a substitute for the absent Dalai Lama. This had tragic consequences for the Panchen Lama who was to end his life in exile, and for the peace of Tibet. Sir Charles Bell wrote of him: "Truly the Tashi Lama has a wonderful personality. Somewhat short in stature, with a fair and healthy complexion, the smile with which he regards you is touched with the quiet saintliness of one who prays and works

for all mankind, but it is at the same time the smile of a friend who takes a personal and sympathetic interest in your own concerns. It is not surprising that he should be loved by his people. It is good that there is such a man in Tibet; it is good that there are such men in the world". The great explorer Sven Hedin described him in even more enthusiastic terms: "Wonderful, never to be forgotten, incomparable Tashi Lama", and related the deep impression made by his calm, dignity and courtesy and his wide humanity: "Extraordinary, unique, incomparable !"

The participation of the Panchen Lama, whether willingly or not, in political matters beginning with the plans of Frederick O'Connor and continuing through his enmeshment in Chinese designs on Tibet since his flight from Tibet in 1926 until his death in 1937 are a sadly uncharacteristic story. And the involvement of the two Great Lamas in international politics to some extent robbed them of their remote mystery but, although there remained an aura of spirituality it made them more credible human beings.

Today the balance has changed. The present Panchen Lama is something of an enigma. In the early days of the Tibetan tragedy he appeared as the political creature and puppet of the Chinese; and contentious and offensive words were put into his mouth. But people who have met him lately emphasize that when he is able to speak for himself he is a true Tibetan and Buddhist.

The Dalai Lama - Chos-srid gnyis-ldan, Master of Religion and State - is inevitably and deeply concerned with the politics of his country and when he speaks of them, which he does mainly on special occasions and when he is specifically asked about them, he makes his views and meaning clear but in balanced and temperate language. In his daily life and in his public utterances politics are subordinated to his deep, innate feeling for religion, and the good of all beings. His radiant, generous spirituality in all he says has restored the mystique of the incarnate Lama underlying his warm humanity and approachability.

As I have said charisma is not to be described. I make no further attempt to do so and will only add my twentieth century workaday account of a child Lama to the incomparable descriptions by Turner and Manning.

On 6th October 1939 the whole population of Lhasa, so it seemed, had congregated in bright cool autumn weather on the plain below Rikya monastery some two miles from Lhasa, where a great camp had been ornamented with auspicious designs in blue, sheltered the tent proper, the roof of which was even more splendidly decorated with religious symbols in gold, red and blue and with golden peacock figures perched on the roof



DALAI LAMA, FEBRUARY, 1940

pole. The front was open showing the inner walls lined with splendid gold, red and blue brocade hangings and with bright banners hanging from the supporting poles. In the centre stood the tall throne of the Dalai Lama, covered in patterned gold and red brocade. There was a lower throne at one side for the Regent. The crowd waited in tense excitement which was heightened when the band of the Dalai Lama's bodyguard, which had gone out to meet him, was heard in the distance; and soon in a cloud of dust and of incense smoke from burners all along the route, the first banners of the procession came in sight. Long trumpets sounded from the monastery above and the crowd pressed forward eagerly. A small troop of Chinese soldiers in dusty quilted clothes came first at a quick pace and then a long line of mounted men, carriers of banners and symbols, and then the whole body of Tibetan officials in ascending importance in magnificent brocades and white or crimson topped hats. At last in the centre of the cavalcade we saw a small carrying chair draped in yellow silk, and through the glass window the face of the little Dalai Lama could be seen looking calmly but curiously at the mass of people prostrating themselves by the roadside, many weeping with joy. The procession moved at a rapid pace up the hill to the monastery where the child was to have a short rest and change his clothes. Soon he was carried down the winding path in the large gilded state palanquin with eight bearers in yellow silk and red tasselled hats. The whole official body accompanied him into the camp to the Peacock Tent where he was lifted on to the throne by his Lord Chamberlain. Everyone then took their proper places in the enclosure and we members of the British Mission and those of the Nepalese and Chinese, were led to our seats. Ours were just in front of the Dalai Lama's father, mother and family. The Regent opened proceedings by prostrating three times before the Dalai Lama and then offering him a scarf; after which the officials began to file past to offer white scarves and receive the blessing. The child, wearing yellow brocade and a yellow, peaked hat with a fur brim sat quietly and with great dignity, completely at ease in these strange surroundings, giving the proper blessing to each person, with both hands or one, or with a tassel on the end of a rod, according to their rank. He looked often in our direction, partly because we were so near to his parents but also it seemed, fascinated by our unfamiliar appearance; and when our turn came to offer our scarves he was smiling broadly and as I bent down for his blessing he took a pull at my hair. But a greater centre of amusement and interest were the rosy face and fair hair of Reginald Fox, the Mission Radio Officer; the Dalai Lama felt his hair for quite a long time. After us the stream of worshippers continued to flow for over an hour until at last tea in a golden tea-pot studded with turquoise was brought in; the tea was first tasted formally by a high official then poured into a jade cup and offered to the Dalai Lama. He was then lifted down and carried back in state up to the monastery.

Although not surprisingly he seemed a little tired at the end of the long day his behaviour through the whole ceremony was movingly impressive. He maintained a calm and interested appearance and a look of happy benevolence. The rapt devotion of the Tibetan crowd could almost be felt and all of us like Manning experienced "the strangeness of sensation".

Later, Sir Basil Gould came to Lhasa for the installation ceremony. By then I had left Lhasa but Gould has left a very full account of the story of the discovery and recognition of the child as well as of the enthronement. He tells of his receptions by the Dalai Lama, describing his steady gaze and absorption in what was going on, and using the language of Isaiah "Unto us a child is born".

When I returned to Lhasa in 1944 and on many later occasions, I was formally received by the Dalai Lama and never failed to be impressed, as he grew up, by his composure, his self-possession and his look of kindly interest. As he was a minor all my time in Tibet and state affairs were conducted by the Regent, I never had an opportunity to meet and talk to him privately. During much of that time my friend Heinrich Harrer was frequently in contact with the Dalai Lama whose curiosity about the outside world and things mechanical he was able to satisfy in many ways. Harrer has told his remarkable story in 'Seven Years in Tibet'. I was fortunate in being able to exchange, through him, messages with the Dalai Lama to whom I used to send cinema films, illustrated magazines and books, and flowers from our garden. But it was only after he had reached safety in India that I was able to meet him personally on several occasions, first at Mussoorie in 1960 and then at Dharamsala in 1961 when I was privileged to enjoy his hospitality at delightfully informal family lunch and dinner parties. At those meetings I could feel the immediate impact of his personality. Behind the simple often humorous friendliness of manner shone a transparent goodness, an inner peace devoid of hatred and a wide compassion not only for the pressing needs of his own people but for the wider troubles and cares of all humanity. That feeling perhaps developed even greater intensity in the travels he was later to undertake all over the world and in his meetings with leading religious and political figures in many countries.

For me, my experience in those meetings in India showed that "His Holiness" was not merely a title but a reality.

THE GOING FOR REFUGE SUTRA

Kenneth Liberman

This sutra from the Great Vehicle is called "Going for Refuge to the Three Sublime Ones."

I¹ prostrate to the triple gem. Thus have I² heard. The Conquerer was residing with a great gathering of 250 assembled monks in the park of (the benefactor) Anathapandika in the forest of King Jitavana. At the time Shariputra was living in solitude, and there arose in his mind this thought, "If I have the opportunity to meet the Praised One, I would go before the presence of the Dharma King, the One Gone Thus, and ask him how much merit one can accumulate if, with sincere devotion, one takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha."

One afternoon, upon arising from meditative absorption³ and having gone to where the Conquerer was staying, he prostrated to the Conquerer's feet and found a seat off to one side. After having sat down, Shariputra addressed the Conquerer in this way, "Revered One, when I was alone in meditative absorption this thought came to me, 'How much merit can one accumulate if, with sincere devotion, one takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha?'"

After Sariputra had posed his question, the Conquerer replied in this way, "Shariputra, it is excellent that you have asked your question for the sake of the happiness of others and with compassion for your fellow beings. You have come before the presence of the One Gone Thus with the thought of asking this; therefore, Shariputra, in order to help you understand the matter well I will explain by giving an example.

"If someone having miraculous powers were to construct a stupa out of seven kinds of precious stones, beautifully arranged—gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystals, red pearls, emeralds, and gems— and it covered an area equal to that of this world Jambudvīpa and its adjacent continents having a length and breadth of 7,000 miles and it reached as high as the world of Brahma; and then, having made an offering to the stupa of heavenly incense, heavenly flowers, heavenly garlands, heavenly umbrellas, victory banners, and silk pennants, if this person having miraculous powers also poured the water out of the four great oceans with Maruka oil, planted in wick as big as Mt. Meru, and burned this offering lamp continuously for many eons until the end of existence, what would you think of that, Shariputra? On the basis of that how much merit do you think he would accumulate?"

"Oh Conquerer, a great deal of merit," he replied. "Oh One Gone to Bliss, a great deal of merit indeed. It would be beyond the understanding of all the Hearers and Solitary Realizers. Oh Conquerer, this is only a object of understanding for the One Gone Thus. Oh, One Gone to Bliss, this is an object

of understanding for the One Gone Thus. Oh, One Gone to Bliss, this is an object of understanding for One Gone to Bliss."

The Buddha then commented, "Shariputra, the collection of merit of such a person would not approach the vicinity of the collection of merit of one who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The latter collection is a hundred times greater than the former. A thousand times greater. A hundred thousand times greater. The amount of merit and the quality of its substance is incalculable."

Following the Buddha's statement the third world system of great thousands shook and trembled. Everything trembled. It quaked and trembled, and quaked again. Its contents collided together, and these collisions brought on further tremors. At that moment a great bolt of lightening flashed above that very spot, and even the gods beat their drums in proclamation.

Then Ananda asked the Conquerer thusly, "Oh Conquerer, what shall we call this particular instruction?" How shall we best maintain its significance?"

The Conquerer replied, "Ananda, call this instruction, 'endless means for attainment'. Its significance may be held in that way. That is how you shall refer to it." Upon the conclusion of this statement, Shariputra and the assembled monks rejoiced at the Conquerer's words.

Thus concludes the Great Vehicle Sutra known as "Going to Refuge to the Three Sublime Ones"⁴.

1. The Tibetan translator.

2. Shariputra.

3. nang. du. yang. dag. 'jog; lit. "placing the inside in perfect order."

4. Translated into English from the Tibetan by Ven. Jampa Losel and Kenneth Liberman at Sakya College, Rajpur, India.



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