

KNOCKING ON BUDDHA'S DOOR:

**A Journey into the Cultural Context of Tibetan Buddhism and
Tibetan Buddhist Art as a Spiritual Journey Towards Compassion**

By

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ABSTRACT

Within the field of Curriculum Vision, educators are presently engaged in a conversation about Spiritual Education. Due to the multicultural/multi-religious aspects of today's social demographics and pluralistic backgrounds of students, it is required that dialogue and curriculum avoid religious content. Also, multiculturalism is tending to adopt themes of exclusion rather than inclusion, contrary to the nature of its original envisioning. Consequently, spiritual education is bound within this potentially volatile discussion, implicating *spiritual* with *religious*. The tendency is to sidestep spiritual curriculum altogether. There is, however, a need to address the growing problematic arising within schools and society as a whole. Values of peace, interconnectedness, community, justice, equality, and freedom (values inherent in our national constitution) need to be reinstated in classrooms in ways that can be understood and received within a diverse cultural context. As a concerned educator and parent, it has been my intention to investigate one particular aspect of my spiritual journey, Tibetan Buddhism, within its cultural context to evaluate whether the foundational premises of Buddhism could be transposed into the framework of spiritual curriculum in a *generic* way, that would be appealing rather than offensive. The value of art as a means of self expression and meaning making offers education an avenue through which this could be accomplished. This project offers insight into another culture and an innovative perspective to the field of spiritual education, pointing towards a curriculum that embraces a Pedagogy of Happiness.

OFFERING STATEMENT

I would like to offer this paper to the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Until I attain enlightenment, I will work for the happiness and well being of all sentient beings.

I do this in support of the great work of the Dalai Lama who has stated:

I believe that every human being has an innate desire for happiness and does not want to suffer. I also believe that the very purpose of life is to experience this happiness. I believe that each of us has the same potential to develop inner peace and thereby achieve happiness and joy. Whether we are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, black or white, from the East or the West, our potential is equal. (2001, p.5)

I would also like to dedicate this paper to my first Enlightened master and teacher, Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (Amma), an embodiment of the Divine Mother, who said in an address to the United Nations General Assembly:

If we look back through history, we can see that all conflicts originate from conflict within the individual. And what is the source of this inner conflict? It is the lack of awareness of our true nature, the one living power within us, of which we are all a part. The role of spirituality, true religion, is to awaken this awareness and to help us develop such qualities as love, empathy, tolerance, patience and humility . . . If world peace is to become a reality, peace and harmony first have to fill the heart of every individual. Love for humanity has to be awakened within us. Love and unity are not alien to human nature – they are our most fundamental instincts, the very foundation of our existence. (2004, pp. 22-23)

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RED CHENREZIG

(Postcard image, photographer unknown)

PART I: PROJECT

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Project Focus and Intention

This project addresses an important aspect of my personal spiritual inquiry and reflects commitment to understanding and furthering myself towards the ‘true nature of the mind’ and altruistic intention of compassion. The paper represents one segment of my spiritual journey – a pilgrimage into the cultural landscape of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhist Art, depicting its co-relation to an ongoing process of self-education and adult learning that I have established for myself. It introduces new information into the conversation of holistic, peace, and spiritual education that is presently taking place in the field of pedagogy. The project and paper also address the need to contextualize cross-cultural curriculum to enhance understanding and support learning, particularly in the area of spirituality and art.

The endeavor is a qualitative study based on phenomenological methodology through narrative inquiry. It is represented in a descriptive manner to best adhere to the nature of both the research and the researcher, rendering the representation authentic. It has taken the form of a travelogue, in part, to establish the ‘journey’ within a personal context. It reflects and establishes the relationship of the ‘pilgrim’ to the experience through the praxis/ point of contact between the outside world and the subjective mind. This

research has been a ‘real life’ experience and is represented as such. As the traveler, upon entering the journey, it was necessary to set aside preconditioned notions of identity and reality to the best of my ability in order to adopt an open, receptive stance within the walk and not project limitations on my view of the experience, the ideas and people encountered.

Within the course of this paper, I propose to (a) establish the relevance of spiritual inquiry through the spiritual journey, (b) introduce content of Tibetan Buddhism and its sacred art, (c) authentically represent (as much as possible) the cultural context of Tibetan Buddhism and its art in relation to the present predicament of the Tibetan people and their culture, (d) establish the relationship and relevance of my spiritual quest to that of Buddha and Tibetan Buddhist reality, and (e) show an actual experience of interfacing the Western¹ European-Anglo subjective reality with that of an Eastern Tibetan Buddhist one. I hope to establish, through my conclusions, a direct relationship between the material/secular North American predicament existing within the cultural and pedagogical landscapes and the incorporation of Buddhist ideology – a relationship offering possibilities of revision and evolution. Also, I would like to substantiate the relevance of art education and artistic practice to the development, expression, and representation of the spiritual reality as a viable addition to education curriculum².

1 Within the context of this paper, Western refers to European /Anglo/Christian derivation.

2 In ancient times, addressing the aspect of spirit and spirituality was included in educational discourse. It has only been since the Renaissance that education has become secular, devoid of any spiritual context.

Cultural Location

My intention journeying into the heartland of Tibetan Buddhism by visiting its culture and land of origin on various travels in 2005 through 2008 was to support my learning and better understand the Tibetan Buddhist teachings that I had been involved in since the late 1980's, particularly the foundational teaching of compassion. I wanted to know how this travel would affect my learning and attitude towards the Tibetan Buddhist teachings and Tibetan art. Would the experience support and anchor me in my spiritual process and if so, how? Would I experience change or transformation? Would it help me to transcend my subjective reality and personal preoccupation, to become more peaceful and compassionate? How could the Buddha's teachings be incorporated into my own teaching practice or further the vision of curriculum in the field of education?

After engaging in a thorough study of the Buddhist perspective of compassion through study of Shantideva's book, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (2007), and completing an entire round of the Red Chenrezig Teaching of Compassion (100,000 repetitions),³ I undertook a pilgrimage to India, Nepal, and the Tibetan Autonomous Region (or simply TAR, previously known as Tibet)⁴ where this religious tradition is practiced.⁵

Entering into the teachings of another culture, particularly religious teachings, is a

3 The Red Chenrezig Teaching is a Tibetan Buddhist Vajrayana (explained in Chapter 2) teaching and practice that involves visualization, mantra repetition, and meditation. Most commonly, a round of 100,000 mantra repetitions with accompanying visualization and meditation is required to complete one round of a Vajrayana practice.

4 TAR refers to the Autonomous Region of Tibet, a present province of China. The 'old' Tibet also encompassed areas presently located in the provinces of Qinghai and Sechuan. At the moment, in China, people refer to Tibet which is an acceptable name for TAR.

5 A narrative of the pilgrimage is found in Chapters 4 and 5.

fascinating process. It may also be an ‘other worldly’ one in which things encountered do not register as real within the realms of previous understanding or conditioned and historical background. In the case of the Tibetan culture, many things have been encountered that at first did not register as *possible* within the scope of my personal and cultural understanding. At times, I entered into the realm of the extraordinary possessing no familiar set of values or standards from which to view, assess, or evaluate my experiences. It was necessary to remain completely open, free of judgment and to place my cultural conditioning to the side in order to fully experience and appreciate the unusual circumstances in which I found myself.

It is therefore necessary to read this paper with an open mind, free of inclination to dismiss or pass judgment. Also, there are many terms that may be new and unfamiliar. I have supplied a glossary of terms and meanings to support the reader, located in the Appendix at the end.

Moreover, the process and format of this project has taken on a deeper, underlying intention to render the altruistic reality of the Tibetans visible to the world before it is completely lost. This culture and tradition is in decline. Responding to an extraordinary directive that I received in the Dalai Lama’s old summer palace in Lhasa, I feel it is my responsibility to document and present my experience, adding my observations to the record of the Tibetan people’s cultural /religious beliefs and practices. I hope that I have done them justice. It is also partially an effort to relieve myself of the guilt and accountability as a Westerner for my part in this unjust process. I have been watching

this destruction happen, without being able to prevent it.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the secular and religious traditions are so completely intertwined that it is difficult to distinguish them, each being seen as a manifestation of the other. Consequently, the visual representations with regards to the symbols of the ideology, are depicted inside and outside of the religious architectural structures. The iconography and symbolic art and artifacts pervade, in the streets and daily life, as well as within the monasteries and context of religious study and ritual.

Until 1959, Tibetan culture remained a Theocracy adhering to the unity of political, cultural, and religious tradition.⁶ As in other areas of the world, in the face of material consumerism and capitalism, the spiritual reality has been fading into the background of society. The younger Tibetan generation especially is under pressure to embrace and uphold Chinese ways and ideals. However, many Tibetans within and without the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China are desperately trying to maintain their culture and are eager to share it with the outside world, believing as they do, that the teachings within their cultural/religious philosophy are an essential part of their survival, some would go as far as to say the very survival of humanity.

The Dalai Lama, the world renowned Buddhist teacher, scholar, peace advocate, political leader and active representative of the Tibetan people, is said to be an incarnation of Chenrezig,⁷ the Tibetan Buddhist Deity of Compassion. For many Westerners, this is a

⁶ The Chinese began their occupation of Tibet in 1949. However, the occupation became complete in 1959 with the departure of the Dalai Lama who went into exile in India.

difficult idea to accept; most of us are unwilling or unable to acknowledge this man as divinity incarnate.⁸ For the Tibetan, it is veritable. Furthermore, Tibetan Buddhists believe they too can achieve this state through arduous application of their teachings, through meditation, and accumulation of 'sonam' or merit (see glossary). They aspire to do so, not solely for themselves, but for the enlightenment, happiness, and well being of all sentient beings.

Such was the foundational premise of Tibetan Buddhist thought and the ultimate purpose of the life of every devout Tibetan, at least until recently. With the 1959 invasion and occupation of Tibet by China and the subsequent secular and communist changes that have been installed, Tibetan ideals have been eroded. Many who hold these teachings have been dispersing into self-imposed exile until such time that the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government return home. Until then, the old Tibet will remain under the auspices of the government of China as a province. A benefit of this unfortunate situation is that through the diaspora, Tibetan Buddhist teachings are being disseminated throughout the world.

Personal Location

7 According to Tibetan Buddhism, Chenrezig is the deity that inhabits the middle realm of existence, the Samboghakaya (see Chapter 2), for the present era and is a divine embodiment of the altruistic characteristic of compassion. The Dalai Lama is believed by devout Tibetans to be a human incarnation of this deity.

8 In Tibetan Buddhism 'deity' is differentiated from 'god'. The gods live in the sixth realm of existence (see glossary) while principle deities and bodhisattvas live in the realm of the kayas (see Chapter 2 and glossary).

My introduction to Tibetan Buddhism happened in such a way that might it as well have dropped out of the air. The seed appeared in the form of a book called *The Crystal and The Way of Light, Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen* written by John Shane (1986); it contained the teachings of Namkai Norbu, an adept Tibetan scholar and teacher. I read it soon after I became a Reiki Master/teacher in 1988. In my understanding and belief of the synchronicity of events and the relevancy of connections, I wondered if Tibetan Buddhism and Reiki were interwoven somehow. As my relationship to teaching Reiki developed over the years, I began to explore the connections with the hope of deepening my understanding of Reiki and possibly revealing the underlying philosophy of this healing art and way of coming to Self knowledge.

The pursuit of Self⁹ and my relationship with a higher awareness has been an intention in my life since I was a child. Particularly, it has been a focus of mine since early junior high school when I was introduced to the Classics in literature. I remember devouring the pages looking for a universal meaning of life and a way to understand the suffering of the world. Little did I know that I was seeking liberation and a way to understand the predicament of human pathos. Even before I entered my teens, the 'big' questions of life occupied my thoughts.

9 My personal understanding of the self/Self is that within the mind, there is a greater aspect of mental awareness that is beyond the subjective reality of response and reaction to circumstantial happenings. This aspect of Self is a continuous awareness unaffected by outside stimuli. Within my Anglo/Christian orientation, transcending the small self offers direct connection with my soul, where union with God is possible. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the greater Self is referred to as the Absolute Self – Ultimate awareness and the subjective self, the Relative self – Relative awareness. (See glossary). Accomplishing Ultimate awareness and abiding in the knowledge of Absolute Self is the object of enlightenment according to Tibetan religious tradition.

I was initiated into Reiki in 1984, becoming a Reiki Master/teacher four years later. Since then, the practice and teaching of it have been a particularly suitable pursuit. Reiki offers tools to purify negative thinking, strengthen concentration, and develop clarity to further self-analysis, leading participants towards a greater understanding of the mind and how thought creates structure. In turn, it empowers individuals to become conscious participants in life, helping them to find their passion and follow their hearts' inclinations. It is also a method that encourages and teaches self-inquiry. Reiki is a method of spiritual teaching not unlike Buddhism.

Reiki offers me a means of sharing and revealing the spiritual path to others, particularly to adults, although its methods can be easily adapted for children. It situated me within the pedagogical domain; it gave me my point of entrance into the world of teaching. Through Reiki, I have developed a teaching method and curriculum that is easily transferable to a more formal educational setting. Most importantly, it has led me to Tibetan Buddhism, as the underlying aims of both are liberation and Self realization.

Curriculum Vision

It is becoming increasingly apparent that spirituality and cross-cultural awareness are relevant to curriculum development. With the integration of other cultures into North American society and into the classrooms, other ways of seeing and viewing the world need to be recognized and incorporated into learning in order to better explore “connections, patterns, relations, or more metaphorically, steps, bridges, pathways between learning and

context, among mind and culture” (Bochner, 1981, p. 70). My interest in education and involvement as learner and teacher inclined me to enter this Master of Education degree program. I recognized the Curriculum Instruction Department of the Faculty of Education as an appropriate location for my project of study. I suspected that the value of my research and its conclusions would be best incorporated into the educational literature and might prove a useful addition to curriculum re-visioning.

Cross-cultural Pedagogy

Learning takes place within a cultural context. A learner cannot step outside his/her cultural context, but can merely hold it to the side as a mirror offering reciprocal reflections from the image to the viewer. Cross-cultural learning, whether or not it introduces varying cultural content, happens within the individual cultural locations of the students involved. These separate and shared locations offer spaces of interaction and exploration that in themselves become cultural spaces. Laura Jewett (2005) mentions the multiplicity of questions that arise about the conceptual space that is created upon being exposed to or entering into another culture, questions “about relations of self and other; the knowledge that circulates between and among them; and the conceptual and social patterns of mind and culture that shape – and are shaped by – intersections and divergences among knowledge, knowing and knowers” (p. 277). Such questions are relevant to cross-cultural curriculum.

In my case, as I stepped outside my own culture into foreign territory, both through the content of the Tibetan Buddhist practices which I was studying and through the actual

cultural territory in which I traveled, I was not only a voyeur, but a learner and participant. Acquiring knowledge about the practices, I interpreted the learning through the framework of my own culture. As I interacted with the people, my responses reflected my understanding. It is, of course, impossible to step outside of self and be completely free of the influences of conditioning. What I have learned represents cross-cultural educational experience. I offer this learning from my perspective only, in this subjective study. I am not here speaking about learning from others' perspectives. My subjective experience forms the basis of my phenomenological narrative, from which I derive my learning, and out of which I offer suggestions as to how educators might introduce and implement spiritual ideas into curriculum from the Tibetan Buddhist perspective.

Spiritual Pedagogy

Education for a healthy, peaceful society must encompass the needs of the whole person; all aspects of life (physical, emotional, intellectual, social, aesthetic, and spiritual) need to be addressed. Krishnamurti, a spiritual scholar and teacher stated "The intention of education must be the inner transformation and liberation of the integrated human being who is free of fear. From only such people, society can be transformed into a place of peace" (Internet site of A New Global Education, 2009, n.p.). Krishnamurti advocated internal freedom, which he defined as "the deeper freedom of the psyche and the spirit," the inner liberation that he felt was both the means and the ends of education (n.p.).

The idea of spiritual education is not new; it continues to be developed within

Postmodern society and implemented within the North American public educational system. In some instances, independent or charter schools often revolve around the exploration and integration of spiritual values and concepts as well as developing the means to express them, particularly creatively. The Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori schools are but a few. According to Rudolf Steiner, it

is essential that we should develop an art of education which will lead us out of the social chaos into which we have fallen during the last few years and decades. And the only way out of this social chaos is to bring spirituality into the souls of men [and women]¹⁰ through education. So that out of the spirit itself men [and women] may find the way to progress and the further evolution of civilization. (A New Global Education, 2009, n.p.)

To a great extent, spiritual ideas and values have been embraced by the movement of peace education. As asserted by Maria Montessori, “Establishing lasting peace is the work of all education; all politics can do is keep us out of war” (A New Global Education, 2009, n.p.). The methods and curriculum of Peace education are still being explored and developed as the need for Peace consciousness is growing.

A more ‘holistic’ education is needed – one where the needs and inclinations of people on all levels (physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually) are addressed ¹¹

10 My own brackets. To be politically correct, it is important to update the quote to include women.

11 In European derived education, psychology can be posited as a bridge between 'secular' and 'spiritual' (Astri Wright, 2009). Jungian psychology addresses the subjective reality (Relative) through the Conscious and Subconscious mind and the greater reality (Absolute) through the Collective consciousness. However, it is questionable how much psychology is used within the classroom to introduce spiritual values such peace, interconnectedness, and altruistic responsibility or to point out the human connection to divinity and/or the possibility of 'enlightenment'. Admittedly, there are many parallels between the Jungian view of psychology and Tibetan Buddhism. Both admit that suffering is caused by malaise within the psyche. Both embark on an individual process of self discovery using methods of meditation and contemplation or analysis with the goal of realizing the whole Self (Jung) or Absolute Self (Buddhism). Both acknowledge the need for union of the male and female aspects of the

and where the education takes place within an atmosphere of peace, respect, freedom and self-discovery. “Educators must urgently help students find meaning and purpose in their lives in order to develop strategies for coping with the everyday stresses of life”

(Campbell, 2009, p.124). This means finding ways to address spirituality within secular contexts and developing curriculum that has balance, inclusion, and connection as underlying principles with an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things as a basic view.

Spiritual education could include curricula that face reality while offering possibilities of transcendence, working for the benefit of the common good, while encouraging the search for meaning (Campbell, 2009). Spiritual education could provide a means to incorporate spiritual values while avoiding any specific religious or denominational connotation. Such a view provides within secular education a space for conversation about spiritual matters and spiritual development.

I never encountered a discussion of spirituality of any form in school as a youth. I have to wonder if the disconnect I felt for so many years, in school and in community, had something to do with the absence of any meaningful conversation on the topic. Looking back, I remember the first poem I ever wrote in my Grade 10 English class entitled “What Good is a Soul Without a Body?” I was starving for spiritual conversation and reflection. Perhaps my entire adult life has been an effort to compensate for the spiritual neglect. Had

psyche and the energy or life force (luminosity – Buddhists) that flows through us. However, while Tibetan Buddhism stresses compassion as one of the two necessary components of enlightenment, Jung thinks that compassion is a natural impulse of the realized. He does not believe that the mind is ever free of ego constraint, whereas Buddhists claim that humans can realize Buddhahood or the true, perfect nature of the mind.

my formal education included spiritual discussion, I might have been better able to integrate into and contribute to the society in which I was born instead of always feeling outside of it.

Tibetan Buddhism and Pedagogy

The spiritual themes of liberation, self-discovery, interconnectedness, peace, virtue, and compassion pervade Tibetan Buddhist thought. Moreover, they exist within the domain of all Buddhist study. The Dalai Lama persistently advocates loving-kindness and compassionate action as a means to enlightenment and global peace. These appear to be universal qualities and preoccupations that serve to support the evolution of humanity. These themes lie within the realm of Buddhist philosophy and have been exemplified within an ancient culture. The study of this cultural tradition became relevant to my personal inquiry and spiritual journey and to my argument here, as a method to guide educators towards a Pedagogy of Happiness. I see a correlation between the foundational premises of Buddha's teachings and the need of Western culture to respond to the symptoms of its own (and possibly planetary) impending demise.

Art Education as Spiritual Curriculum

The human need for transcendent experience is inherent and seeks expression and satisfaction (Dissanayake, 1995). As a reflection of the spiritual nature, humans will find means and ways to experience the extraordinary in the face of mundane existence. While various societies still offer avenues to satisfy this urge, our secular society tends to stifle

this need, relegating it to the realm of religious institutions. Dissanayake (1995) also suggests that if this need goes unmet, the psyche will develop aberrant ways of behavior in order to create an avenue to act out this aspect of human nature. Possibly the drug use/abuse and violence found among students today might find explanation in this theory.

A positive way to connect the spiritual with the physical involves art: “Art and the human spirit have been inextricably linked throughout history and across cultures” (Cosier, 2005, p. 54). In what is now being termed 'a culture of hostility' within society and acted out in the playgrounds and classrooms of our schools, it serves educators to consider the value of art education as a spiritual means to promote unity and healing. “[S]piritual art may be concerned with transcendental values on a grand scale, but it can also involve more personal and intimate feelings and beliefs which simply affirm and give meaning to our humanity” (Yeomans, 1993, p.73). Addressing art as spiritual and emotional expression puts teaching and learning art into the realm of spiritual matters as a viable means to re-establish meaning, connection, unity, and individual relationship with the greater whole.

The Mandala as Spiritual Representation

In Tibetan spiritual arts, the mandala is a form of primary importance. The mandala was also an important symbol to the psychologist Carl Jung. “I realized more and more clearly that the mandala is the center; it is the expression of all life; it is the path of individuation” (Frances, 2001, p.7). He referred to the mandala as “the Hindu magic circle” using it “to designate a structure to the order of the psyche. Knowledge of that structure is important in

being able to access its different parts in service of the total personality” (McQuarrie, 2004, p. 37). The Webster's dictionary defines the mandala as “a circular design containing concentric geometric forms, images of deities, etc. and symbolizing the universe, totality, or wholeness in Hinduism and Buddhism” (Guralnik, 1984, p. 860). There is a dualistic aspect to this symbol, knowledge that may help to give order to the psyche, accessing different parts in order to understand the whole. The first is the form that “restore[s] previously existing order . . . A second form of the mandala is to serve the creative purpose of giving expression and form to something that does not yet exist” (McQuarrie, 2004, p. 37). The mandala then, may be used as a symbol and structure that opens emotional, psychic, and spiritual realms restoring balance, as well as a method for giving expression to creative inspiration and aspiration. All are necessary components for the understanding, development, and transformation of consciousness.

Consequently mandala practice is a useful tool for understanding the psyche, giving insight and entrance into greater conscious awareness, a useful practice in spiritual education. It offers potential exploration into relationship of duality – the individual to the collective, the singular to the universal, the subjective to the objective, and the inner to the outer reality. Used in contemplative meditation, the mandala is believed to promote peace and balance, offering opportunities of expansion and connection with a transcendent, greater consciousness. It can be used to explore depth and meaning. Seeing oneself through mandala is empowering in that the connection of the ego with its greater consciousness establishes grounding and a stronger sense of self; both are important

aspects of a healthy, functioning individual.

Spirituality and the Spiritual Journey

First, in my discussion to follow, it is necessary to make a distinction between religion and spirituality. Religion refers to the relationship with religious doctrine and its institution, be it the church, temple or synagogue. Spirituality applies to the inner relationship of human mind to its own consciousness and the creative force (spirit, prana, life energy) that flows through our lives.¹² This creative life force is everywhere and in everything; it is dynamic and ever present moving through all life at all times (Wane, 2002). “To be spiritual is to maintain an awareness of this dynamism as it moves through and around our being. It is the practice of utilizing this creative force for the good of all humanity” (Arewa, 1998, p. xvii).

The globally active spiritual teacher Amritanandamayi (or simply Amma) says that the spiritual path is an educational process, one of moving from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to the light. She calls this a science that teaches us how to live happily in the world. At all her gatherings, where she gives teachings, Amma ends the dharshan with a traditional Hindu prayer, reminding people that the spiritual journey is an educational process and progression towards the truth and the light (2002, p. 3).

Spirituality, being a practical science of life, offers a road map so that we will not be

¹² The word 'spirit' is used to denote the life principle of living beings regarded as inherent in the breath ie. creative life force. Whereas the 'soul' refers to the divine intention or inspiration of a being – the aspect that unites the being with the divine source principle ie. God. The soul is regarded as being immortal with no material or physical reality, also equated with the emotional, moral aspect of humans.

overcome by crisis, and will be able to face life situations as they are presented to us. It teaches us how to understand life and live fully in the best way possible. How then does one study this science of life? How does one proceed on the spiritual path? How does one's spiritual path become a commitment to education? Why is it necessary to work toward the betterment of self and in turn the betterment of others?

Firstly, however, a commitment is needed to turn inward, to face all that is in the way of feeling happy, free to make choices to step out of the oppression of suffering, for spirituality is a liberating process. It is a journey that requires a “commitment to transform one’s consciousness from ignorance, denial, or grandiosity into harmonious alignment with one’s divine nature” (Wane, 2002, p. 145). It is an ‘inform-ational’ process, informing the self about the nature of Self.¹³ In other words, it is a process of learning about the inner reality that every human possesses, a process which is continuous and unending. From birth to death a human being travels with the self.

This relationship is one of communication between mind and spirit, dwelling within our bodies and revealing itself through the heart. For some, this communication extends outward to seek conversation with something or someone greater than the personal self.

Whether or not there is in fact a greater omniscience, (Creator, God, Great Spirit,

¹³ Here the use of the word self moves beyond that of the ego. According to the Hindus, the greater Self that abides within human minds is called Atman connected to divinity - Brahman (indivisible essential Being, the Absolute, and the creator aspect of the Hindu deities.) It is possible in the evolution of the human 'soul' for the Atman to become conscious of its God self (Brahman), or true Self, in what is known to the Hindus as enlightenment or achieving God Consciousness. This is outlined in the ancient Hindu text, the Rig-Veda (Feuerstein, Kak, Frawley, 2005, pp. 181-188). Keeping in mind that Buddhism came about at a time when Hinduism was at its Zenith, the Buddhists (who do not refer to the evolution of the soul) acknowledge this process as that of the mind coming to understand the 'true nature of reality'.

Universal Power . . .) that can be reached and communicated with, lies within individual belief and faith. One thing is certain; there is a human internal monologue going on within the mind of every individual. Spiritual journey may be defined as the pursuit of understanding consciousness through experiential exploration of this inner landscape and internal perception (thinking/reflecting/conversing) as it relates to the greater whole.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Method and Inquiry

Self Knowledge and the Nature of Truth

I remember learning about Socrates in junior high school while studying Greece. I most remember his directive to 'Know thyself'. That phrase probably influenced me more than anything else I learned in public school. Its directive set me on a personal quest, that, until my early twenties, I defined as a philosophical one. Before that, the word 'spiritual' had not entered my vocabulary. The quest for self-knowledge and truth has been a major preoccupation of philosophers throughout the ages, myself included; the object and goal of this quest being the Philosopher's Stone – finding the Truth with a capital T – the Ultimate Nature of Reality.

What is true? What is truth? Is there an ultimate truth behind/beyond subjective reality that can be shared with others? And, if one is to follow Socrates's directive, how does one locate the study, within or without the self? Does one adopt an inner, subjective stance through feeling and intuitive response or an outer, objective one according to purely intellectual rationale? Postmodern thought sets aside as non-existent or at least unknowable, assertions of a single, true reality for all. Reality is believed to be subjective according to the individual experiencing it. Reality is based upon perceptions differing for

each individual and the meaning is contingent upon the situation or context of the person experiencing it. Reality has meaning only in the context of the individual's relationships in life – relationships to space, body, time, circumstance, and people. I contend that purely intellectual logical understanding of reality is limited; acknowledgement of the felt, intuitive, imaginative nature of human reality must also be considered.

Lived Experience and Phenomenology

From personal study, I have come to understand that the nature of truth lies within perception of one's life experience. Truth lies within my subjective interpretation of the events and experiences of my life. In other words, information from the outside only becomes 'true' or real through experience. Coming to 'know' something through experience converts information into knowledge that subsequently lives in me. Externally located ideas may become truth when there is a lived relationship to the ideas themselves. In other words, ideas may become knowledge through personal understanding and application of them. Consequently, a method of study would be one based on lived experience.

This method needs to be holistic because experiencing the world is not simple, fragmentary nor linear. It is complex, and multifaceted, involving outer objective reality and the subjective viewer is participant, interpreter, analyst, creator and developer. The point of meeting of these two creates a separate phenomenon which, under investigation, offers a 'viewing space' and a holistic view or conceptual image rich in material from which analysis, interpretation, evaluation, development and application may be drawn. The

objective reality is knowable only as much as the interface between the subject and the outer reality is explored, investigated, and understood. As Schon (cited in Dalhberg, 1992) has described, a new awareness within this praxis needs to be explored: “Increasingly we have become aware of the importance to actual practice of phenomena – complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value-conflict – which do not fit the model of Technical Rationality” (p.2).

Edmund Husserl, a German Philosopher of the early Twentieth Century, came to this same conclusion proposing that the actuality of our subjective lives become real only as we act them out in the world (Kohak, 1978, p. 48). Husserl believed that the truth of reality could only be formulated from subjective interpretation of lived experience by returning to the things themselves and having an openness to those things. Truth lies not within the separate subjective or objective views of an experience but within the ‘phenomenon’ of the consciousness of the subject experiencing the reality (Kohak, 1978). From similar conclusions, Husserl developed a philosophy known as Phenomenology.

“Phenomenology can only point out what is there to be seen; it cannot speculate and invent. We shall, therefore, turn first to ordinary experience and describe, quite naively, how the objective world appears in it as experience” (Kohak, 1978, p.48). Rather than being a cognitive quest of gathering empirical scientific data for analysis, phenomenology is an orientation to essential meanings, a way of looking at the world and a means of investigating the meaning of this experience. By “bringing to reflective awareness the

nature of the events experienced in our natural attitude, we are able to transform or remake ourselves in the true sense of *Bildung* (education),” (van Manen, 2003, p. 7) becoming more thoughtful and caring human beings.

Phenomenological methodology aligns itself with the descriptive nature of qualitative research. As one describes structures of experience as they are lived, capturing a ‘living’ truth, the phenomenological reality identified and the learning found therein, is wholly subjective. Reality is located within perception and is thus best revealed through description. It is a qualitative versus a quantitative approach. The experience is subjective, differing for each individual within the experience according to the individual’s personal interior perspective. Meaning is derived from the lived relationship to the situation or context and revealed through reflective/reflexive introspection, interpretation, and description.

Deciding to focus my project from a phenomenological perspective and incorporate this method into my research required that I actually undertake a personal journey into the cultural context of Tibetan Buddhism. The information this journey offered with respect to my spiritual inquiry and my study of Tibetan art was greatly enhanced; as participant and also object of the research, the information I gained came through the body and mind. It was both a physical journey and an internal one. My participation and response to the travel – the circumstances and people I met – became embedded within my mind and body. I ‘lived’ the journey. After entering into the experience, I could no longer separate myself from it. I, too, was part of the journey, my experiences, my responses and reactions, my insights and interpretations all became part of the research project. This self-locational predicament

offered a valid and authentic ‘field’ of study and analysis.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, a research method situated within phenomenology uses description as its primary tool. Through written description of my personal history/journey, I am able to study myself and evaluate my learning, not merely reporting on the journey but also describing my *experience* of it. This is a reflexive and ongoing process that evolves over time as each point of reference encourages more reflection, analysis, interpretation and written application. The method of the written word offers a process moving from introspection towards self-understanding through “venturing, comprehending, embodying, restoring. . . [and] remembering” (Krall, 1988, p. 468). It is a continuing and quite possibly never-ending process. At some point, however, in order to retain the liveliness of the process, a line is drawn and the reflection concluded before it begins to feed off itself.

The descriptive narrative that I offer here is not merely a travelogue. Each segment of the journey selected has particular relevance to different aspects of my learning. Each part offers meaning and adds congruency to the whole, necessary for furthering my learning and understanding of Tibetan Buddhism and the relevance of its symbolism embodied in its art. Each step of the way is significant, offering possibilities for progressing to deeper levels of understanding and positions of embodiment.

Narrating personal history can help to comprehend life experience. At times, it may not be easy. One needs to be open to the extractive, invasive and sometimes exhaustive

nature of this process that may at times lead to self-doubt and even precipitate an identity crisis. It is easy to stumble but through persisting with the writing, it is possible to progress through a transformational process, landing the investigator onto new grounds of viewing. Self-analysis is always at the center of this approach (Krall, 1988). Narrative inquiry, for me, was able to provide an extremely authentic representation of the nature and truth of the spiritual pilgrimage undertaken.

As any researcher does, I entered the self-analytical study carrying my prejudices and conditioning. We all possess understandings of the nature of reality from a cultural standpoint. In my case, it was my formative years growing up in the 1950s and 60s in North America, within the context of European-Anglo, middle-class values and inculcated with Christian beliefs. In adult life, I had also acquired some understanding of the cultural and religious norms of the East, which I had found particularly relevant to my learning and personal inquiry. However, my referential viewpoint was and continues to be strongly influenced by my childhood learning and conditioning. This situation offers mirrors for reflection and assimilation of new knowledge. Gadamer (1976) wrote that “prejudices are not unjustified and erroneous . . . [simply] biases of our openness to the world. . . conditions whereby what we encounter says something to us” (pp. 8-9).

The belief in the relevance of a research project based on personal history and the need to present it as a holistic experience related to the greater collective as useful educational knowledge are “act[s] of trust in the significance of personal knowledge” (Krall, 1988, p.469). Through the creative reconstruction of one’s experiences into a more unified and

comprehensible whole, using a process of descriptive narrative, it is possible to find a more harmonious and integrated view of the present (Krall, 1988). This tangible representation solidifies and confirms experience as valid, turning the ordinary into an extraordinary offering worthy of communal study, reflection, and evaluation. It confirms and reaffirms the value of existence and personal effort. Krall (1988) further defines the use of personal history as an approach that “enhances and develops students’ analytic and interpretive skills and that fosters self-awareness in relation to the general human condition” (p. 468).

Buddhism

Gautama Buddha, meaning the Awakened one, is universally considered the founder of Buddhism. He was born in the 7th Century B.C. in Kapilavastu, the capital of the small Indian principality of Nepal, Northern India, at a time when Hinduism was in its infancy, a period known as the Late Vedic Religion. There are many myths and miraculous stories around his birth. It was prophesied that he would eventually renounce the throne and his family to become a 'savior' of humanity (Gordon, 1963). He was born when people were collectively asking the greater eternal questions of life regarding meaning, purpose, suffering and happiness (Coward, 2002). Siddhartha Gautama, or Prince Siddhartha, as he was known, left the luxury and safety of his father's palace at the age of twenty-nine to become a religious ascetic; his intention was to solve the meaning of life for the benefit of all people. In India, it was not sufficient to merely think about the great questions; such a pursuit was not just a philosophy but a religious and scientific enterprise that involved 'yoking' the self to understanding, using methods known as yoga (Thurman, 1997).

Siddhartha spent the next six years engaged in extreme austerities and self discipline, studying under the most famous Yoga masters of his day. He came to realize that such extremes were not the solution, but that the 'Middle Way' was the right path to follow. At the age of thirty-five he renounced asceticism and began his meditation under the great bodhi tree vowing to remain there until he had attained perfect enlightenment, meaning “complete freedom from all suffering, full experiential knowledge of the exact nature of reality, and comprehensive awareness of all its dimensions” (Thurman, p. 23). After a period of profound contemplation Gautama came to a realization of the 'Truth', regarding the causes underlying the sufferings of humanity.

There is a story worth mentioning because it is frequently referenced by the Buddha's 'hand touching the earth' mudra (hand position/gesture) in Buddhist art. In Tibetan Buddhist paintings of Buddha Shakyamuni, this mudra makes him easily recognizable from the other deities. Just before Siddhartha's enlightenment, he is tempted by Mara, the God of Worldly Desire, but he resists temptation and becomes awakened. However

Mara grew very angry, but he was still a master of lies. He tried to trick Buddha into giving up his plans to spread his wisdom to others. Appearing to Buddha himself, Mara congratulated him on his efforts of many past lifetimes which brought him to this crucial moment. Then he added that although Buddha was bound to gain enlightenment, his efforts would bear no fruit. There was no one to speak for him, no one to bear witness to what he had accomplished. Without a witness, who would be able to understand what the Buddha had done? No one. He would be alone with his enlightenment. So the wisest course would be for Buddha to leave Mara's realm and enter Nirvana at once, alone. But instead the Buddha touched the ground where he was sitting. He said, 'The earth will be my witness.' The Earth Goddess rose from the ground where he touched it and said, 'I will bear witness to your attainment.' Mara fled in defeat, and at that moment Buddha was

enlightened. (Ward, 1996, pp. 29-30)

The story establishes Siddhartha as a teacher of Truth, one who has mastered the mind and achieved what the Buddhist's believe to be the true purpose of human life. At this point, he became Gautama Buddha (the awakened or enlightened one). The gesture is also an assurance of the latent possibility within each of us to awaken to the true nature of self.¹⁴ In reaching such enlightenment, the Buddha declared that “he had achieved the purpose of evolution, the ultimate fulfillment of human and even divine potential. . . that all living beings could eventually reach and experience for themselves the same ultimate bliss” (Thurman, 1997, p.29). This process of turning away from the self obsession and self delusion of conventional subjectivity (relative reality) to the freedom of clear spacious emptiness (absolute reality) and concern for others has been the focus and fountain of energy of the Buddhist movement throughout history (Thurman, 1997).

Buddhist Doctrine

Gautama Buddha formulated his teachings or doctrine which is known as the Dharma and spent the next forty-five years of his life teaching it throughout India. According to the Buddha, life is a direct reflection of the mind; to change the mind is to change life. The Dhammapada (Shane, 2001), the original sayings of the Buddha, begins with a verse which

¹⁴ And that this awakening can happen on the earth-plane, the material plane, or must be witnessed there. ie. In the body and by the body, since Earth and goddess and ‘Earth Goddess’ represent the physical plane of existence (Astri Wright, 2009).

forms the basis of all his teachings and establishes the foundation of his methods – that the focus of his educational aims and goals is the mind.

We are what we think
All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make the world.
Speak or act with an impure mind
And trouble will follow you
As the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart. (p.21)

It is not enough to mentally investigate through thought but rather have a direct experience of it through a process of self inquiry, examination and experimentation. To make such a process available to people, the Buddha created an educational institution for people to learn the Dharma, learning and living it within community. This community he called the Sangha. The three foundations of Buddhism, the Buddha (the enlightened teacher), the Dharma (the teaching) and the Sangha (the community), became known as **The Three Jewels**, the three 'wisdom arms' of Buddhist doctrine (Thurman, 1997).

Essentially, the foundation of the Buddha's teaching is **The Four Noble Truths**: Suffering, the Cause of suffering, the Cessation of suffering, and the Path. Everywhere the Buddha turned, he experienced suffering derived from adversity, sickness, old age, and death. Suffering seemed inescapable. He pondered the cause of this miserable state and came to the conclusion that it was a product of negative thought and action. This he termed the law of Karma, based on the natural order of cause and effect, with the effects not necessarily manifesting in one lifetime. Reincarnation or rebirth becomes necessary in

order to work out the causes of suffering from the thoughts and actions of previous lifetimes (Gettelman, 1989).

To overcome the negative manifestations of thinking, the Buddha concluded that changing the mind was the necessary factor for the cessation of suffering. He devised methods and skillful means to control the mind, turning it towards positive, compassionate thought. This goal he termed the Cessation of Suffering and the practice that led to it he called the Path. Following this Path of Dharma (truth) ultimately led to the realization of the true nature of Mind (enlightenment); this is the core and the goal of Buddhist belief. This is the essence of what the Buddha taught in his first teaching at Sarnath, near Varanasi in India (Gettelman, 1989).

The Eightfold Path, which is the elaboration of the fourth Noble Truth, was the Buddha's second teaching. Right view, right purpose, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness, and right concentration compose the eight steps of the Path. This outlines a course to root out ignorance, introducing new patterns of behavior that eventually result in awakening. Clearly understanding the cause of dis-ease, deciding one wants to be cured and focusing on doing everything possible through effort, examination, concentration and meditation to cure oneself, supports the process of self realization and the ultimate removal of all suffering (Gettelman, 1989).

The Buddha described the true nature of mind and the essence of everything as emptiness. He stressed the interconnectedness of all things because nothing arises of itself. He referred to this as **Dependent Origination**. Everything is dependent upon something

else; nothing stands of its own accord: things and events come into being through dependence on other factors, which means that they do not possess independent, autonomous, or absolute existence (Dalai Lama, 2007). “When we come to see that everything we perceive and experience arises as a result of an indefinite series of interrelated causes and conditions, our whole perspective changes” (Dalai Lama, 2005, p. 120). From this one can see the universe as a living organism, a whole dependent upon its parts for cohesiveness, unity and balance. This suggests that individual well being is connected with others and the environment in which we live. If one is harmed so is the other. It also presents a challenge to see the complexity of the interlinking of things rather than thinking in terms of black and white or absolutes. If things don't exist independently, then even our most cherished selves cannot be considered to exist in the same way, which subsequently affects our relationship to identity. Self-analytical assumptions and conclusions must then be reassessed in relationship to the whole (Dalai Lama, 2005). Emotions and internal dilemmas may then be regarded as less permanent, results of internal polarization and reflections of internal thought. The Buddha's understanding of emptiness offers a perspective to release the stronghold of mental suffering, the root cause of all relative dis-ease. Here, responsibility and accountability for self in relation to the whole becomes of paramount importance.

Realizing that each individual possessed a different capacity to understand his teaching, it is said that the Buddha devised over 84,000 different ways or methods to practice. He devoted his entire lifetime to teaching, traveling far and wide to disseminate his knowledge.

Finally at the end of his life, while reclining and teaching the Dharma, surrounded by devotees who were listening attentively, he essentially said “now it is up to you” then drew his last breath (hence the significance of the reclining Buddha statue).

The Buddha turned the Wheel of Dharma three times¹⁵, revealing three levels (the Lesser, Greater, and Supreme Vehicles) and three cycles of teachings: the Theravada, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana. In the Buddhist dialectic, there are two aspects needed to attain accomplishment – wisdom (emptiness) and compassion (skillful means) – the union of which results in perfection and liberation. Upon attaining life's ultimate goal, a person may pass into the Buddhist heaven known as Nirvana, or choose to remain to work for the benefit and well being of all sentient beings until everyone reaches the state of enlightenment, crossing the threshold of Nirvana together. This is the way of the 'bodhisattva'. The first level, the **Lesser Vehicle**, comprised of the Theravada¹⁶ path, focuses upon individual enlightenment and outlines methods and practices for the community of monastic and lay practitioners. It establishes the essential teachings of Buddhist thought, dealing “with controlling personal behavior and emotionality through the rejection, abandonment, and avoidance of erroneous and mistaken behavior” (Kalu

15 After achieving enlightenment, Buddha went to Sarnath where he gave his first teaching. This is referred to as the time when he first turned the Wheel of Dharma (the cycles of Buddha's teaching). Dharma means teachings of the Buddha.

16 In the time of the Buddha, the Lesser vehicle was referred to as Theravada ('of the ancients'). However, with the incorporation of Buddhism into Tibet and the rewriting of the history and teachings, the term Hinayana has arisen. In Tibetan Buddhist discourse the term Theravada is replaced with Hinayana.

Rinpoche, 1994, p. 11) so that one does not cause harm to others. The second level, or the **Greater Vehicle**, is called the Mahayana and involves ways to develop emptiness and compassion. This level describes the path of the Bodhisattva, the compassionate being who remains to work for the benefit of all after achieving enlightenment. Anyone who aspires and works towards enlightenment can achieve this state. The secret Vajrayana or **Supreme Vehicle** is the third level of Buddha's teachings. Comprised of esoteric methods also known as Tantra, the Vajrayana encompasses many practices or skillful means to support and enhance the efforts toward liberation from the standpoint of the bodhisattva.

It is wise for the serious Buddhist practitioner to consider studying and practicing all three levels, particularly if one aspires to achieve enlightenment within one lifetime, not solely for personal benefit, but also for the well being of all.

If one wishes to construct a three-story building, then one must start with the ground floor, continue by adding the next story, then the third, until one has completed the building. If one wishes to practice and understand the full meaning of the Buddhadharma, one can utilize the three yanas – the hinayana, the mahayana, and the vajrayana. By practicing the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, one can utilize these three vehicles in unison. (Kalu Rinpoche, 1994, p. 11)

In the case of the Tibetan Buddhist, preparation for practicing the Vajrayana techniques is necessary and accomplished through the understanding and adherence to the foundational practices of Hinayana and Mahayana.

It is the Vajrayana that forms the core of Tibetan Buddhist teachings. The Buddha intended the Vajrayana practices to be reserved for a future time.¹⁷ It is said that many of these teachings were hidden in the hills and lakes of Tibet to be discovered in future times when they would be needed. These ancient tantras were called 'terma' (hidden treasures) and the people who discovered them were called 'tertons'. Terma are regarded as the most powerful and sophisticated teachings of the Buddha. Within the last few hundred years some of these treasures have been discovered in somewhat miraculous ways. There are many yet that lie hidden within the sacred hills and valleys of Tibet (Harding, 2003).

During the Buddha's lifetime his teachings were transmitted orally. About three hundred years after his death, they were documented in sacred books in Sanskrit known as the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets). Later, these books were translated into Tibetan and are known as the *Kanjur* (108 volumes composed of the teachings of the historical Buddha as recorded by his disciples) and the *Tengyur* (227 volumes of commentaries on these teachings) (Gordon, 1963).

Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism is essentially the Mahayana and Vajrayana path emphasizing the way of the 'bodhisattva', the one who achieves enlightenment but remains behind to serve others

¹⁷ Buddha taught the tantric practices of the Vajrayana “only on a limited scale, but he predicted that they would be spread in this world by other enlightened beings, who would appear later” (Patrul Rinpoche, 1998, p. xi). Although not widely taught in the Buddha's lifetime, the Vajrayana is still considered Buddha's teaching.

along the path. It promotes union through developing awareness of emptiness (wisdom) and compassion (skillful means).

Buddhism spread into many countries in Asia but it didn't take hold in Tibet until around the 8th century A.D. when the teachings were brought by Padmasambhava, a renowned teacher from the Nalanda University in Northern India. At the time the Bon tradition was the predominant religion of Tibet. Padmasambhava is said to have pacified the Bon demons that were interfering with the progress of Buddhism in the country. He eventually incorporated some of the Bon deities into the Buddhist pantheon of deities, fusing the native religion with Mahayana Buddhism. This became known as Lamaism. Its methods were/are predominately the esoteric Vajrayana practices (Tantra), which require initiations that can only be given by lamas, who hold the necessary power to pass the teachings on (Gordon, 1963). Vajrayana has been kept alive and retained the integrity of the original doctrines (until recently, when the occupation of the Chinese has made it difficult to maintain these religious practices that formed the foundation of Tibetan thought and way of life).

Tibetan Buddhism is known as the 'adamantine' (diamond) path because it is considered indestructible. Its methods are said to have the ability to cut through all illusion of thought. It is "the final and logical development of Mahayana Buddhism . . . the climax of Buddhist spiritual culture" (Pal, 1969, p.40). Tibetan Buddhism does not look to the future for enlightenment but uses a direct path, enabling the practitioner to attain enlightenment in one lifetime through more absolute, esoteric means. "Its methods are secret and revealed

only to the initiate under the guidance of a master teacher or guru. They are never committed explicitly to writing, but are transmitted orally, or by means of gestures, or telepathy” (Pal, 1969, p.40). Most Tibetans have been initiated at birth and in ongoing public transmissions throughout their lives, by visiting teachers, often outdoors at very large public gatherings. With the growing interest in Tibetan Buddhism and with the exile of so many Tibetan Masters, the sacred Vajrayana teachings are now being conducted and transmitted throughout the world, particularly in the West.

The way of the Bodhisattva is a life-long and life encompassing endeavor. Generating compassion, developing altruistic intention, and integrating them through compassionate action are truly noble intentions, rendering life more meaningful and purposeful. How to do this was methodically laid out by Shantideva, an eighth century Buddhist master of the monastic University of Nalanda, in his book, *A Guide to The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (2007). The Dalai Lama often teaches from this great work, “extolling the very practical nature of the advice it contains. [Hoping it will] inspire readers with the higher ideals of Bodhisattvas while repeatedly encouraging their practical application in every day life” (Gyatso Tshering, cited in Shantideva, 2007, Foreword).

Shantideva was a teacher who embodied the knowledge he taught. He wished to share the knowledge of his awakened state in order to motivate and instruct others towards self liberation. He was considered a Bodhisattva in his time, his knowledge well grounded in life experience. In this text, he introduced the aspirant to the Awakening mind that wants to work for the benefit of all and outlines how to develop it. The path of the Bodhisattva

requires commitment, vigilance, alertness, mindfulness, patience, enthusiasm, meditation, and wisdom in order to tackle the constant egoistic struggle with the addictive mind. The book is a road map of encouragement along the altruistic path.

Shantideva's advice from 13 centuries ago contains truth for people, today, who may be overwhelmed with stress from the fast pace of our complicated technological society and who are concerned about the prevailing negativity and violence occurring around them. The Buddha's intention and insight seem to transcend time and space. Shantideva, in his commentary, adds clarity and relevance to these ancient teachings. This guide has stood the test of time. Today, Shantideva's recommendations continue to inform and support practitioners of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition throughout the world. This teaching has potential and relevance in today's world.

I have found Shantideva's guide helpful in comprehending the nature of the Mahayana path and the process of awakening the mind, particularly with regards to transcending fear. From my understanding, awakening the mind through the removal of the self opens the mind to expanded awareness with less of the ego clinging that causes fear. In one story of the Buddha, he was walking down the middle of the road when he encountered a raging elephant.¹⁸ At first he felt threatened and frightened, and felt compelled to use any means necessary to stop the raging beast. Then, upon realizing that the elephant was probably more threatened by him than he was of it, Buddha adjusted his thinking. He put one hand

¹⁸ This is a famous teaching story of Buddha often told regarding the development of compassion. I first read it in a book by Sheldon B. Kopp, called *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him* (1972). The original text is presently unknown to me.

up to stop the animal and extended the other to help it. The elephant, no longer terrified, approached more calmly. The danger of the situation was averted.

Like the elephant, the ego mind is terrified, reluctant to relinquish its stronghold on perceived reality. Within every person lies the perfect awareness of the greater mind. When the true nature of the mind is recognized, fear dissolves and out of the emptiness, compassion arises. Only then can we conquer fear and practice compassionate action towards others, taking part in restoring peace on earth. Fear prompts us to become rigid and closed hearted, resulting in separation and lack of concern for others. This leads to hatred and violence, and even war. Shantideva (2007) said:

Those who wish to guard their practice
Should very attentively guard their minds,
For those who do not guard their minds
Will be unable to guard their practice.

In this (world), unsubdued and crazed elephants
Are incapable of causing such harms
As the miseries of the deepest hell,
Which can be caused by the unleashed elephant of my mind.

However, if the elephant of my mind is firmly bound
On all sides by the rope of mindfulness,
All fears will cease to exist
And all virtues will come into my hand.

(p. 34)

Mindfulness, or wisdom (the other aspect of enlightenment) although difficult at times, offers clarity, luminosity, and a lightness of being that feels balanced and natural.

With mindfulness comes a sense of relief and freedom. Fear is replaced by the relaxed composure of loving kindness. It seems logical to choose these feelings over the heaviness and stress of self satisfying intention and projection. In this centered place, where thoughts generating fear are dissolved, there is what Buddha identified as the 'Middle Way'.

Following this 'path of compassion' naturally allows a being to evolve towards the true self. Balance, harmony, and peace can be restored within the physical body and within the body of life, whereby true liberation is found. It takes vigilance, effort and determination to achieve this state of being.

Tibetan Buddhism offers multitudinous methods to develop the mind to achieve a state that transcends fear and develops compassion. The promise of enlightenment, particularly possible within one lifetime if one practices the Buddha's Mahayana and Vajrayana methods, attracted my attention enough to step onto the Path of the Dharma and investigate both Tibetan Buddhist methods and their cultural context. The Buddha's beacon of liberation was extremely compelling. If, by dispelling fear, ignorance and ego grasping, I could further the development of peace, equanimity and compassion, then I was ready to begin my march towards enlightenment. Furthermore, my intention to help others might be fulfilled through this study, as “the corollary of enlightenment is what Buddhism calls 'loving kindness': the realization that to live morally is to live for others” (Brown, 2004, p. 19).

Tibetan Buddhist Cosmology and Iconography

The Pantheon of Deities

Entering the world of Tibetan Buddhism is an introduction to an enigmatic world of mystery, enchantment and fascination. As a pendulum swings, it is possibly the farthest thing away from the secular world. The world of Tibetan Buddhism is highly complex, but for the purposes of this project, it is necessary to simply outline the cosmology and artistic/symbolic representation of its various dimensions. Although Buddhists deny the existence of one God, in Tibetan Buddhism there is an overarching Ultimate Consciousness from which all else stems. This is called the Adibuddha, the ultimate personification of all the Buddhas. Considered the Primordial Buddha, known as Vajrahara or Samantabhadra, he also represents the potential of every human to achieve the ultimate state of Buddhahood.

Out of the Ultimate Adi Buddha, as consciousness transmutes itself into form, arise three realms of existence (kayas): the Dharmakaya, the Sambhogakaya, and the Nirmanakaya¹⁹.

The Dharmakaya is the 'body' of enlightened qualities, which is devoid of constructs, like space. Can be either an aspect of the yogi's experience or of final enlightenment. Sambhogakaya is the sublime form of a buddha in the buddhafiels endowed with

¹⁹ The Mahayana teachings of the 'Three Bodies' envisages a Buddha living in three different dimensions – as a Dharmakaya, indistinguishable from the ultimate true awareness, the Sambhogakaya or heavenly physical body that dwells in a paradisial 'Pure Land', and the Nirmanakaya of a mortal physical body which lives in the ordinary world (Peacock, 2003, p.50). According to Mahayana Buddhism, as a person travels along the path towards enlightenment, one progresses through each of these three levels, finally achieving the Dharmakaya body and dwelling in the realm of pure awareness. What the Buddha achieved is possible for every person who is committed to transcending suffering and attaining enlightenment.

the ‘major and minor marks’. Nirmanakaya is the incarnations to influence and benefit sentient beings. (Urgyen Tulku Rinpoche, 2005, p. 410)

Each of these three realms is presided over by a deity Buddha, according to the age in which it appears. Tibetan Buddhism identifies five eons (kalpas), or ages, of which we are in the fourth, the Degenerate Age. Each of these kalpas with the five corresponding Buddhas for each of the three realms are believed to co-exist simultaneously.

Presiding over the first realm (kaya), the Dharmakaya, are five Dhyani Buddhas – Vairocana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi of the corresponding ages (see Appendix). The Dhyani Buddha for this fourth age is Padma Buddha, more commonly known as Amitabha Buddha. He resides in the realm of the Dharmakaya – the kaya of Buddhahood that represents emptiness awareness.

The next realm, the Sambhogakaya, represents the perfect enjoyment body of spontaneous luminosity of Buddhahood, presided over again by five bodhisattvas. The bodhisattva for this time is Chenrezig. Apparently, this kaya is visible to highly realized and accomplished beings.

The third and last realm of existence is the Nirmanakaya, the body of manifestation, the aspect of Buddhahood that manifests out of compassion to help sentient beings. The Buddha of this age is Buddha Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha who lived on earth and who, although deceased on earth, presently dwells in the Nirmanakaya realm. The Buddha

for the future, the Nirmanakaya Buddha of the fifth and last age, is Maitreya who is presently a bodhisattva presiding in Tushita heaven.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that the various Buddhas of the five ages (the three previous ages, the present age, and the one to come) presently reside in the three kayas, that their presence is never ending. The five Dharmakaya Dhyani Buddhas, five Sambhogakaya bodhisattvas and five Nirmanakaya Buddhas all come with corresponding colors, symbols, and attributes.²⁰ For example, in this present age, the Buddha Amitabha reigns over Sukhavati, the Land of Bliss, a paradise that exists in the west where everything is radiant with light and knows no darkness. He is red in color and is depicted sitting in lotus posture holding a vase containing the 'nectar of immortality'. He also appears as the Buddha of Immortality, Amitayus, associated with the long life initiation. The iconographic representations of all the deities are easily recognizable in the various art forms if one is familiar with the symbolic aspects of them. Below is a simple diagram of the overarching Adi Buddha and the three Buddha realms with the presiding Buddhas **for this time**. For further reference to the deities of the three kayas and the five ages, their aspects and symbols, refer to the Appendix.

²⁰ See Appendix

Universal Realm

Adibuddha
(Samantabhadra or Vajradhara)

Dharmakaya Realm

Dhyani Buddha
(Amitabha Buddha or Amitayus)

Sambhogakaya Realm

Bodhisattva
(Chenrezig)

Nirmanakaya Realm

Buddha Shakyamuni

Tibetan Art

Tibetan art is essentially Buddhist sacred art that acts as a medium through which to represent the metaphysical concepts of the Tibetan Buddhist religion. Peter Fingesten, writes that “Sacred art is canonical, liturgical, didactic, guided by ecclesiastic rules and intended exclusively for worship, and is anonymous” (cited in Gordon, 1963, Preface). As an expression of the religion, Tibetan art possesses a complex mythology represented by a pantheon of deities. In order to understand the art, it is necessary to have an understanding of both the Buddhist religious concepts and stories as well as knowledge of the deities and their corresponding attributes.

A monastery's walls are most often covered by detailed murals based on the stories of the Buddha's life. A monastery entrance might have mural paintings of religious symbols or of protector deities. Scroll paintings will hang from the ceiling and on the walls painted with brightly colored icons and symbols. Objects of art used in religious ritual and practice may be seen everywhere, both inside monastery walls and in the living rooms of the most simple Tibetan practitioner. Tibetan art, just as the religion,

flows into life . . . find[ing] its way onto all the surfaces of the Tibetan world; onto teacups and lamps, tables and carpets, onto hems and hats and boots, onto saddles and tents, and most conspicuously onto Tibet's magnificent temples and monasteries. Tibetans create art to open windows from the ordinary, coarse world we know onto the extraordinary realm of pure wisdom and compassion. To the artists who create these objects, and to those who behold them, they are the point of transition from the earthly world to ultimate and sacred realities. The contemplation of icons, called tangkas, and of sculptures and mandalas enables Tibetans to reach into realms beyond their normal command, just as these art forms enable their deities' compassion to come shining through into this world of woe and trouble. (Rhie & Thurman, 1997, p.17)

Until recently, all art forms in Tibet pertained to the religion, just as every aspect of their education revolved around religion. Religious worship and attention formed the basis of all activity. Tibetans were only as far away from the intention of compassion and wisdom as the malas worn around their wrists and the mantras that were uttered constantly on the tips of their tongues. Tibetan art could not be separated from the people, the life, and the religion that harbors it and that it represents. Most aspects of Tibetan art upheld the continuation of the Buddha's intention that sentient beings must move in the direction of enlightenment. The congruency and continuity between Tibetan culture, Tibetan

Buddhism, and Tibetan art implicate the Tibetans as having been probably one of the most religiously alive cultures in the world.

The viewer of Tibetan art needs to first understand the pictorial deity representation encountered. This has been described in the section of the Pantheon of Deities. For the purpose of this paper, the other necessary definitions and descriptions of the most important symbolic aspects of the art/artifacts are included or footnoted within the narrative. Through reading and study of Tibetan Buddhism, its art and artistic representation, and continued daily practice, I was able to acquire much prior knowledge about the tradition of the Tibetan people. These pre-journey efforts prepared me for an educated entrance into the artistically rich and colorful world of Tibetan and Tibetan Buddhist culture, facilitating a more holistic experience and consequently a more transformative one. They also established me as a fellow pilgrim whose awareness did not bypass the Tibetan pilgrims I met along the way. This prior knowledge gave me entrance into their hearts and lives in a way that I am sure would not have happened had they thought I was just another tourist trying to capture them on film.

CHAPTER THREE

Veda's Narrative

Padmasambhava foretold back in the days of Tibet's isolation in the eighth century:

When the iron bird flies and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan people
will be scattered like ants across the world, and the dharma will come to
the land of the red man. (Walker, 2006, p. xiv)

This ancient Tibetan prophesy predicts the fate of Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetans.²¹

It most certainly describes the present Tibetan state of affairs and my involvement in North America with the Tibetan Buddhist teachings.

It gives me pleasure to think that my life has meaning, that I, Veda Mata, am one of the
a worthy vessels through which Guru Rinpoche's (Padmasambhava) ancient treasures may
be revealed to this part of the world. Times and technology are rapidly changing. The
Tibetan forecast of a degenerative age seems to me to be coming true within the present
psyches of people, the environment, and life around me. My investigation and journey into
Tibetan Buddhism and culture seems timely and auspicious. I wonder if there are any
greater implications held within my research and inquiry? I like to think that in 'following
my dream' I am serving to benefit the happiness and well being of all.

21 This well known ancient prophesy has been passed down through the ages by Tibetans and is attributed to Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava. The exact words lie in an ancient text, the identity of which is presently inaccessible to the author.

Spiritual Origins

My first spiritual conversations happened with my father. He was my first spiritual mentor. We spent many hours talking about the nature of reality and the relationship of thoughts to things, suspecting that there was something 'greater' to be discovered. He bequeathed me his personal quest just before he died: “You know and I know that we know. We just don't know exactly what it is that we know. Your job is to keep looking for us both, until you find it. And then, bring it back to the family.” I was only twenty-five years old at the time. He died shortly thereafter.

This particular segment of my spiritual quest began to take shape in my forties when I made a firm commitment to direct my life towards spirituality. At that time, my first enlightened spiritual master, Amritanandamayi or Amma as we simply called her, gave me a spiritual name. Officially changing my name from Dorothy (meaning 'gift of God') to Veda Mata ('source of true knowledge' or 'mother of truth' in sanskrit), the name Amma gave me, marked a turning point. My vision turned away from the role of motherhood towards the 'yellow brick road' of adventure, to a journey away from my Christian cultural context and towards the East. Embarking on a mission to find the truth of myself, I decided to cast my fate to the winds and see where this little dandelion seed would land! It landed in Tibetan Buddhism and simultaneously landed me within the academic context of a university. It is here, at this juncture, at the cross-roads of Canada and Asia that I begin to narrate my personal experience.

Pre-journey – Entering the Way of the Bodhisattva

The Red Chenrezig Teaching and Practice of Compassion

Namo
Even though they had Buddha nature
They wandered in samsara through the power of their confused ignorance,
At the time that the Bodhisattvas and noble ones
Gave rise to the mind of perfect enlightenment.
In the same way, I too shall give birth to a mind of perfect enlightenment.
(Dorje, 2008, p. 6)

After I took my Bodhisattva vows²² in 1999, my goal became that of practicing harmlessness (ahimsa). This was more than a ceremony and verbal commitment; it became an ongoing process and new way of life. Every thought and action had to be fed through the intention of compassion. What did I really know about this? I began to realize that most of my life had been led along the lines of selfish intention although I thought that I was a loving person and had tried to live according to Jesus' directive to 'love others as myself'. Practicing compassion is more than that; it is being aware of the happiness and well being of others at all times, every single minute of the day! Moreover, it is the constant awareness that my thoughts and actions impact others' lives, not just my own.

22 When a person commits to becoming a Buddhist, or Buddhist practitioner, the first step is to take Refuge. This vow acknowledges faith in the Three Jewels – the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha – and is a commitment to turn to them each day, particularly in times of doubt and stress. As one progresses along the Buddhist route, it becomes evident that the individual has a responsibility not only to self, but to the greater community. At this juncture, one may take Bodhisattva Vows and commit all thoughts, words, and actions for the benefit and enlightenment of all sentient beings. I took Refuge in July, 1999 and my Bodhisattva Vows in October of the same year. Bodhisattva here is understood within the context of the altruistic qualities of the bodhisattva – by adhering to the vows of harmlessness and compassion one may consciously work towards attaining bodhisattva status in the process towards enlightenment.

How could anyone possibly do this? Needing information and support, I sought to find it within Buddha's teachings. According to the Tibetans, compassion is defined as the desire to benefit all sentient beings, an intention and a quality that can be developed by practicing 'harmlessness' at all costs, particularly that of our ego or self centered tendencies. Although inherent within every human being, most often this virtue has been buried deep within the crevasses of the subconscious, covered over by the demands of personal neurosis. The subjective experience of suffering urges us to satisfy personal needs first and foremost. Moving towards Buddhahood involves a process of moving the small self out of the way and encouraging the greater Self to step forward. How can we, as self preoccupied humans do this? The Red Chenrezig teaching or Vajrayana practice is one way to achieve compassion.

I undertook to complete the first level of the Red Chenrezig teaching, given to me by Kenchen Thrangu Rinpoche in October, 2004,²³ the same year I entered university to begin my Master Degree. In 2006, I successfully accomplished the first round of 100,000 repetitions of the mantra, doing the corresponding visualization and the subsequent meditation.²⁴ The experience, although at times tedious, had a profound effect upon me. It firmly established the altruistic intention in me. Realization of the inter-connectedness with all life shifted from an idea into practice within my everyday life.

23 Kenchen Thrangu Rinpoche is a tulku, a reincarnation of a realized master. He was originally from Tibet, but presently resides in Boudhanath, Nepal. He is the head teacher of the 17th Karmapa, the head of the Kagyupa sect. I first met Thrangu Rinpoche in 2004, when I received the empowerment and oral transmission for the Red Chenrezig teaching.

24 I continue to include the Red Chenrezig practice in my daily meditation because developing compassion, (just as transformative learning) is an ongoing and never ending process.

For example, one day as I was sweeping the kitchen floor, a tiny spider scuttled out from under the garbage can. I noticed its feelings of terror as it sped across the floor to get away from me. It was afraid. It too had feelings and a sense of self-preservation. I acutely sensed this and didn't want to hurt it. Taking a small cup, I covered the spider, which put it into a frenzy as it tried to escape. Attempting to alleviate its dilemma, I slipped a piece of paper under the cup so that I could lift it up and put the spider out the window. But as I did so, I accidentally crushed it. It was hurt and I could feel it! Then, I felt the life go out of it. I felt anguish at what I had done and tears came into my eyes. I had never felt pain before while disposing of pesky insects or spiders. How many times have I slapped and killed mosquitoes and never questioned it? This time though, I felt remorse at extinguishing life. This was a new found sensitivity which I attribute to my Chenrezig and Buddhist practice. Through this personal experience I had a glimpse at the fruits of learning. Adhering to my vows to seek meaning within the methods and practice was having an effect on me. I was changing.

When I first took my Bodhisattva vows, I had little actual understanding of what I was committing to. Teaching Reiki and studying Buddhist thought had, to a certain extent, developed benevolent aspiration and faith in compassion, enough to consider taking the vows. I did not, however, realize the magnitude of responsibility and the depth of commitment required. Could I renege on the vows if things proved too difficult?

In times of great stress and personal need, I have found these vows tested over and over again. In times of strong suffering, I have recurrently been reminded of what I have

undertaken. The fact that it is no longer about 'me', but about the happiness and well being of others is strong medicine to take. It is not about having my individual needs met; it is turning away from myself to ask: 'How can I help? How may I be of assistance?'

Throughout the years, I have come to realize that a life lived solely for oneself feels meaningless and unsatisfying. The desire to serve my human family has become a paramount aim. Through serving others, I serve and heal myself.

Buddha's teachings offer a firm foundation for self realization and offer a gradation of teachings that further a person towards the development of the self and realization of one's true nature. Taking the Refuge and Bodhisattva vows means that one agrees to adhere to the educational path of Buddha's teachings which are very explicit and thorough. Through study of the teachings on Refuge and development of boddhichitta (aspiration for compassion and enlightenment) and doing practices such as the Red Chenrezig, the reality of Buddha's intention reveals itself. In my case, I began to experience change and transformation. Faith began to develop along with certainty that this path truly was a valuable educational process.

As I had chosen for my project to explore Tibetan Buddhism, both through practice of its core teaching of compassion (Red Chenrezig) and a journey into the Tibetan culture, it was necessary to review and further study the foundational Refuge and Bodhisattva vows which I had previously undertaken. I began to realize the interconnectedness and progression of the levels of Buddha's teachings as an educational process that happened through application and practice.

The Red Chenrezig teaching has especially sustained me. It has opened my eyes to the nature of compassion, surprisingly showering its fruit of blessings and sensitivity upon me first, and in turn offering a surplus of good feeling and good intention towards others. The process continues to flourish and grow daily, as though the empowerment initiated a perpetual and ongoing transformation within me. The actuality of becoming a bodhisattva has become a tangible possibility as I watch myself undergoing this transformation, remembering that bodhisattvas began as ordinary beings such as myself, struggling along their own way to transparency and enlightenment. The solid structure of me – my body and the selfish intention of my life – is shifting into a more fluid, selfless nature. I am becoming a clearer, more open vessel through which a greater, kinder intention can flow out into the world.

I have found that in bending to the needs of another, one's personal suffering fades, replaced by the joy and appreciation of the other. Compassion becomes a formula for happiness, a sweet balm for the pathos of the human condition.

Aside from the Chenrezig practice, there was Shantideva's commentary to refer to whenever I felt lost within the confusion of my subjective reality, or wavering in the commitment to conquer my negativity. This Buddhist intention was difficult! It was hard work. I had recognized my laziness and adaptation to suffering.

I reminded myself, however, that education and learning is a process. I have a habit of denying myself this process of beginning, applying, developing, and achieving. I have noticed through the years that I expect myself to be accomplished before I begin, which is a

negative tendency that gets in the way of my learning process. Once again, I saw this pattern but was determined not to let it undermine my efforts. In the past, I might have given up. I definitely knew a process was taking place within me; it was difficult however to identify it exactly. Learning new modes of thinking can be challenging, like behavior modification. I encouraged myself to continue with my study and practice, to let go of self protective, self satisfying modes of behavior and to observe the effects and changes, realizing that often transformation isn't visible until after it has occurred.²⁵

Committed to change, to becoming a better, more effective human being, I kept Shantideva's book beside my bed as a constant reminder of my commitment to my endeavor. It served as my spiritual guide, just as necessary as the travel guide that had accompanied me on all my journeys. The outer world may have changed considerably over the years, with new boundaries and new countries, but the inner path remained the same. Shantideva's advice is as applicable today as when he wrote it hundreds of years ago. His commentary helped to anchor and encourage me in my practice. It also helped open the way to 'waking up', having been written by some one who had 'woken up'. Reading it stimulated and affected my intelligence, reflecting the value of reading the commentaries alongside doing the practices.

²⁵ Transformation tends to occur in an incremental process rather than ending in a culmination point. The changes are revealed within the reality of the students' lives, particularly in adult learners. Through a process of assimilation and integration change take place. Often along the way a learner can get stalled, particularly in the initial stages because the previously established sense of order is threatened or later when commitment and action require risk and uncertainty (Schugurensky, Ed. O'Sullivan, 2002, p. 69).

Entering into the awareness of this enlightened Buddhist offered me an opportunity to understand the mindset of many Tibetans and the focus of Tibetan daily reality, preparing me for the next step on my journey, that of entering into the landscape of Tibetan Buddhism.

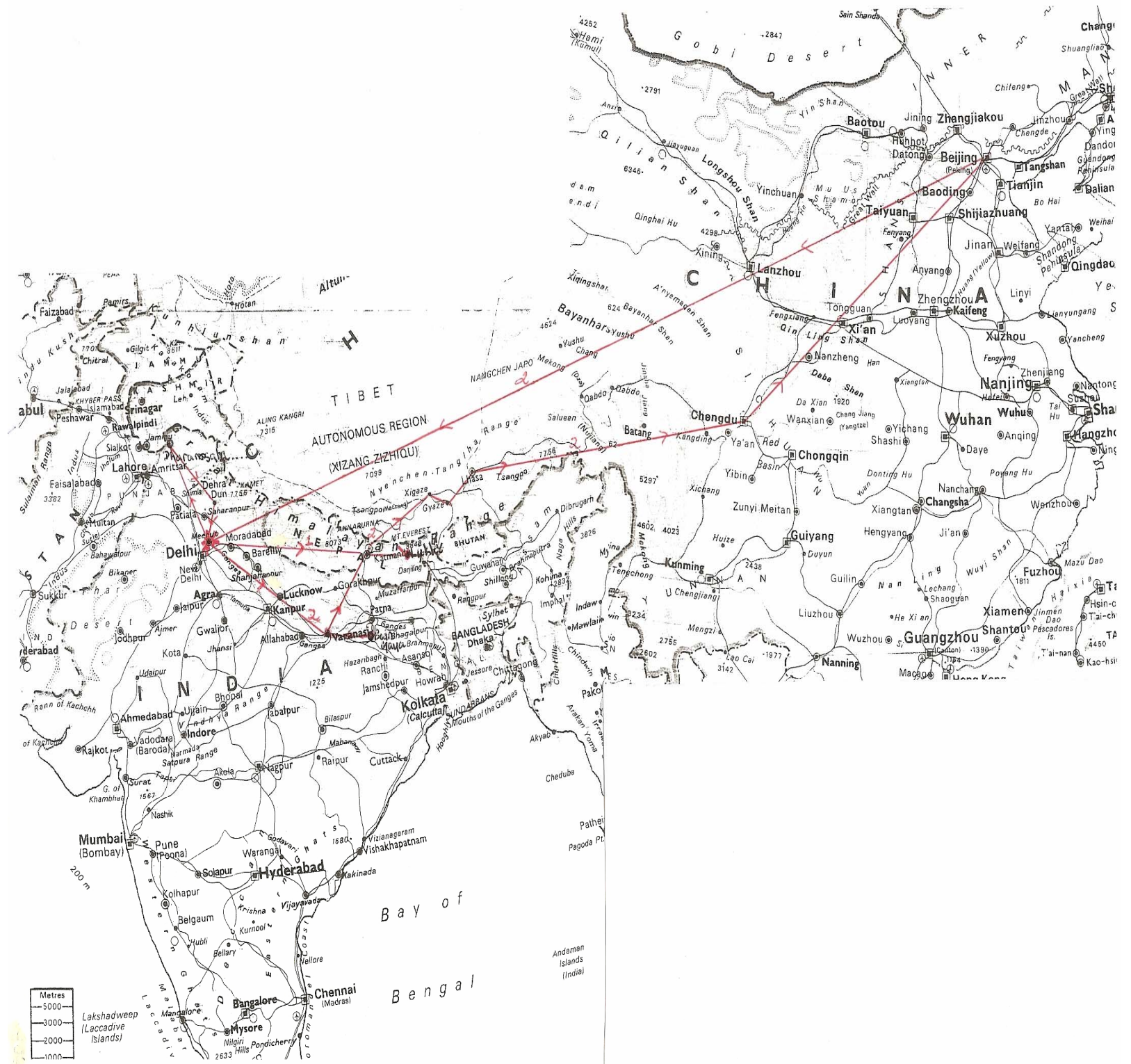
PART II: JOURNEY

CHAPTER FOUR

The following is a narrative/story based upon my various travels to India, Nepal, and Tibet in 2005 through 2008 – what I saw, heard, and noticed along my way. This journey into the Tibetan Buddhist culture has been one of transformation. The learning I acquired could not have been gained through books. Narrating this pilgrimage into the 'heartland' of Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan people, offers a glimpse of the route and process of this transformation. “For Tibetans the key to pilgrimage is *danang*, the sacred vision that transfigures the environment into a pure realm of enlightened energies,. Even the most miserable of circumstances invites this shift in perception” (Baker, 2004, p. 161). Aside from my Everest trek to state my intention, the hardships I faced were minimal compared with others, for example the Tibetans traveling to Mount Kailash or other holy sites, forsaking home, family, food, shelter, and facing the extreme elements to journey to their sacred places. However, I acquired this sacred *vision*. My conventional ways of seeing were challenged. The unusual things that I saw, heard, and participated in facilitated a shift in being. I have tried in this narrative to walk the reader through this shift, the process of acquisition, revelation, and transformation that transpired within me. I returned to view my daily life differently, perhaps not with rose tinted glasses, but with a clearer, more auspicious perspective, hence the relevancy of the narrative.

As an addendum, it is important to qualify that all the people mentioned in the story, except for the teachers, represent those I met along the way. Their words express collective ideas that I became aware of en route; they do not represent any ideas or opinions of any *particular* individuals. The teachers, however, are actual *living* representatives of the Buddha as far as the Tibetans are concerned. I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce them, as they have played an important part in my Buddhist journey.

Map of My Journey through India, Nepal, and China (Rand McNally, 2008, pp.100-101)



THE JOURNEY

It was time to begin the next segment of my spiritual journey and place myself within the context of Tibetan Buddhism by entering into the present reality of Tibetan culture – time to step off the edge of the home continent and land on foreign ground. The experience and its narrative would represent the fact and substance (the phenomenon) of my qualitative phenomenological research project.

It was time to make my Buddhist pilgrimage. I wanted to inaugurate my journey by stating my ultimate intention *to realize my true self* in front of the highest and most majestic mountain on earth, Mount Everest, to me a symbol of aspiring heights.²⁶ As well, I wanted to establish myself within my own vision, letting go of parental expectations and psychological/spiritual legacies. I decided that this would be the perfect place to release my Father's ashes. It would be a symbolic gesture to establish me on my own path, within my personal spiritual vision.

NEPAL

Mount Everest

“Lha gyalo! De thamched pham!” I stated. “The Gods have won! The demons are vanquished” (David-Neel, 1993, p. ix). I was standing in front of the highest, the grandest,

26 There is a pertinent quotation made by Bhumananda, the ascetic and spiritual guide to Giuseppe Tucci, the famous Tibetologist and explorer, during his expedition to Mount Kailash in 1935: “The spiritual quest is an ascension, the paths leading to the summit are many and of diverse lengths, and necessarily so, as men think, understand and feel differently. While the paths may be different, the goal is unique” (Allix & de Villemorin, 2004, p. 110)

the mightiest mountain in the world – Mount Everest. I was reminded of an earlier adventurer, Alexandra David-Neel, who traversed the high mountain passes of Tibet in 1927.²⁷ I had come to this place for a very specific purpose, to state my sincere intention to claim the truth of myself and to realize my highest vision of happiness, a vision for myself, my loved ones, and all the beings in the universe.

Reaching this view of Mount Everest had required a great amount of energy, sweat, and tears.²⁸ After a four day arduous trek up and down the hills of Nepal²⁹, into the foothills of the Himalayas, I had released my dad's ashes at the edge of the cliff, released my parents' visions for my life, and felt a new sense of independence. Now, where would my life lead me? This was a great new beginning. A pledge to finish my Master's Degree at the university was my first project, its research beginning right here. I vowed to put the letters M. Ed after my name. After all, more than thirty years of applied spirituality and in depth spiritual study deserved recognition and validation within the context of my society. The

27 Frenchwoman and renowned Tibetologist, Alexandra David-Neel was a Buddhist, scholar, and explorer and the first Western woman to be introduced to the Dalai Lama (13th). In 1898 she made her first journey to India, but continued to travel throughout Buddhist Asia, living in Buddhist monasteries and studying ancient sacred texts. She learned Tibetan so that she could study the original documents. She was conferred with the title of Lamina (female lama) by the monks at a Sikkimese monastery where she resided and studied for many years with her teacher, making her first entry into Tibet in 1916. Disguised as a pilgrim and accompanied by a young Sikkimese monk (Aphur Yongden who traveled and lived with her for many years, eventually accompanying her to the West), David-Neel journeyed to the forbidden city of Lhasa in 1923. She endured primitive conditions, severe weather, and many hardships. Undertaking the arduous journey on foot, this journey took her four years. She traveled throughout Tibet accompanied by her monk, bringing first hand descriptions of Tibet to the outside world through her various books – a Tibet which had hitherto only been imagined.

28 “It is said that the hardship of a journey invests the pilgrim path with power and that each step is an offering” (David-Neel, 1993, p. xxi). Without any physical training or preparation for trekking, this first leg of my pilgrimage was, although extremely arduous, very powerful. The path imbued me with unknown strength and faith and I am sure accrued much merit with the many offering tears that fell to the ground along the way.

29 For a more in depth narrative of this trek refer to Knocking on Buddha's Door (Mata, 2009, pp. 190-237).

degree would also validate my position as a spiritual teacher, further my career and solidify my commitment to offer spiritual education to the public.

My journey had begun. I had stepped beyond the known, to enter an entirely new world. This new world had meant entering a completely different culture, taking a perilous flight in a small aircraft to Lukla. From there I had donned some very insufficient hiking boots, accepted a hand whittled walking stick from a wizened old Nepalese man, and began my trek up the hills into valleys, across rivers, beside waterfalls, and over precarious swinging bridges, up and up and up and up . . . until I thought the climb would never end. At times fatigued and disheartened, my tears flowed freely. Then, just around the bend, stopping to rest my aching feet and sip a cup of sweet tea, I saw my destination: Namche Bazaar and just beyond, the trail to view Mount Everest! I could do it!

And, I did. Now that I had accomplished my first mission, the first leg of the journey, I felt on top of the world, which I practically was! Elated, encouraged, and confident; what was left? Only the rest of my life!

Jubilation and rejoicing were short lived as I began the descent back into ordinary life. My youngest daughter had gone into premature labor and I had to return home as quickly as possible. A mother's work never ends. As I returned home on the plane, I thought of the childhood game Snakes and Ladders. Analogically speaking, it seemed to me that I had just landed on the last number, 99, the last square before the finish, but stepping on the head of the ultimate snake, I felt myself sliding all the way back to square one, knowing I would have to begin again later.

Little did I realize that, as I slid down the ladder homeward bound, I would land on a different level, returning with a new, more confident perspective. The climb and proclamation had been transformative, firmly launching me within a spiritual journey that would take me beyond the bounds of the known. I also came to regard the climb as an analogy as to how I lived my life, with strength, determination, perseverance, and accomplishment! During the intervening time, until I stepped back onto the track of pilgrimage, I was able to see my life as 'a climb' towards the highest peak of my ideals and intentions. I came to realize the need to pay attention to each precious moment and to value the practice of mindfulness. The unexpected call home did not diminish the meaning or influence of this adventurous undertaking. It would live in me forever.

INDIA

Bodh Gaya

In the fall of 2006, the year following my Everest Trek, I returned to my beloved India. What a marvel! I was standing gazing at the tree (or the granddaughter tree) that the Buddha sat under when he came to enlightenment 2500 years ago. I had to see it to believe it! Bodhi leaves beneath and around, I stooped to pick one up and sat down to contemplate. Gautama Buddha was a great man, his teachings profound. They had endured for centuries. Here in this very spot he meditated for 49 days – he strove for perfection, tested himself, was tempted by desire, overcame his lower mind, and realized a place within himself far greater than most of us ever achieve. How had that happened?

After striving for so many years, I was still floundering. Maybe it was not my karma to achieve enlightenment this lifetime. If not, then why was I making this pilgrimage? I believed self-realization was possible and wanted to put myself onto the path in a tangible way, stating my intention through my actions, claiming the possibility for myself. Was this all just another illusion? Better to have stayed home and done my dishes? There, those old doubts again. On the other hand, my commitment to completing my university project inspired and compelled me to continue this learning process. In fact, the project anchored and supported me on my spiritual journey in unexpected ways.

Stumbling along, tripping over my doubt and disillusionment, therein lies the purpose of a pilgrimage – to rekindle hope and faith when the traveler is weary and disheartened.³⁰ This was the beginning of the next step. A deeper turning of the wheel of my life, focusing and re-focusing on the spiritual journey. I was in a very privileged position. Bodh Gaya lay in the poorest state of India, Bihar. Yet, here in the midst of the barren landscape lay a jewel of a town, infused with a wealth of spiritual history and energy.

Sitting with my eyes closed, focused on my breath, I inhaled the sacred atmosphere and felt renewed. I felt hope for myself, the pilgrim, regardless of how deeply mired I was in the muck of my doubt and disparagement. Like the lotus growing out of the mud, I knew I too could blossom! This ancient tree, this sacred place, exuded blessings of beauty and

30 The Tibetan Buddhists also believe that the pilgrimage develops merit and bodhicitta (the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all). Pilgrimage acts as an agent to renew faith and further one along the path to enlightenment and a better rebirth.

compassion. Imbued with the fragrance of encouragement, under the blessed bodhi tree, I renewed my Refuge vows.

Varanasi

Also called Benares, Varanasi is India's most sacred city. I was mesmerized by the sound of water, the rhythmic dipping of the wooden oar as the boatman slowly moved us along the edge of the Ganges river in the worn old boat. How many tourists had sat in the same seat to view the ritual ablutions of the Hindu people taking their morning baths and chanting their morning prayers as the sun rose gently over the horizon? It appeared as a bright red orb creeping through the haze or the pollution, beautiful regardless. Flocks of brilliant green parakeets swirled around the steps advancing up from the shore, steps gleaming with a rainbow of freshly washed saris laid out to dry as the heat rose along with the breaking dawn. A new day, another day. Thank you, God.

People had warned me of the filth and disgusting conditions of the Ganges River. We were just passing the burning ghats where a funeral was taking place. Under the arches of the far building, the flame of Shiva was burning as it had done continuously for hundreds of years. There were the attendants, all untouchables, dhalits, the lowest class within the Indian caste system. A man with a shaved head, the son of the deceased, was putting a long

thatch of straw into the flame.³¹ Mesmerized, I watched him carry it over to the pyre while a priest chanted the burial prayers.

At the edge of the river, young boys were diving beneath the water. The boatman told us that they were looking for gold and precious jewelry which is theirs to keep if found – one of the few benefits afforded the dhalit, a pittance of compensation for their impoverished station in life.

As the sun rose, more activity and detail could be seen. The dead carcass of a bloated cow and on a bamboo stretcher, a corpse under a white cover tied with marigold garlands floated by. The boatman mentioned that only pure people such as holy men, children and people bitten by snakes were placed on the river to float out to the ocean. The first two didn't need the purification of the fire but why were people bitten by snakes included? He explained that they weren't considered dead until three days had passed. Priests at the temple would be saying yantras hoping to bring the spirit back from its impending voyage. I pondered the possibility and managed to overcome my disbelief, enough to offer a respectful response. Cultural exploration requires an open mind.

Sarnath

Retracing the Buddha's steps, I journeyed onto Sarnath. The Earth Goddess had given the Buddha the right to begin his teaching career. Here, at Deer Park, was the site he chose

³¹ In the Hindu tradition, when a father dies, the sons shave their heads and the eldest son performs all the funerary rites. The ashes are then put into the river, particularly the sacred Ganges if possible.

to do that. I entered the gates of the park and gazed up at a towering stupa.³² Along with the other devotees present, I made three prostrations before beginning my walk along the cement walkway that encircled the area. I was asked to pay a considerable entrance fee to get closer to the ancient brick stupas in the archaeological area. Due to my meager budget, I elected not to, choosing instead to walk outside the fenced area, gazing at the ancient structures as I simultaneously browsed the little guide book purchased outside the main gate at one of the street stalls. After completing the circuit, I sauntered towards the park area and sat down on a bench to gaze at the lotus pond and the little deer behind a fence.

The water lilies (or lotus as they are known in Asia) were both purple and pink, their yellow centers open to the sun, reminding me of the compassionate heart. It truly was an act of compassion on the Buddha's part to offer his life to the service and enlightenment of others. He taught for forty-five years. I see so many parallels between the ministry of Jesus and that of the Buddha – both committed to assist the human race to achieve peace, both teachers characterized by compassionate hearts, their remarkable beginnings . . . Compared to their commitment to service, how do I fare? I pondered my self-centered inclinations as I basked in the beauty of the precious flowers that are the Buddhist's symbol

32 The stupa (chorten in Tibetan) is the most typical Buddhist monument and architectural structure originally built to contain the cremated remains of Gautama Buddha. Chortens house the relics of enlightened masters and, in some cases, whole mummified bodies, such as the five ancient Dalai Lamas in the Potala in Lhasa. The structure has a wide square base, a rounded mid-section, and a tall conical upper section topped with a sun and moon. The three layers represent the Three Jewels – the top represents the Buddha, the middle section the Dharma, and the base the Sangha. Chortens are also symbolic structures representing Buddha, the base representing his seat when in meditation, and the mid-section and the dome his torso and head. In the early days of Buddhism, the chorten not the Wheel of Law represented Buddha and Buddhism. The stupa in Sarnath is known as the Stupa of many Gates and Doors and identifies the place where the Buddha turned the Wheel of Dharma for the first time.

of compassion,³³ now providing me with a soothing antidote to my tendency towards self-criticism.

There are many stories circulating India that say that after Jesus' resurrection, he came to India and lived with Mary Magdalene, raising a family and teaching until he was in his eighties. They say his tomb is in Srinagar, Kashmir. The Church would never accept that story, even though many Indians find it easy to embrace. This assertion can be found in a book published in Asia entitled *Jesus Lived in India* (2001) written by Holger Kersten. He also suggests that Jesus was a reincarnation of Buddha. My mind remains open, my heart willing to embrace such possibilities in its search for truth. Truth or fiction? I guess it depends upon who is listening and interpreting.

Dharamsala – McLeod Ganj

After a twelve hour train ride from Varanasi and an over night bus from Delhi to Dharamsala, I arrived to find that the Dalai Lama was still in America. He continues, even in his senior years, to spread teachings of peace and loving kindness to our strife-torn world. He has lived his life as an active example of peaceful resistance, standing for the

33 The lotus is one of Tibetan Buddhism's eight auspicious symbols (Tashi Tag Gye in Tibetan) which are signs of good fortune and are said to have sprung from the gifts that the celestial beings presented to the Buddha upon his enlightenment. The eight symbols are: the parasol (chattra) a sign of royal dignity and protection, the banner (dhvaja) representing victory over samsara and triumph over ignorance, the conch (shankha) proclaiming the glory of Buddha's teachings and accomplishment, the infinite knot (shrivasta) representing the teaching of Dependent origination, the wheel of the law (dharmachakra) signifying Buddha's teaching (Dharma), the vase (kalasha) holding the spiritual jewels of the teachings or nectar of immortality, the fish (matsyayugma) representing liberation from the ocean of samsara, and the lotus (padma) symbolizing purity, perfection and compassion. See Appendix for diagrams.

rights of Tibetan people while adhering to theories of peaceful negotiation and dialogue.

Unfortunately the Chinese government refuses to relinquish its grip on Tibet.

I enjoyed a few days in one of my favorite places, having visited the Dharamsala area many years ago on my first trip to India. The Tibetan community, particularly McLeod Ganj, had grown considerably, with thousands of refugees coming over the passes of the Himalayas yearly, risking their lives to do so.³⁴ It looked as if the infrastructure wasn't adapting fast enough to the growing number of residents. Lots of unemployment and young people in the streets. They said that the crime and drug problem was growing. They didn't have that ten years ago.

I joined the Tibetans at dawn and dusk to circumambulate the base of the Dalai Lama's temple, doing the 'kora' with the community.³⁵ Just behind the Mc'lo Restaurant stood a chorten and a circle of colorful metal prayer wheels. As often as I could, I made my way around them, turning the wheels to keep the prayers of compassion spinning for the benefit of all, telling my mala, my prayer beads, and repeating the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum.³⁶

34 In 2006, when I did my Everest trek, a group of Tibetans, both young and old, were shot by the Chinese as they were trying to cross into exile over the China/Nepal border. The episode was documented on film by a tourist in the area at the time. For me, it was verification of the continuing precarious and oppressed position of the Tibetan people.

35 The Kora is a ritual circumambulation (clockwise) around a shrine or holy object ie. Stupa or monastery. It is believed to confer merit and align one with spiritual forces. It is customary for Tibetans communally to do the kora at dawn and dusk around their local shrine or monastery.

36 Om Mani Padme Hum or Om Mani Peme Hung is translated as 'homage to the jewel in the lotus'. It is considered the Sacred Mantra, associated with Tibet's benefactor Chenrezig, the Great Compassionate One, incarnated in the Dalai Lama. The mantra is proclaimed everywhere – on prayer flags, within prayer wheels, engraved on stones, pinned onto doors of homes, and woven into their blessing scarves and materials. It has even been found self-emanating (growing on its own, not carved by human hand) out of rocks and mountain sides. The Tibetans chant it from morning until night, cleansing and protecting the mind of impurities, and proclaiming the attainment of enlightenment for all.

From my understanding, mantras are sounds that protect the mind from negative thoughts and generate the intention of the meaning through their sound vibration. The more one repeats a specific mantra, the more the mind establishes its intention into the experience of being. This Sacred Mantra, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, engenders bodhicitta, ensures spiritual well-being, accrues merit, and furthers the practitioner's intention towards transformation and enlightenment. I welcomed the opportunity to join in with the crowd to honor and develop such benevolent intention, fully aware that this ritual was helping me to learn and grow. These efforts also helped me to feel part of the Tibetan Buddhist collective, as I too was winding my way towards the compassionate heart of the Buddha. It added to my sense of belonging and helped diminish my sense of other. While doing the kora and turning the prayer wheels, the lines between *stranger* and *native* diminished as the unified vibration of the sacred mantra and the circular steps around the holy shrines united us into one body of pilgrims honoring the Buddha's holy intention.

My efforts to receive blessings from the Dalai Lama or the Karmapa were foiled. Neither were present in the area at the time. Maybe at the end of the journey, I thought to myself, my karma would open up, my fortune turn towards receiving their holy blessings.³⁷

³⁷ It is customary for the Tibetans to receive blessings from both their local lamas and the lamas of the area of the pilgrimage that they are entering. These occur both at the beginning and end of the journey. Such blessings offer protection and auspicious support for the successful outcome of the sacred undertaking.

Clement Town – Mindroling Monastery

If I thought kissing the feet of a dead guru was weird, (which I did with Papaji on my first visit to India) then this felt even more strange. I had just received a blessing from His Holiness Mindroling Rinpoche who is said to be flying in the land of the dakinis or basking in the Pure Land. The dakinis are female deities (also called sky dancers because they supposedly fly) that reside in a land of their own somewhere in another dimension. The Pure Land is presided over by the male deities. Rinpoche most certainly wasn't 'present'; he lay comatose on a carpeted bed, as unconscious as someone lying in hospital. Instead of being diagnosed with some sort of somatic disease, the Tibetans considered him to be in an exalted state, living in a mystical Shangri-La dream time. His wife, standing beside the bed attending to him, received my khata,³⁸ touched it to Rinpoche's hand and placed it around my neck. Then, she lifted his hand and touched my head with it. That was it. I had been blessed by the head of the Nyingmapa lineage (the most ancient order of Tibetan Buddhism) at the great Mindroling Monastery. I left the room through the Tibetan silk curtain, appliquéd with the auspicious symbols, covering the doorway. Outside the room, I deposited my white envelope enclosing my financial offering in a basket on the table.

38 The khata or khagta is a blessing scarf of praise and happiness, usually of white silk (also orange, yellow or blue). The sacred scarf is presented to religious dignitaries, high officials, hosts, or people of special significance. It is offered as a gesture of respect, hospitality, blessing or protection. The size and quality vary according to the position within the political, religious or social hierarchy of both the giver and receiver.

I was trying to reconcile what had just happened with what I had *imagined* would happen earlier that day. Clement Town is a Tibetan community just outside of Dehradun, where I had arrived that morning off the bus from Dharamsala. The picture that I had so carefully harbored was of a vibrant, good looking, middle aged man with intense eyes looking directly at me. I had seen him in the pages of the Shambala Sun, the popular Buddhist magazine. I was looking for a 'spiritual friend', one who could oversee my practice and teach me Dzogchen, the Rainbow Light teaching, where one could turn into rainbows at death and not leave any remains behind except toenails and fingernails. I had been intrigued by the possibility of achieving such a death myself sometime in the future. I wanted to save the unnecessary expense of funeral arrangements and offer my skeptical children the thrill of a light show. More seriously, I had hoped to find the 'lightening path' of the Tibetan Buddhist teachings whereby a person could attain enlightenment in one lifetime. However, it amused me to envision my ultimate earthly departure accompanied with multitudinous circles of shimmering rainbow light,

Instead, I had encountered a sleeping beauty. If only I could have kissed him and woken him up so that he could become my personal teacher. The teachers that I had met so far were busy with thousands of students and only had time for a few minutes of interview each year when they came to Canada. I felt that I needed much more support and personal oversight, especially since I had heard that these teachings were very powerful. There would be risk involved in attempting such a spiritual path unaccompanied by a master; one could unbalance the mind and body. My disappointment was considerable.

However, the architecture was awe inspiring. Reduced to a tiny spec within a gigantic universe, I sat looking at the gigantic white stupa, considered to be the largest in India. The stupendous brilliant white dome cut the piercing blue sky magnificently. The towering golden Buddha which stood atop gleamed under the mid-day rays, projecting the light of his blessings over the expanse of the park. The architecture and statue served as an reminder of the monumental influence and benevolent effect of a liberated realized being, compared to the ordinary human ensconced within the pathos of subjective suffering. A huge statue of White Tara, the Mother of Compassion, sat on a gigantic multicolored lotus presiding over the entrance to the stupa grounds. The entire place radiated sacred blessings and emanated peace. I was happy just to sit on the bench and absorb the beauty and silence.

NEPAL

Boudhanath, Kathmandu

A Dream

The first morning after my arrival in Nepal, in the Tibetan community of Boudhanath in the capital of Kathmandu, I had a dream that included a special request. It had been a drenching night – a torrential downpour bouncing off corrugated tin roofs and winding its rivulets of sound through my restless sleep. I woke many times throughout the night, disturbed by the pounding of the rain against the window. Each time I awoke, I wondered how I would make my way through the muddy streets in the morning. I had given away

my trekking boots and only had open toed sandals. I finally woke up to the sound of a wailing baby and the dogs' incessant barking.

However, before I did, I remember dreams of monks, Tibetans, and lots of colorful activity. As I rose from the depths of sleep yet still held within the dream, a very old woman turned and looked me. Her gaze projected an awareness that nothing on earth in the material world is of any value, an awareness of the preciousness of this impermanent life. It was the knowing face of an ancient one. She was a nun, but at the same time looked like my maternal grandmother the last time I saw her before she died. Grandma was 93 at the time; lying in the hospital bed, all she wanted to do was to look deeply into my eyes and tell me how precious I was. This little nun's message was: "Walk with humbleness amongst these my people." She quietly directed me. The dream left a deep impression in my psyche, remaining with me after I woke up.

Now the cock was crowing. People were stirring into life. Night darkness was beginning to leave the sky as the light of dawn crept in. The long horns, blowing messages from the monasteries, were sounding and resounding the morning pujas. Preparations permeating the atmosphere with encouraging reminders that there was a way through the trouble and muddle by turning to Buddha with offerings.

A Holy Visit and Blessing

Later, bowing before His Holiness Sakya Trizin, the head of the Sakyapa sect, I couldn't take my eyes off his beautiful gold and turquoise ear rings dangling from his huge earlobes

that reminded me of the long ears of the Buddha depicted in paintings and statues. I had read that people of the Sakya clan had ears like that, but I thought that was thousands of years ago! His Holiness must belong to the same family lineage.

This was the last day of Sakya Trizin's yearly visit to Nepal; I was very fortunate to have heard from a monk in the street that he was here. Another golden opportunity to receive blessings at the beginning and as part of my pilgrimage.³⁹ I hadn't seen His Holiness for almost fifteen years, since he came to Victoria, and it was ten years since I had written him the letter that I also took to the Dalai Lama. Surprising to me, Sakya Trizin remembered, referred to the letter, and inquired about the situation back home. I wondered how omniscient these guys really were? Could he read my mind? At the time of his visit to the Dharma center, I had asked the simple question: "Are you enlightened?" He had responded negatively saying that he was just like me, on the same path but somewhat ahead. I had heard that enlightened masters were always modest and made light of their accomplishments. But as I knelt before him on the colorful Tibetan carpet, I wondered. Looking back, I was quite certain that many other people in the room had probably wanted to ask the same question. I was a fledgling at the time and hadn't taken Refuge vows yet, so, I wasn't bound by the same protocol.

39 Sakya Trizin is a tulku and rinpoche, a reincarnated master. The Tibetans believe that a tulku is a living embodiment of the Buddha and to receive blessings from such an auspicious person grants immeasurable merit and helps further one on the Path. Blessings such as this are considered part of a sacred pilgrimage, more important even than visiting sacred sites. The heads of the various sects are the most important manifestation of masters within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, believed to be actual manifestations of Dharmakaya and Sambhogakaya Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Seeing Sakya Trizin again, I felt honored to be in the presence of a great master. I presented him with pictures of my children which he blessed. He placed the white scarf around my neck and touched his forehead against mine as a blessing. I walked backwards continuing to face him, having been instructed not to turn my back to someone who was considered a 'living Buddha'. With my hands in prayer position at my heart, I continued to make my way slowly towards the door, bowing slightly. "Namaste and Tashi Delek."

Smiling happily as I left the room, I couldn't help wondering what sacred effect this would have on my psyche and on my spiritual progress. Unlike the educational process back home, in spiritual matters such as these, there is no way to measure the effect, success, or accomplishment of such an undertaking. The only way to assess such learning is to observe the effect as it manifests in daily life and relationship to other, hopefully with regards to compassionate intention and action.

Walking the Kora

"Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum . . ." One of the crowd, telling my mala,⁴⁰ chanting the secret mantra, circling the gigantic stupa with the

40 The mala or 'akshamala' is a rosary necklace made of 108 beads representing the same number of teachings of the Buddha in the Kangyur. It is used to recite prayers and count the number of recitations of a particular mantra, according to the deity practice selected (usually one round of 108 repetitions being a minimum). The mani or Sacred mantra is the most popular. Tibetans are rarely seen without their mala held in their right hand, clicking it along bead by bead as the sounds of their mantra are mouthed silently or uttered softly under their breath. Each bead is passed between the thumb and the forefinger, a process called 'telling' the mala. When the mala is not in use, it is usually wrapped around the left wrist or worn around the neck.

community of Tibetans gathering daily to do the kora. Circling round and round the stupa⁴¹ gathers merit and absolves one of impurities. No harm in that; in truth, I loved the ritual. I felt included, touched to be with these special people. Their hearts seemed open, vulnerable yet so faithful. They might not have a country any longer, but they have their faith and their holy father, the Dalai Lama. Here in Boudhanath, Tibetan Buddhism continues to thrive without fear of Chinese government repression.

However, word had it there was continued surveillance as the government here worked under the beneficence of the neighboring Chinese. They wanted to remain on good terms with China. Nepal is a small and unstable nation, due to the rising call for democracy. The fear of absorption by their powerful neighbor to the north is great. The Tibetan refugee predicament is tenuous in many ways. Fortunately, they were free to associate so I would be able to talk to them about their situation. I feared it would not be the same in Tibet, or rather, The Autonomous Region of Tibet.

An Auspicious Meeting

A tall dignified man in maroon robes and gold silk shirt was beckoning me to come over to him. He was obviously a lama because he didn't have the bearing of a monk. What did he want with me? I approached rather shyly. The Tibetan man beside him spoke English

⁴¹ The gigantic stupa in Boudhanath is one of the most famous and most frequently visited Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage sites. It is revered by both the Hindus and the Buddhists but its origin is Buddhist. It is said to contain the relics of the third Buddha of this time, (Buddha Shakyamuni being the fourth).

and said the Rinpoche wanted me to join him for tea in a nearby shop. Filled with curiosity and impressed that this man was a Rinpoche, I agreed.

Inside, I was introduced to Lobsang Rinpoche from Kham, Tibet. He was a 'tulku', a reincarnated master, acknowledged by the Dalai Lama. He had left his monastery in Tibet seven years ago and was now in Boudhanath serving as a doctor to Tibetan refugees in need of healing. He worked twelve hours a day and had just finished walking around the kora when he noticed me. Lobsang Rinpoche wanted to know if I would like to observe his healing work. As a Reiki master who also does healing, I welcomed this opportunity and spent the rest of the day spellbound as he saw one ailing person after another. He spent considerable time with each and seemed to do it all for a small donation, since refugees in Nepal are very poor.

His methods were varied. Each person was given a bit of tsampa, a mixture of barley flour, butter and a bit of water, and told to squeeze all their sickness into it. They did so, and returned it to him, telling the healer their plight, whereupon he laid his hands on their heads and chanted prayers. After sprinkling them with water, he took his bell and dorje, and in various mudra gestures, chanted and rang the bell. The energy in the room seemed particularly auspicious.

Patients seemed respectful and most often quite relieved when the treatment was finished. Apparently, his healing was quite successful and most often the people said their pain went away during the healing. One lady said that she had been coming for a week

with serious pain and that it was now completely gone. She lived with her sister in Lhasa and the two were going to return home soon.

Later that evening, I met with Rinpoche and the patient whose pain had been relieved. Her name was Drolma. She had just returned from four years in Boston where she had been a nanny. Suffering from various illnesses, she wanted to return to her mother's home in Lhasa. Rinpoche had asked her to serve as a translator as he had something important to share with me. He dictated a letter to me explaining that he was a 'tulku', a reincarnated master, who had known me in his past life. Apparently, I had been one of his teachers. He had great respect for me and wanted me to stay in Nepal to learn healing from him. In our last life, we had lived in the same monastery and had eventually worked together teaching.

I was dazed by this odd information, skeptical and suspicious. In my travels, I had learned that Asian men either wanted sex or money. Was this really an offer of pure intention or did this Rinpoche have a hidden agenda? I would soon be heading north, along the Friendship Highway into Tibet and so agreed to 'hang out' with him for a few days. The experience would be entertaining if nothing else. Perhaps I might learn something from the experience.

As it turned out, he did make sexual advances towards me and mentioned his need for a sponsor. I was reluctant have to further association with him, suspecting his sideways intentions. It is sad to see a person of such 'high level' origins reduced to begging and compromising himself, at the mercy of Western affluence. Without doubt, Rinpoche's work is worthy and necessary, as the poverty and disease of the Tibetan people in exile,

particularly in Nepal, is overwhelming. Any effort to help them deserves credit and support. If I had had the means, I would have gladly given him the money he needed. As it was, I had my project to attend to. Perhaps in the future I may be able to reconnect and further my desire to exercise compassionate action through undertaking an NGO project that would help him to set up his envisioned health clinic.⁴²

THE AUTONOMOUS REGION OF TIBET

Go to Tibet and see many places, as much as you can; then tell the world.
His Holiness the Dalai Lama. (Mayhew, 2008, p.12)

Overland Tour

Eh Ma Ho! The Tibetan guide told us we could get out of the land rover and take a look around. The sky was clear, the wind gusting strongly, tossing the lines of the prayer flags⁴³ to and fro. The red, yellow, blue, white, and green squares covered with prayers printed in black ink flapped merrily, casting their mantras for peace and compassion out into the mountain air, to travel down through the valleys, along the rivers, over the barley fields and

42 The last news via email (summer 2009) contained pictures of Rinpoche and Goldie Hawn, arm in arm, at a gala event in Germany. He had been asked to travel Europe and America to give healing and teachings. Obviously, he has found sponsors who recognize his abilities and are willing and able to further his work, at least out in the world. We have talked about his coming to Victoria as well as collaborating on a book to tell his story, in order to generate monies to continue his work in Nepal.

43 The 'Lung-ta' or prayerflag means windhorse which refers to a spiritual animal that is thought to possess the power to carry blessings to the world and touch all sentient beings – flying in the swiftness of the wind and with the vigor of the horse. Prayerflags keep the prayers for compassion scattered throughout the universe. They are everywhere throughout Tibetan Buddhist territory and signify the victory of the Dharma and protection from harm and evil spirits. These little squares of bright or faded colors of the elements – yellow (earth), white (ether or space), blue (sky), green (water) and red (fire) are hung on high mountain passes, on rooftops, on poles, in front of monasteries, and off balconies. Also, they may be paper squares with pictures of the windhorse or printed prayers, released to the wind because the wind is the only element able to communicate with the others.

beyond. Some string lines looked quite old and tattered with just bits and pieces of the gossamer strands left hanging and yet, they persistently sent blessings into the turbulent air.

It was freezing because we were at an elevation of 5000 meters on the first pass into Tibet from Nepal. We had just left tropical rain forests and raging waterfalls behind at the border in Kodari, on the Nepalese side. Now, stretched out in front of us at this point on the Friendship highway, was a vast terrain of alpine valleys and hills. It looked like another planet. The skies were so blue with puffy cumulus clouds towering magnificently in the incredibly vast space above. Eagles soared high overhead, circling around, in and out of the invisible blessings-fields of the prayer flags. There were shards of bones scattered everywhere and yak skulls lying around. Some of them had painted designs or Tibetan writing on them. And mani stones were strewn about, again with prayers etched on them.

The ardent devotion of the Tibetans was evident. The view was spectacular, but more impressively, the sacred atmosphere of the sight struck me with awe. I felt privileged to be present, as if something ancient and alive was being preserved high on the top of these hills. What a remarkable entrance into the famous and mysterious Land of the Snows.

Overlooking the edge of the Tibetan Plateau and standing on top of the Tong La Pass I shouted: “Tashi Delek, greetings to all far and wide!” and hurried back to the vehicle where it was much warmer and out of the icy gale. Waiting for the others, I sat musing about the possible sight of Chomolongma (Everest) that was promised next on our itinerary.

Lhatse

Our first overnight stop was at a Tibetan hotel managed by Chinese people. The room was very old, painted with colorful Tibetan designs on the ceilings and walls. I wondered if this hotel might be a remnant of an old monastery, so similar was the interior design.⁴⁴ There was a cupboard with a shrine. A glass case enclosed statues of deities and offerings of incense along with Chinese yuan (currency). The room was very cold and the beds peculiar, just mattresses on wooden boxes covered with old faded hand-woven carpets, again bearing Tibetan designs. The humble room had one dim light dangling from a cord, water in a bowl for washing, and a big thermos full of hot water with a few packages of jasmine tea. There must have been holes between the slats making up the walls because the wind could be felt blowing through. It was not going to be a warm night.

The German woman, who was my room mate and traveling companion, was suffering from altitude sickness, vomiting regularly into the cheap enamel bowl we had found in the cupboard. She had a terrible headache and wanted me to stay with her. I was torn between showing care and loyalty to a stranger or joining the others to have some supper in the hotel restaurant. What to do, as I had never been one of a tour before? In the end, I stayed with her, missing my dinner. Lhatse was in the middle of nowhere, and the hospital was in the next town which we were supposed to arrive at sometime tomorrow afternoon.

⁴⁴ During the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976) the Chinese destroyed an estimated 6,254 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. It is quite possible that the remains of old monasteries are now being used for other purposes, in this case a Chinese hotel.

As it was, Ulma proved to be a very demanding and unpleasant traveling companion, arguing continually with the other German couple in our land rover. I tried to help her as much as I could because she suffered from altitude sickness for the duration of the tour. Things came to a climax in Lhasa five days later, after an argument about the cleaning lady who wanted to enter our room. Ulma, who wanted to sleep, began to yell at me. Her rage culminated in physical abuse, at which point I decided to take a private room with no regrets about parting ways.

Shigatse

Why was I crying? I just couldn't seem to stop. Tears were streaming down my cheeks and I was struggling to contain myself as I hadn't brought any tissue. I was standing in front of a huge golden Buddha, the tallest statue in the country, in one of the most famous monasteries in Tibet. Mucus was pouring from my nose and my eyes were so wet I could barely see. Visibility was scarce anyways because there was very little light cast from the huge butter lamps perched in front of the statue. No one seemed to be paying much heed so I felt free to let my emotions flow. Maybe I was shedding all the old karma of my past lives and depositing it here in this ancient monastery, absolving myself along with all the other pilgrims who were filling the butter lamps with their offerings of yak butter from home. My tears were just as sacred and it was all that I had to offer that might have been of any consequence to the great Buddha in front of me.

I was so overwhelmed by the extraordinary atmosphere of the shrine room at the Tashilunpo Monastery in Shigatse, the seat of the Panchen Lama (next in line after the Dalai Lama) that I couldn't help crying. I later learned that the great statue was that of the future Buddha, Maitreya, the embodiment of charity. No wonder I was so touched with emotion! That and the incredibly strange, otherworldly atmosphere that seemed to transport me outside of myself into a mystical dimension. The sights, sounds, smells . . . another author expressed it so perfectly: "There is not much light and the air is steeped in that *foetor thibetius* compounded of butter, various kinds of incense, human odors, a metaphysical-pastoral combination which one has to smell only once to recall forever" (Maraini, 2000, p. 249). My sentiments exactly!

I moved aside to let some Tibetan pilgrims pour some butter into the butter lamps as an offering.⁴⁵ I placed a khata at the bottom of the statue and a few Chinese yuan at Maitreya's feet remembering the Dalai Lama's directive not to over stress the external things. The primary focus must be on interior development. Therefore, the careful preparation and offering of objects is merely a manifestation of the underlying intention for the welfare of all beings. That is what gives value to the offering and what will bring about change.

⁴⁵ The altar or shrine of the Tibetan Buddhist monastery is the highlight of every monastery. Monasteries throughout India, Nepal, and Tibet house statues of the Buddha that range sometimes up to three stories tall, rising through multiple floors. Usually the Buddha is accompanied by a representation of Chenrezig, Tara, and a deity protector such as Mahakala. The statues are elaborately painted in basic gold with multicolors for decoration. Visually these statues are stunning and awe inspiring. Beneath the statues in front are offerings of tormas (cone shapes made of barley flour and butter, or with colored circular shapes to mark the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha). Other offerings include gems, ritual objects, food, fruit, flowers, clear water in the seven ritual bowls, and light shed by candles and butter lamps. Often ceremonial scarves and money are placed at the feet of the Buddha by visiting pilgrims who come to pray, receive blessings and accrue merit.

The other tour members had gone ahead. We had been told that a Tibetan guide would accompany us. I had hoped for a guided tour with an explanation as we went along. His idea was to deposit us at the wooden gates of the monastery, hand us our entrance tickets, and then leave us for the day. We were left to piece together our own stories.

Apparently, the Chinese had kidnapped the real Panchen Lama along with his family, when he was just a child. An alternate, a Chinese nominated Panchen Lama, had been selected years ago and was now in his late teens. Word had it that he was hardly ever at the monastery. However, after my touching episode at the temple, I made my way down and around the cobblestone steps to the edge of the old city. At the bottom of the narrow passage, I came upon a group of people standing behind some yellow plastic ribbon, partitioning off a courtyard in front of a red door, the entrance to a smaller monastery. I asked what everyone was doing and the man next to me, who obviously understood a little English, excitedly declared: “The Panchen Lama!” Regardless of his lack of authenticity, this Panchen Lama was still revered by the Tibetans, or at least by some of them. With the Dalai Lama in exile, this was the closest thing they had to a spiritual leader and a living saint. If the Dalai Lama is an embodiment of the Bodhisattva Chenrezig, the Panchen Lama is an incarnation of the Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Light for this degenerating age.

There he was! The Panchen Lama had just exited the red door and was standing not five meters from me! Dressed in the traditional monk's garb of maroon and yellow, he lifted his shaved head and looked directly at me. His eyes were kindly and full of consciousness.

Something seemed to snap in my brain and through his direct gaze came the words: “Don't be fooled by what they say about me. I am the REAL Panchen Lama. This consciousness cannot be harnessed. This may not be the original body I chose to reincarnate in, but I have transferred my consciousness into it regardless. My intention carries on!”

Where did those thoughts come from? Were they real? If they were, the meaning had great significance and far reaching consequences for the Tibetans. Would anyone believe me if I told them? Would the Dalai Lama? Honestly, I wasn't making it up! The respectable looking teenager emanated grace, authority, and learning, obviously well educated and established in his Buddhist practice, being well trained by his tutors. His countenance and bearing were regal and impressive. I wondered if what I had heard could possibly be true.

As it was, I was the only one of the tour to see His Holiness the Panchen Lama. No one seemed remotely interested that I had had a glimpse this holy personage. They all said that it wasn't the real one anyways. I chose to remain silent, as I seemed to be the only spiritually inclined one in the group. What I had been privy to seemed for my ears only, saved for a future time to be shared with those who had open minds to listen.

Gyantse

A monk who spoke English had explained it to me: the famous ancient stupa, the Kumbum, at the Palchor Monastery in Gyantse was a replica of a model brought to Tibet hundreds of years ago. It had been built in the 15th century. At that time, a lama from the monastery went to India, presumably to the great university at Nalanda, and was so

fascinated by the stupas, pagodas, or chortens in Tibet, (architectural structures that represent the five levels to enlightenment) that he made a model of one of the most impressive ones there and carried it back in his satchel, to be reconstructed here in Gyantse

This colossal octagonal chorten possessed six floors topped with a giant golden dome glinting in the sun. The brilliant steeple bore huge eyes that seemed to be looking out over the relative expanse with unprecedented knowledge and awareness. Watching, I felt a bit uncomfortable under its scrutinizing gaze. Maybe it was questioning my authenticity or intention at being there. A stranger in a strange land, I was beginning to wonder myself. I struck up a conversation with the friendly monk, partly because I was feeling awkward and alone in the foreign surroundings. The rest of the group had gone sight seeing earlier in the day.

The monk pointed past the yellow chrysanthemum bed covered with perching monarch butterflies, to the three remaining structures on the grounds. “This used to be a huge monastery complex housing thousands of monks. Much was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. It is now an empty shell sitting amidst a rock bed with only these few buildings left. There was so much art here – murals, statues, thangkas, mandalas . . . Now, all that remains are the grand temple, the Tsugla-Kang, the ancient chorten, Kum-Bum, and the Labrang, the abbot's lodging.”

I followed him past the well with its rustic pump and stooped into a narrow passageway that led to a very small room where an old man sat cross legged on a carpeted dais quite

low to the ground. A few peasant-like people were seated on the ground in front of him. He looked up smiling with very gentle eyes. I felt welcomed although we only stayed a couple of minutes. He wasn't accepting any further interviews.

Outside again, the monk continued: “The chorten represents the entire universe and is said to contain a hundred thousand replicas of the Buddha. Its steps rise up the progressive levels of illumination to the top, where at the summit sits the Lord of the Buddhist universe, the Adi Buddha, the Absolute, the beginning, the end, the All! You can climb up if you like. Most tourists do, taking pictures on their way. There are many beautiful statues and paintings still left intact.” He left me there, finding his way back to his residence where they were serving lunch.

I spent the next hour climbing up to the top of the stupa, resting at each level under the incredibly expansive blue skies, gazing out over the valley to view the ancient city wall climbing up the sides of the hills, over the steep cliffs, like the Great Wall of China, up to the old dzong or fortress that sat on the crest as if it were naturally emerging out of the rock, so well did it blend in with its surroundings. I ended my visit by doing the kora' walking around the base spinning the hundreds of large prayer wheels⁴⁶ that encircled the bottom level, 'telling' my beaded mala and chanting “Om Mani Padme Hum.”

46 The 'chos-kor' or prayer wheel is the ritual object most common and dear to the Buddhist pilgrim. It is a Buddhist way to continue to turn the doctrine and to keep the prayers for the well being of others in motion. The wheels appear in all sizes, can be seen in the hands of devout practitioners, perched in enclosures in remote mountainsides, lining the walls at the base of chortens or the outside of monastery walls. It is always a cylindrical body, usually metal or wood, carved with the Sacred Mantra, mystic emblems or prayers. It sits on a central axis which is attached either to a handle, as in the hand prayer wheels, or to a base as along the outer walls of sanctuaries. Wound around the central axis are printed

I felt very blessed and quite informed as I returned back through the old, over-arching wooden gates, back along the dusty road where the many road-stand hawkers sat, waiting to haggle over the tourist trinkets which they tried to pass off as ancient antiques of unacknowledged value. The tourist route continued on even into this mysterious land of the renowned Shangri-La. Today, the Old Tibet no longer exists except as memory held within its monastic ruins. I kept my entrance ticket for posterity. No telling what the future held for this unpredictable and paradoxical country and culture.

Nyetang – The Great Buddha

There are many self-manifesting' or 'self-arising' (rangjung) rocks and other objects to be found throughout Tibet. Usually they are images of the Buddha. These images are not carved; they are believed to grow out of rock surfaces of their own volition! Such phenomena have appeared for centuries on rocks and various other objects all over Tibet and are common knowledge to these people. In fact, Tibetans probably take them for granted or consider them natural occurrences. What is natural and ordinary for some cultures may be considered extraordinary or even miraculous to others.

Unknowingly, I was standing in front of a gigantic 'rangjung'. At the time, I didn't know anything other than what the tour guide had told us – that it was just a large rock with the Buddha carved and painted on it. Very few of the other land-roving passengers had

mantras of sacred prayers, up to a mile long. One spin alone could send millions of prayers out into the universe. The wheel is always rotated clockwise while chanting 'Om Mani Padme Hum'.

disembarked, not bothering to come over to view the spectacle. After all, it was just another image of the Buddha and I suspected that they were quite fed up seeing the same images of the Buddha painted on the walls and shrines of the places we had already visited. I wasn't sure what exactly my fellow passengers were looking for in Tibet but it sure wasn't spirituality. At least, it apparently didn't seem so. There was just one other traveler who accompanied me across the road; he was taking snapshots.

As for myself, I had resumed my newly acquired habit, standing in front of the Buddha bawling my eyes out. What was it about him that had that effect on me? I remained caught in the penetrating gaze of the Buddha towering in front and over me. The rock painting seemed to jut out of the wall about 15 centimeters and was painted in the bright colors of the Buddhas seen in the murals, thangkas, and statues – gold body, bright cobalt blue hair, and orange monk robes, sitting in the meditation posture holding the blue vase of immortality in one hand while touching the earth with the other. I stood still, observing not only the painting but myself, trying not to be too judgmental or embarrassed about my overtly emotional condition. I looked over to the others across the road waiting by the vehicles. I felt their impatience to get going. The other traveler began to make his way over to them but I remained standing, fixed, held within the Buddha's gaze.

I took a white khata out of a large Plexiglas box and hung it on a chip of rock on the Buddha's leg, at the base of the statue. As I did so, I felt a strong infusion of energy and I heard a voice inside of my head. This was becoming a familiar experience. As if it were the Buddha, the authoritative voice spoke: "I cannot be destroyed. I am immaterial. I live

in and under this land. The Chinese may try to blanket me but my intention is stronger than theirs. I will always remain in Tibet. Regardless of what it looks like on the surface, the intention of the Buddha underlies the will of this land and the people. It will survive and vanquish the enemy of ignorance until the end of time.”

“Oh my God!” I thought. “What/who did I just hear? Was that really the Buddha? No one, but no one would believe this story – first the Panchen Lama, and now the Buddha!” I wondered for a moment about my true identity. Why was I witnessing and hearing this? I mean, if there really were such a thing as reincarnation, then maybe I had been incarnated to receive this message and take it out to the world! Anyway, no one was going to believe this, probably not even the Dalai Lama himself!

Across the street, people were sitting in the land rovers waiting for me to join them. The guide was shouting at me to speed it up. I reluctantly turned away from the statue and another puzzling experience, and hurried over to my impatient tour group. I managed one last glance at the mysterious Buddha as we sped off to reach our final destination, the ancient capital of Tibet.

Lhasa

Barkor Square

I stood planted in the center of Barkor Square gazing at the purple gray slopes of the encircling mountainous hills and at the sun rising behind the Jokhang Temple, the holiest temple in Tibet. Light streaming between the billowing white clouds and across the

emerging blue expanse was hitting the golden corrugated rooftops and gleaming spires. Ricocheting rays of brilliance streamed back into the sky. The rising sun provided an impressive backdrop for the silhouette of the towering Wheel of Law and the two presiding deer, the ancient emblem of the Tibetan monastery. In front, on each side stood two gigantic bottle-shaped incense burners, 'sanggangs', billowing fragrant smoke into the crisp morning air. A pair of colorful flagpoles bound with hundreds of sacred prayerflags, 'lungtas', towered in front of the two sanggangs. Mesmerized, I watched a parade of Tibetans moving in the same direction, circumambulating past the front of the temple, placing juniper branches and other herbs into the burners, touching their foreheads to the flag poles, twirling prayer wheels, telling beaded malas, chanting mantras, and occasionally stopping to do full prostrations in front of the gigantic red doors at the entrance. Pulled into the momentum of the communal round, I retrieved the mala from my wrist and joined the circling stream to complete ritual 'kora', along with the others.

The Market

A while later, more practical affairs took over; Tibetans turned their attention to the bustle of shopping activity. The market stretched around the foot of the Jokhang, in and out of the narrow cobblestone streets of the Old Lhasa. Barkor Bazaar, centered within the medieval maze, remained the heart and pulse of the Tibetan community. Only in the marketplaces were citizens able to escape the scrutiny and surveillance of Chinese authorities.

Fascinated, I spent the morning wandering the dusty streets of the old city, taking time to merge with people, and of course, to shop. There was such a variety of items! Around the temple, all the accouterments of the sacred as well as tacky souvenirs were displayed in full view for the pilgrim and the tourist: malas, incense, prayerflags, prayer wheels, ferocious protective door knockers, yak skulls, bells, thangkas, paintings, jewelry. There were also colorful shawls and felt cowboy hats to protect the skin and eyes from the glaring sun. I sauntered along the dirty alleyways stopping to take pictures of the carts of yak butter, sacks of barley flour, jars of yogurt, baskets of pieces of hard white cheese and eggs, and multicolored vegetable stalls heaped with cucumbers, green onions, white radishes, purple egg plants, red tomatoes, and orange carrots.

People were sitting on the ground, women nursing babies, old men leaning on their old wooden walking sticks, women and children with baskets of wares between their legs. Above, the tall princely Kham men (men of the Eastern province of Tibet) were milling together talking business and politics. Their dress and mannerisms are colorful – strutting in their leather cowboy boots, long fur-lined black coats with one arm cast off, dangling over the belt at their waist. Their shiny black hair is braided with turquoise, coral and yak bone. Women are also fascinating: Dressed in traditional attire, their hair is arranged in massive tiny braids and splendidly adorned with elaborate silver, turquoise, coral and occasional amber beads and head pieces. Married women wear colorful striped aprons over their 'chubas' (plain dresses). It was a feast for the eyes and food for thought.

I lost track of time so entranced was I in the exotic display of this vibrant culture, a culture rapidly dying within the strategic and systematic Chinese policy of assimilation. I felt my heart wrench as I considered the prospect of the demise of these centuries-old traditions. I was so deeply saddened that I had to turn away from the crowd to hide my tears. A culture was fading before my eyes.

A Home Visit

Coincidence, mystery, serendipity, call it what you will; it makes me wonder if there really was a divine hand stirring the pot. I turned in the crowd and there, over my left shoulder, was Drolma, one of the sisters I had met in Boudhanath, the one who had translated for Rinpoche at the restaurant. She was pushed up against the old wall of the temple, looking as attentive as the rest of us who were all waiting to see the ancient lama inside the Ramoche Monastery giving empowerments and teachings. The Ramoche Temple had been built to house one of the two remaining Buddha statues from the Nalanda University. The other one, the Jowo, is in the Jokhang Temple. This lama is believed to be one of the last remaining masters in Tibet. Most of the others have been killed or fled into exile. I went over to Drolma; we hugged and then resumed our patient wait for the lama to come out. The crowd was reverent and quiet with expectation and respect.

Eventually, a wizened bent old man exited through a tiny wooden doorway. I would have had to stoop quite low to get through it. Many elderly Tibetan people are quite short. However, it seemed that the people from Kham and the younger people were much taller.

The lama was bald on the top with a long white braid hanging down his back. His hair, long stringy beard, and scholarly demeanor reminded me of the porcelain statues found in Chinatown, back home in Victoria. He looked very wise. Everyone was bowing and prostrating on the ground, whispering and chanting as he passed. It was very touching how deeply these people revered their spiritual masters, and were quite unselfconscious about showing their respect in public.

Afterwards, Drolma took me home to meet her mother and her aunt who had been a nun before the Cultural Revolution, when she had been forced to break her vows. It hadn't been too long ago (thirty or forty) years since the time when over 10,000 people had been slaughtered in these very streets, the monks and nuns forced by the Chinese soldiers to do all sorts of unimaginable things in public to break their vows, including having sex in front of everyone. Eye witnesses report that the streets were swimming in blood with dead and wounded bodies everywhere, particularly those of the clergy. I looked around as we walked down the street trying to imagine the horror. We walked past monks sitting on the sidewalks chanting and hoping for donations to rebuild their monasteries in other parts of the country. The crowded streets were filled with food carts, stalls selling yak butter, dentist chairs with patients sitting in them, everything all jumbled up yet making a strange sort of sense.

I found it hard to imagine how these people could function so peacefully beneath the surveillance of the Chinese military that was so highly visible. The Dalai Lama stressed the need for peace and loving kindness both within and outside his homeland. From what I

saw, it took a lot of courage and faith to follow his direction and live under the present circumstances. The very survival of the Tibetan people depended on this practice of peace.

Even though it was risky, Drolma took me to her family house. They lived in a typical gray stone building that one entered through a red door with a brass handle. We crossed a courtyard filled with pots of flowers and a communal water tap, to a door on the far side. There were two rooms, the living room and the mother's residence. The courtyard served as the common area. The house had the usual carpeted wooden benches along the walls, serving as seats as well as beds. There was an elaborate shrine at the far end of the main room; though small, the room had everything one might need. Drolma's sister Tashi, her mom and her aunt, both very old and very sweet, were sitting in the shrine room. Their eyes shone with happiness and curiosity as they welcomed me into their home.

I settled myself onto one of the carpeted benches and looked around as Tashi went to fetch refreshments. I noticed a picture of the Dalai Lama on the shrine and asked about it; I thought his picture was forbidden. Drolma put a finger to her lips implying that we couldn't talk about it – the walls had ears. I imagine they had brought it with them from Nepal. I was graciously served tea and cookies just as if I were visiting my women friends at home. Women sitting around doing what women do, talking and enjoying each other's company. I sensed however, an underlying nervousness. Later, Drolma told me that there were rules about entertaining foreigners. They should have asked permission from the authorities. Drolma, coming from America, ignored the rules, but her mother and aunt were somewhat apprehensive. Because Drolma was doing some translation work at the embassy and had

some friends who would help her if needed, she seemed unafraid to entertain foreign guests.

As we sat drinking Tibetan butter tea, I was aware of the shy glances of the mother and aunt. They seemed quite pleased that I was there. I wondered how many westerners they had entertained in their home before. Probably not many. I'm not sure how much of the conversation they understood but they smiled all the same. When asked how my visit was going so far, I couldn't help mention my very emotional experiences in the shrine rooms and in front of the Buddha statues. The sisters agreed that this was very auspicious. Many Tibetans were moved to tears in the same way. Considered the 'burning off karma' of past lifetimes, it was a process of purification that must happen on the road to enlightenment. News to me! Then I told them about the voices at the rock. No one seemed surprised. Apparently, this was not an unusual experience to them, nor was the Buddha's message. The most surprising thing about the conversation was that everyone knew that Buddha image on the rock was self-emanating. They proceeded to explain the 'whys and wherefores' of 'rangjung' in Tibet. Next, I thought, I'll probably be introduced to a yeti and expected to shake hands nonchalantly!

Showing gracious hospitality, the women made sure I felt welcome and didn't leave hungry. As we parted company that evening, the mother and aunt (I was never told their names) asked me to walk the kora around the Potala with them the next day. It would involve an arduous three hour trek up, down and around the great palace of the Dalai Lama. I wondered how the old women would manage it. I was told the mother had done it every

morning of her life since she was a small child. A great many old people do. However, the young people are not as interested in keeping up the old ways. I accepted the invitation, and agreed to meet them at 7:00 the next morning. Their house was only a few blocks from my hotel and would be easy for me to find.

Old Lhasa

Many times walking around the kora, old people, particularly very old women, would grab my arm and with tears in their eyes, pull on my sleeve and say “Dalai Lama, Dalai Lama.” They would put their hands in prayer position and pleadingly request a picture. Such images were deemed contraband by the Chinese authorities. Following regulations, I hadn't brought any with me. There were serious repercussions for those who disobeyed and were caught. I didn't relish a trip to the police station and so had complied with the law. However, I shared their sadness, aware that rights and privileges I enjoyed were regarded as treason to others in this occupied country.

Witnessing the undying devotion many Tibetans feel for their leader and spiritual father was a lesson to me. They look to him as their savior, with such fervor and faith. I had heard it, read about it, but hadn't really known it in my heart. Now I did. I feared the immense collective grief and disappointment that would be experienced if the Dalai Lama were to ultimately fail in his mission to free Tibet. Indeed, this seems inevitable.

Ancient Monasteries

Parading through Drepung, Sera, and Ganden, one historical monastery after another, they all began to merge into one. These sacred and auspicious sites house many of the remaining treasures and relics, so important to the Tibetan Buddhist. The monasteries themselves are mere shells of the bustling old communities that existed before the Chinese invasion, monasteries that played a significant role in the social, political, and religious life of the Tibetan people. Now, only a few monks remain to keep up the sites so that they would be presentable to the tourists. Some teaching and practice was taking place but nothing like in the past when thousands of monks were trained from early childhood, educated from elementary school up to the Doctoral Degrees in Buddhism for those who were interested and willing. As for me, I felt 'monasteried' out by the time I had made the rounds. I would save the Jokhang, the most sacred temple in Tibet, until the end of my sojourn here.

Tourism to the Autonomous Region of Tibet is flourishing. China has promoted Lhasa as the number one tourist attraction in China. There is a big brass plaque beneath the enormous statue of the two golden Yaks, in the middle of Central Road to attest this fact. With the millions of national tourists traveling within China every year now that it is so prosperous, the monasteries are a growing source of income. Entrance fees to these holy sites are comparatively steep for Asia, ranging in prices comparable to the museums and tourist attractions at home. To think, if a million people entered the Potala (the Dalai Lama's winter home and monastery) every year at twenty dollars a head . . .

On my Buddhist pilgrimage to all these important places, I had come in contact with all the art and symbols that I had been exposed to at home. The images and symbols were everywhere. The elaborate opulence of the work, the statues, the thangkas, the murals that covered every wall was amazing and deeply moving. Over and over again, tears streamed down my cheeks as I stood before gigantic Buddha statues. The aura of shrine rooms within the darkness lit up by butter lamps, huge brass bowls filled with yak butter and a burning wick, the incense, khatas and money offerings at the Buddha's feet, moved me beyond anything I had ever felt before. I was filled with wonder and sacred humility, a fleck of dust landing in a moment of time. I experienced both my significance and insignificance simultaneously. In the face of this grandeur, what was the actual meaning of my life? What was I doing with my time that could compare to the greatness and compassion of this almighty being that had lived so long ago, but whose intention is still so grand and influential in the present?

Sky Burial

The O Dan Hotel is located in the center of old Lhasa. I was sipping on a steaming cup of sweet mild tea in the Tibetan restaurant, thinking about something I had read about not fearing the strangeness of Tibet but rather allowing the self to be embraced (Ash, 1990, p.74). It seemed appropriate as I listened to a tour guide explain the custom of a 'sky burial'. I had read about the funerary rites of the Tibetan people and was particularly

interested in observing this tradition. I wanted to see one but it wasn't going to be as easy as I thought.

The Tibetans bury their dead in many ways – ground burial, water burial, celestial burial, and cremation. However the celestial or sky burial, known as the 'Jhator', is most common. After a person dies, the body is wrapped in a white cloth and set in a corner of a room. For three to five days monks chant scriptures over the corpse which is then taken to a rocky platform, usually on a hill behind the local monastery or beside a lake. 'Rogyapas' (body breakers) prepare the body for burial and the undertaker offers pieces of flesh to huge vultures that circle the expansive skies of Tibet. Vultures are considered sacred because they play an important part in the sky burial and because they don't harm small creatures.

Burial follows ancient tradition, carried out with appropriate ceremonial actions and mantras. Lamas are especially trained for this task, presiding over the funeral rite. It might seem gruesome to the Western mind but we may think of it as a clean and healthy way to support nature, not leaving too many traces of the past behind. And it underscores in very clear form, a fundamental separation between material body and soul/ consciousness.

According to Tibetan Buddhism, a body may remain as a food offering but the spirit takes 49 days to leave the earthly sphere and be reborn, unless of course, the person has achieved enlightenment and successfully moved through the 'Bardo', the afterlife experience which takes place between death and rebirth. Then, the liberated spirit goes to the Pure Lands (land of the Buddhas) such as Dewachen in the West, the land of Amitabha. The remaining corpse is merely a carcass of meat and bones to be disposed of as quickly

and efficiently as possible. The Jhator is a reflection of the heart of Buddhism, compassion. The word 'jhator' literally means 'giving alms to the birds' and is considered an act of charity and compassion.

“It is impossible for me to help you with your request. It is no longer allowed. If I take you to the Sera Monastery, one of the few remaining sites where sky burial takes place, the monks might beat you off with sticks. That has been happening since last spring. Observers, especially Westerners, are not welcome there.”

“Why?” I disappointedly asked the guide.

“Because the Chinese released a documentary last spring supporting the theory that Tibetans are cannibals who eat their dead!” He whispered vehemently. It was obvious that this was painful to him.

I gasped with horror and disbelief. “How so? That's outrageous!”

“Well,” he continued softly “nevertheless, it happened. Somehow, a film crew got onto a sky burial site. Usually cameras aren't allowed. They filmed a close-up view of the ritual and at the end, when all the entrails were lifted up to the sky by the presiding lama and he was chanting mantras to call vultures to him to come eat the special remains, the camera filmed it in a way that looked like he was eating it himself. Or, possibly it was all a staged event using actors for the purpose of supporting this theory of cannibalism. This was broadcast all over China and maybe has even got out into the world, putting Tibetans in a very bad light. The Chinese are known to have done this before to justify controls that they put on our people and of course, for propaganda against us. The Chinese people only know

what they are shown and taught by their government.” He finished with a sigh. “Who knows why else they don't like us, and treat us as secondary citizens.”

Looking extremely sad and defeated, he lifted his cup to take a sip of tea. Then in a very soft voice, after looking over his shoulder he whispered, “That is why it would be extremely dangerous for you as well as for me. Chinese officials would know that I am trying to refute their claim and get information out to the West. I might be put in jail and you, if you are not beaten by the monks, might be questioned by the authorities. I'm sorry, but I can't risk it. I hope that you understand.” I nodded that I did, feeling quite sobered by this reality check.

That was that. No Sky Burial. We sat sipping tea, eating momos (Tibetan dumplings), and chatting congenially for the next while, surrounded by the eight auspicious symbols that were painted brightly on the saffron yellow walls of the Tibetan restaurant.

The Potala Palace

Giuseppe Tucci was an Italian scholar of Himalayan arts and philosophies who traveled to Tibet in the early 20th Century. Traveling with him was photographer Fosco Maraini, who, in 1951, described the Potala as having “grown out of its rock like a diamond secured to its setting” (2000, p. 284) with its central red body and above it, sparkling “golden domes and pinnacles” (p. 257). The Potala, built between 1645-1649, by the fifth Dalai Lama, is yet a magnificent palace that as Maraini wrote “marvelously expresses the final, immutable, hierarchical feeling of Tibetan civilization” (p. 257). Even today when Tibetan

culture and civilization is being subjugated and assimilated by a dominant culture, the palace remains extraordinarily impressive. But its leadership of over four centuries is gone.⁴⁷

I could understand why the Potala Palace was called the Abode of the Gods, situated high above the city of Lhasa, towering on a level of the clouds. I felt high enough to be flying with the dakinis or whatever other deities might be around. It felt glorious to be up there but also sad. Once this was the winter palace of the 'god king', the Living Buddha, the Dalai Lama, a place full of life and intrigue. Now it is an empty shell, a museum of the past, a revenue-generating tourist site for the coffers of the Chinese government.

In Tibetan mythology, Potala is the mountain palace where Chenrezig dwells, in another realm or divine dimension, and thus where Compassion reigns. As yet, I hadn't encountered much compassion while visiting this earthy palace of the gods, just impatience from Chinese guards determined to rush me through. I was the last visitor of the day and they wanted to close the doors and get home to supper. I guess I couldn't blame them.

As I stood in the middle courtyard overlooking the city, watching the sun cast its last rays across the expanse of the valley and over magenta hills, I disregarded icy stares of the army guards and took my time to savor the experience. I wasn't going to succumb to their pressure, after all, this might be my one and only visit to the Potala.

47 In 1578 the third head of the new order of the Gelugpa sect, Sonam Gyatso, was given the name Dalai Lama meaning 'ocean of wisdom' by the Mongolian ruler Altyn Kahn. He also bestowed the title of 1st and 2nd Dalai Lama posthumously to the two past heads of the order. It is at this juncture in history that the Dalai Lama and the Gelugpa religious order enter the political arena in a leadership role.

Aggravating as it might have seemed to them, I wanted to go around the Dalai Lama's rooms twice. I felt entitled because I had paid my twenty dollars, a considerable amount. The first time I went through his chambers and meeting rooms I (once again) couldn't stop crying. My tears prevented me from seeing much of anything. They did agree to let me go again. The second time round I took note of everything. Something in me wanted to touch the walls, the tapestries, the murals, to tactile-ly absorb the experience so that it would live in my body. It was a strange feeling, familiar, a recognition. Had I previously lived here in another lifetime? ⁴⁸ I determined to completely absorb my visit, treasure it as a gift for someone. For whom, I did not know. It all felt very strange and a bit paranormal. There were ghosts of memory meeting the subtle emanating energy of everything around me. Hard to explain. Whatever had happened, at some time, or in some dimension, was a living experience, not the voyeuristic experience of a regular tourist.

⁴⁸ Tibetan Buddhists believe that death is not an end but the beginning of another round of existence characterized by suffering. Human beings are caught in the cycle of life and suffering until we attain awakening which is the goal of Buddhist practice. There are six realms of existence – hell, hungry ghosts, animals, human, demi-gods, and gods. It is only on the human plane that consciousness can realize itself, hence the preciousness of human life. Due to the nature of karma or cause and effect of our thoughts and actions, whether positive or negative, the course of life is influenced. At death the balance of a being's karma will determine the realm in which they will be reborn.

Norbulingka

The next day at Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's summer palace,⁴⁹ was an experience very similar to the Potala, just in another location. I made sure to bring lots of tissues this time, knowing what to expect. This time, I was able to control my salty streams a bit better and the experience was clearer, less emotional but not less touching. After I made my way around the grounds, gardens, and shrine room, I entered his personal residence with curiosity and a bit of trepidation. I found that feeling a bit surprising. I thought about the history of the place and about 1959 when he made his escape from Tibet into India.

Again, everything felt familiar. I seemed to know my way around and recognized furniture, rugs, and objects as if I were personally connected to them! Again, I wanted to touch and feel in every way that I could so that the experience would live in my body as well as my mind. I didn't want to miss one iota of the precious experience. I saw where the Dalai Lama slept, prayed, and met with people both within his personal and public chambers. I sat where he had prayed, completing my mala and introducing the vibrations of Om Mani Padme Hum into the atmosphere. There were no guards present this time, allowing me the freedom of a private and personal meeting with the past without the discomfort of surveillance. I was glad to be alone.

⁴⁹ Norbulingka, meaning 'jewel park,' built in 1755, is the place where various Dalai Lamas built their summer residences. There are woods and a little lake on the grounds. The present Dalai Lama built his residence, the New Summer Palace in 1956. It was from here that the Dalai Lama made his escape in 1959. All the palaces were damaged in the artillery firing that happened after his flight. At the time, the compound was surrounded by 30,000 Tibetans determined to defend their spiritual leader. There has been some restoration but the grounds are presently neglected. At the time of my visit, the Chinese were building a high stone wall in front of the park and entrance so that it would not be visible from the road.

That was until I heard a voice. The same voice I heard at the rock. I was sitting in the public chamber, looking up at the raised dais that had once held the living body of, according to the Tibetans, the greatest man alive, imagining him sitting there teaching and giving empowerments. The air was thick; there was not much light, but I could smell the burning butter candles although there were none about. I could hear the horns of Tibetan ceremony, I could imagine the people filing past offering their white khatas and receiving blessings of the auspicious vase topped with peacock feathers which is used in the empowerment ritual. I could hear monks chanting . . . and then, I heard that strong directive voice penetrate the space and enter my brain.

“It is OK. You have got what you came here for. You can go home now. Go home and mingle. Go home and share what you have seen and heard. Go! Go with MY BLESSING.”

As I made my way down the path behind the Potala, trying to get to the bottom before it got dark, I wondered how long I would have to wait to get a seat on the new train I had heard so much about, from Lhasa to Chengdu or Beijing.⁵⁰

I was scheduled to leave two days later. That left me one day to visit the Jokhang and pay my respects to the Jowo Buddha, the oldest and most famous image of the Buddha in

50 The new Qinghai-Tibet train line is the world's highest railway with much of it being above 4000m. Half the track lies on permafrost. Many environmental concerns have been raised along with the Tibetan's concern about the cultural impact that so many tourists and immigrants will have on the demographics of Lhasa and the local environs. The Chinese plan to import (by train) large numbers of Han Chinese from other parts of the country to occupy the new high rises presently being built, with the intention of marginalizing the Tibetans into a second class minority within their own territory.

Tibet. Then, I would meander the streets of my beloved Lhasa mingling with the Tibetans, my favorite people.

The Jokhang

Standing atop the roof of the Jokhang or Tsulhakhang Temple, perched adjacent to the large Golden Deer and the Wheel of the Law, wishing I were a bird, I thought how from this vantage point, the ancient city seemed truly divine. In the distance, the white and maroon Potala palace towered over the entire area, a mythical mountain-palace of the gods, so majestic and mystical, reflecting brilliant sun off gilded rooftops. Surrounded by gorgeous hills, the landscape seemed transcendent – broad clear blue skies, gigantic white cumulus clouds billowing overhead – so easy to form parallels to divinity. If only I could take off and glide upwards into the heavenly expanse!

I had just paraded along with the daily tourist stream, in and out of rooms and passageways of the temple, up the narrow wooden stairways to various levels paying my respects and receiving blessings from the multitudinous Buddhas that bedecked the halls and walls of this sacred place. Of course, all the other images were no match for the sacred Jowo Buddha. I spent about half an hour in the shrine room, sitting on the attendant monk's seat, not sure if that were a 'faux pas' or not, considering monks vows and all. As the seat was vacant and because there was no other place to sit, I took advantage of the opportunity and had a meditation in the presence of Jowo.

The Jowo Buddha image is one of two ancient statues brought to Tibet from China in the seventh century. It is traditionally believed that the Chinese princess Wen Cheng, one of two consorts of King Songsten Gampo, brought it with her from Changan. The other image, brought by the Nepalese princess, Bkrikuti Devi, resides in the smaller Ramoche temple near by.

Most of the decoration around the Buddha had been restored because various designs of dragons and flowers looked distinctly Chinese.⁵¹ At first, I felt offended but afterwards thankful that the actual image of the Buddha was authentic. The Cultural Revolution had wreaked havoc with this temple and many of its sacred relics were destroyed. It is reported that the army used machine guns to shoot and shatter many of the sacred ancient objects. It is also said that the Chinese used the temple as a barn for pigs. As for the monks and other clergy, most of them were killed.

I bathed in the opulent atmosphere – absorbing the light, aura, fragrance, wealth and richness offered through the abundant gold, jewels, silks, butter lamps, and incense. Another precious sacred shrine that seemed to penetrate my cellular structure, to transport me further into the depth of my being-ness. Never had I experienced such holiness, not even in various cathedrals and churches that I had visited in Europe. I just seem to have a far deeper natural affinity with the Buddhist symbolism and iconography than that of Christianity and Catholicism, the religion of my birth-culture. I wonder why?

51 This is also an Eastern Tibetan style and might not have been so misplaced or inappropriate as I first experienced it. Apparently, Tibetan art, particularly in the East, was strongly influenced by Chinese artistic stylization, just as it has been influenced by Nepalese art in the south and Kashmiri in the west.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHINA

Chengdu

I elected to go to China because I wanted to have a first hand impression of the Chinese people themselves, as opposed to accepting a negative judgment due to past and present political/historical circumstances. Coming up from Nepal, I was first struck by the oppressed reality of the Tibetans under the close surveillance of the Chinese army. The consequent impression was negative and left a bad taste in my mouth as I witnessed this serious social injustice.

After a two-day train ride on China's feat of technology, the new rapid overland train, I arrived in Chengdu. I was fortunate to avoid altitude sickness, as the train goes over ice fields and climbs to high altitudes. It was a strange ride in various ways. Funny how I feel so comfortable with Tibetans but Chinese seem so foreign to me. On my train ride, I met no one who spoke English. I got the impression I wasn't welcome. And after Nam-sto Lake, everything was barren, the land completely stripped of trees. The beauty of the Tibetan plateau had vanished into a No Man's land. Throughout the entire trip, I never saw one animal.

I was relieved to arrive in Chengdu where I was picked up by a driver of Sam's Guest House and taken to Holly's Hostel in the heart of the Tibetan section. I had previously arranged it on the INTERNET after reading about their hospitality and helpfulness in my planet guide. Luckily, I had a three- month visa for China and a multiple entry six-month

visa to India. I felt a need to go back there to receive teachings and blessings before concluding my journey and catching my flight back home.

As it was, I wanted to wander the streets of this lovely city and enjoy the tea houses, People's Park, and the Panda sanctuary, to experience its famous attractions. I discovered that the present atmosphere in modern China seems positive and exciting, everywhere bustling with commerce. People seemed to radiated hope and joy. The possibility of wealth through capitalism and private enterprise was a new privilege after so many decades of oppression. I reminded myself that all of China was subject to the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution. Everywhere in China people suffered, not just in Tibet.

This changing government policy offered a better lifestyle and more sense of individuality. Unlike the train ride to Chengdu, people in the city seemed surprisingly friendly and helpful, although no one I met spoke English. Thanks to an efficient transit system, it was easy to find my way around. Enjoying the contact with the people, I felt a new sense of connection with people I had previously regarded as 'the enemy'. I had been brought up during the cold war, at a time when China wanted no relations with the West. And then of course, the situation in Tibet . . .

It was obvious that things had changed and that progress was offering a better life all around. I found myself looking at Tibet from a different angle. Before the Chinese arrived, Tibet was a feudal nation with wealth in the hands of a privileged few. The monasteries and clergy were wealthy. Most people however were peasants with virtually no possessions or access to advantages of wealth and privilege. In the late 1950s, while I was

a child in Canada, watching TV and playing 45's on my record player, Tibetans had no electricity or telephones. China firmly believed that it was helping Tibet enter the Modern Era, offering them roads, education, and health facilities; they sincerely thought that Tibet was a province of their country and that the privileges they were offering were worthwhile and necessary. Admittedly, billions of yuan have been spent to upgrade roads and facilities. But, at what expense? I found myself inspecting the other side of the coin, experiencing a different yet seemingly valid view. What was the truth? Where did it lie?

Musing about such matters, I wandered the streets, rode buses, sipped Wulong tea in outside teahouses by a lake, fed poi fish under the little arching bridges, and danced with people to traditional music in a park. I felt welcomed and at one with them. My sense of 'other' vanished.

The most remarkable experience in Chengdu happened at the ancient Tibetan Buddhist Manjushri temple cum museum in an old area of the city. As I was exploring, I came upon a statue overlooking the square in front of its main shrine room. It was VEDA MATA , the protector of the Dharma. Stopped in my tracks, I stood gazing and listening to the 'lost chords' playing deep within me.

In another life time, was that my mission? Was I an incarnation of the deity protector destined to help restore Buddhist teachings and introduce them to the West? Who knew for sure? Still pondering my true identity.

Climbing aboard the plane to Beijing, I felt some sadness leaving this friendly atmosphere of Chengdu. Aware of the Dalai Lama's compassionate attitude towards the

Chinese people themselves, I too felt fondness and a new openness towards them, recognizing they are not responsible for the decision making of an autocratic government.

Beijing

Beijing was a different story. The expanse of the place, streets as wide as a city block at home, harbored millions of people. Myriads of cars. A new phenomenon. I had a horrific sensation that the oil reserves were rapidly draining in front of my eyes. We have been extremely privileged, enjoying multiple car transportation in the West for decades now. With China's growing prosperity, a common desire is to have one or two cars per family. Multiply that by billions. In India, it is the same.

It took forever to walk to Tienanmen Square. I wanted to stand in the place where thousands of students were killed by the Chinese army for staging a peaceful protest for political reform. The Chinese government reported the official death toll as 23 killed while Chinese student associations and the Chinese Red Cross estimates were much higher – between two to three thousand. I felt uncomfortable under the scrutiny of a military presence. The flags, statues and huge portrait of Mao Zedong were very impressive, but the blanket of government/military oppression was suffocating. Nowhere did I sense anything spiritual.

Building for the Olympics has seen massive areas of the old communities torn down and millions of people being displaced. I wondered if citizens were being offered any compensation let alone new housing. Rumor substantiated my suspicions. Massive

buildings of concrete and cement were being constructed to house expected visitors. I wondered what had happened to Oriental architectural styles and traditions with its precious sense of beauty that I so much admired. I saw no evidence of it in this new construction. The famous 'bird's nest' stadium looked like a rat's nest of dull gray concrete.

As I traveled streets in Beijing, I was aware of the increasing economic power of China extending around the world. I left the country with a sense of foreboding, apprehensive about how China's growing power and mobility was going to impact the future of my country, my culture, and my family.

INDIA

McLeod Ganj

The Dalai Lama's Spring Teachings

Dreams do come true when you help them to happen. The final leg of my journey took me skyward, back to my beloved India where I had commenced this journey. As my plane home was scheduled out of the Indira Gandhi airport in Delhi, I had penciled in the Dalai Lama's spring teachings to round out my itinerary. It had been a long standing desire of mine to attend teachings of His Holiness, given each year at his home monastery near Dharamsala, usually immediately following Losar, the Tibetan New Year Celebration. Maybe I would even meet Richard Gere, the American movie star, who so ardently supports the Dalai Lama!

The Dalai Lama says he is just a simple monk, although he is the Tibetan spiritual and political leader 'in exile'. I sat on the cold cement in a courtyard in front of the big temple, the Tsuglagkhang, waiting for this modest little man. I had arrived the day before and registered for the annual teachings at the Tibetan Refugee Office along with a horde of people. It was now a little after eight o'clock in the morning and drizzling. Cold, damp and chilly, we had waited over an hour before we passed through security, were asked to give up our cameras and cell phones if we had brought them, and given a book in Tibetan that covered all that the Dalai Lama planned to teach for the ten day session. Didn't do me any good; they promised an English version in couple of days. Regardless, there were some pictures of the Dalai Lama and a mandala representing entrance into the teachings we were about to be given.

As we all waited patiently, I thought about the night before. It was the last night of the Losar or New Year's celebration. Thousands had come to the temple to see the celebrated tormas offerings, colorful butter statues, that had been made by monks of the Guyuto monastery down in the valley. There was some sort of contest every year and the monks outdid themselves with marvelous constructions used as offerings. These had been placed beside the huge Shakyamuni statue in the shrine room.

It had been extremely crowded with everyone pressing forward trying to get into the room. Just like the rest of India, few people waited their turn, using shoulders, elbows, arms or whatever to make space for themselves, regardless of whose sides, backs, buttocks, heads or whatever were ahead or beside them. The theory seemed to be make room

however you may. For me, a Westerner used to waiting her turn, this was a very unfamiliar and scary experience. Survival of the fittest in the land of two billion people. Tibetans seem to have adopted the Indian protocol of behavior within crowds.

Afterwards, I joined the crowd to circle the temple, turning brass prayer wheels and repeating along with everyone else “Om Mani Padme Hum” – homage to the jewel in the lotus, the traditional Tibetan prayer of compassion for all sentient beings.

An hour later, a little after the designated time of commencement, there was a titter of excitement and then thousands of pilgrims and eager devotees of the Dalai Lama stood up and turned towards the back of the courtyard. On my left, just over from where I was sitting amongst Tibetan families, walked a hunched old man with glasses and a huge smile, dressed in maroon and yellow, under a saffron parasol held by attendants. He was bubbling with joy, like a spring of fresh water coming out of arid ground. It was the Dalai Lama! His amusement and happiness permeated the atmosphere like trails of fragrant smoke from a stick of incense. I imbibed his joyful spirit and started beaming. Regardless of crowded conditions, people all around started prostrating themselves as he walked past, towards the front of the courtyard. A sea of people, dressed in all the colors of the rainbow, bowing down three times onto the floor repeating their vows to take refuge in the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The mass of people looked like a colorful banner waving in the wind. There was a hush as the Dalai Lama climbed the stairs and sat down cross-legged upon a silk decorated dais. We waited attentively for him to finish the preliminary chanting that sounded like a low throated drone. Some monks on the side were

blowing long skinny horns with 'noses' that touched the ground, whose sound resounded far beyond, out over the hills reaching towards the snowcapped Himalayas, announcing the commencement of teaching.

Then, the Dalai Lama began his talk on the benefits of practice:

Studying Buddhist teachings is a bit like doing construction work upon our mind. This kind of work is not always easy, but some aspects of it make it less difficult. For example, we don't need money, laborers, technicians or technology. Everything we require is already there, within our mind. Therefore, with the right kind of effort and awareness, mental development can be easy. (Dalai Lama, 2005, p.39)

I adjusted my earphones so that I could hear my radio translation better, re-adjusted my legs and back so that I could be more comfortable in the crowded setting, and settled myself to receive the teachings of the first day. It was going to be a long and full next ten days. I wondered if I was going to survive the ordeal. My idea of comfort was an arm chair and hot cup of tea. Speaking of tea, it wasn't long before young monks in maroon robes started circulating with their huge aluminum tea kettles, pouring out hot butter tea and giving out soft round Tibetan bread biscuits. Maybe things weren't so bad after all. Now, just where were the washrooms located?

The Mc'Illo Restaurant

The following conversation comes from a book by Carlo Buldrini (2005). I include it here because it is an example of the many conversations I had with Tibetans while in

McLeod Ganj. I have set it within the context of the story, yet separated it from my text by single spacing.

I was sitting across from a young Tibetan dressed in a hooded sweatshirt and faded jeans. He looked in his early twenties but was actually thirty-two. Having walked over dangerous freezing mountain passes along with thousands of other Tibetan refugees escaping Chinese oppression, he had arrived a couple of years ago. I discovered that he was a very talented thangka painter who had trained for fourteen years in a monastery in Eastern Tibet before he made his way to Lhasa and onto India. He looked directly and earnestly at me as he held his steaming mild tea to his lips and took a sip. Then he sadly began:

“Soon the Chinese will wipe out our culture forever,” he said. “We can't compete with them. Today, the only thing that matters in Lhasa is making money. If you want a good job your mother tongue has to be Chinese. If you want to start any sort of business you need to have money, the right contacts, and preferably a Chinese Communist Party badge in your pocket. We've become second-class citizens in our own country. We don't count for anything any more. Here in Lhasa, the Chinese have opened karaoke bars, gaming rooms and discos everywhere. All that's left for us young Tibetans is drinking, gambling and whoring.” (p.220)

He stopped to take another sip of tea, look up, and with tears in his eyes whispered,

“Even here in McLeod Ganj there are spies that report back to the Chinese. Everyone must be careful these days. It is so wonderful to be near His Holiness who is like a father to us all. Everyone looks to him for salvation but his path of non-resistance and peaceful negotiation doesn't seem to be working. It is almost fifty years since he fled to India. Where is Tibet now? Gone. The young people are getting impatient. We want our country and culture back. I am not sure how much longer we can wait. We want to take up arms and fight for our country. If Americans can do it, fight for democracy, why can't we Tibetans fight to recover our culture and old way of life?” (p. 220)

Not being Tibetan, I was uncertain how to respond to him. Coming from my newly acquired Buddhist perspective, there was only one choice to make between choosing war on one hand and not hurting a fly in the other, and that was adhering to the Dalai Lama's plea for passive resistance and peaceful dialogue. It was clear to me that this young fellow was in need of guidance from his Tibetan Buddhist elders, who were slowly, yet quickly, passing into the history of the night.

The Dalai Lama's teaching lasted two hours each day. Often rather than going inside the temple grounds, I sat in a makeshift tea stall with Tibetans listening on my radio headphones along with them. It was more comfortable sitting on plastic chairs than on the cold concrete floor in the monastery courtyard. I could hear him just as well, and I enjoyed the camaraderie of the Tibetans. Often I helped them peel potatoes or cut newspaper to wrap pieces of fried bread they sold. It was here that I engaged in many conversations around their present situation with both parents and young people.

It seems that Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet is making a comeback now that the Chinese government has given permission to practice it again. From what I heard though, people want to come to India to be near the Dalai Lama and enter into monasteries rather than stay in Tibet where it is all highly regulated. Once they get to India however, they find it isn't as easy or idyllic as they had previously imagined.

I feel concerned for Tibetan youth. The situation appears so hopeless. It is hard not to feel their sense of defeat and frustration.

Clement Town – Mindroling Monastery – Final Blessings

After seven days of teachings, on an impulse, I went to visit the Guyuto monastery down the hill from His Holiness. This monastery was built by the Dalai Lama with his Nobel Peace prize monies, originally intended for the Gelugpa monks living in the south of India. However, when the Karmapa⁵² unexpectedly appeared in exile, landing on the Dalai Lama's doorstep a few years ago, it became the Karmapa's official residence.

Seems like I was forever chasing around in the Karmapa's jet stream or on the tails of his monks robes at least! The last time I tried to see him, I was told he had just left. This time, I arrived a few hours too late again. He had gone to Clement Town, the site of the Mindroling Monastery, the place where I received my initial blessings for this journey and apparently the place where I would receive the last ones! This would complete my project and journey as a full circle, and complete my turning of the wheel of a Buddhist teaching – interesting beyond belief, catching the eye of my spiritual vision!

Leaving the Dalai Lama's teachings a bit early so I could catch up with the Karmapa and receive his blessings, I packed my belongings and caught a bus to Dehradun. I was

52 The Karmapa is the highest lama in the Karma Kaygupa sect, the oldest continuous lineage of Tulkus in Tibet. Karmapa means 'man of action' or 'he who has mastered Karma'. The last Karmapa died in 1981. The present Karmapa, Ugyen Trinlay Dorje, was recognized by the Dalai Lama in 1992 to be the authentic lineage holder and installed as the 17th Karmapa in 1999. He escaped to India in 2000 and now resides at the Guyuto Monastery outside of Dharamsala. He made his first trip outside India in June, 2008, giving his first North American teaching in Seattle, Washington.

carefully toting a large Amitabha thangka⁵³ which I wanted him to bless. This was the last stop on my pilgrimage before heading home.

Excitedly exiting the jalopy of an auto rickshaw, I entered Clement Town. After passing through the gates, I asked about lodging in the nearest restaurant and was led to an amenable guest house where I deposited my things in a clean room and eagerly headed out to once again view the remarkable stupa. On the way, I heard some sad news: Mindroling Rinpoche had passed. He no longer had to temporarily leave his body to fly with dakinis. Death marked his final departure. I wondered if his passing was accompanied by rainbow lights.

The Karmapa had come to accomplish prayers to help Mindroling Rinpoche successfully pass through the bardo (an intermediate state between death and rebirth). With all four Tibetan Buddhist lineages (Nyingmapa, Gelugpa, Sakyapa, and Kagyugpa) having their 'home' monastery, Mindroling had been head of the Nyingmapa sect. The Dalai Lama, head of the Gelugpa sect, was still teaching back in Dharamsala. Sakya Trizin, head of the Sakyapa, had come for a couple of weeks to initiate the funerary rituals but had to leave due to previous engagements. Consequently, the Karmapa (head of the Kagyugpa) had arrived to complete the last of the 49 days of pujas and prayers.

53 A thangka is an ancient method of Tibetan scroll painting, usually depicting various Tantric deities. It is a meditation device that supports the visualization aspect of Vajrayana practice. When blessed by a lama, the thangka is said to embody the vibration of the deity, helping to magnify the energetic intention of the accompanying mantra (hence my desire to have it blessed by the Karmapa). Thangkas appear profusely within the shrine rooms of monasteries, covering the walls and hanging from the ceilings. Anywhere the dharma is practiced within the Tibetan tradition, thangkas make a significant contribution to the visual environment.

Ah, ha! So that was why he was here. I felt touched and honored to be there at this auspicious time. An interesting coincidence that my first journey to India so many years ago began with the death and samadhi (funeral) of Indian guru Papaji, and now, the end of my present journey (and project) was the passing of Mindroling Rinpoche.

I met a couple of Western women who knew very little about these happenings. I sought the guidance of Tibetans who told me the Karmapa was giving blessings to the Tibetans in a school hall that afternoon at five o'clock. They invited me to come. I arrived early and was ushered into one of the many rows of people sitting on a concrete floor. It was all very organized, contrary to elsewhere in India when it came to attending ceremony and following organized instruction. The atmosphere was solemn but expectant.

The Karmapa arrived on time. We were once again ushered in lines up onto the stage to see him. I was attentively holding my khata and thangka. When it came my turn, he took my white scarf and gently placed it around my neck. I looked up into a kindly, earnest, and young face. He looked at me with interest and smiled. He gladly took my thangka and blessed it to his forehead and chanted a prayer. The energy shifted with intensity. Time seemed suspended. Then I was quickly directed off the stage and out the door. My first meeting with the Karmapa, 17th incarnation of enlightened consciousness, living tulku and third highest Tibetan spiritual leader had gone well. I was satisfied.

The next day proved to be even more auspicious. When I went to do the kora around the stupa next morning, I chanced to meet the Karmapa as he was leaving the monastery where Mindroling's body lay. He had just finished his morning puja. I was only a few feet away

from him, waiting with a group of Tibetans who had told me what was going on. Before he got into his car he looked directly at me and nodded, acknowledging my presence.

I followed his car out to the road and started walking in the direction that it was traveling. Many people were lining the streets holding their white khatas and prayer beads, bowing and chanting as the Karmapa passed. I headed down to the Gelugpa Monastery and waited along with many others for him to come out of the temple. He was performing a puja for young monks and students at the monastery school. There was quite a response as he came out. The path was lined with ceremonial horn blowers and town officials, all standing at the bottom of the steps. A young monk, holding a Tibetan-decorated parasol on a pole, had been commissioned to accompany the Karmapa leading a procession.

He emerged through red doors, descended steps and paraded down a pathway to the stupa. As the Karmapa passed, I pulled out my digital camera and took some photos. We eagerly followed, all eyes glued to his procession, watching intently as he climbed up the various levels of the stupa and down again. As he came around the final corner, I scurried to the gate beside another photographer. A security guard intervened, telling us that pictures of His Holiness were prohibited. Luckily, I hadn't known that before! When the Karmapa came out the gate, I was right next to him. He looked up and for a few seconds, stared straight into my eyes! I was within an arm's length of an incarnate deity.⁵⁴ What a tremendous opportunity and blessing!⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The Karmapa, like the Dalai Lama, is considered an embodiment of the deity of compassion, Avalokiteshvara (Sanskrit) or Chenrezig (Tibetan).

The third and last day of my visit, was the pinnacle of all my expectations and dreams. I joined thousands of picnicking Tibetans on a lawn beside the big stupa. The Karmapa bestowed the Long Life blessing on those assembled. There were only a handful of Westerners there, all the rest were Tibetans from Clement Town and local environs. It was quite a family affair, not nearly as serious or solemn as empowerments staged in the West. Culturally appropriate in its relaxed setting, Tibetans are known for their love of picnics.

The Karmapa spoke for a considerable time under a blazing sun. Our assembled group was attentive and orderly. My impression of the Karmapa was that he is a very serious and earnest young man, at the beginning of his mission. Not understanding a word of the Tibetan language, his speech naturally seemed tedious. To pass time, I decided to meditate for the duration of his talk. Finally, an empowerment began and followed the usual format. From previous experiences, I understood what was happening. However, when it came time to receive the individual empowerment and blessing, bedlam took over; no one wanted to wait their turn. There was much pushing and shoving as people stood up and rushed to the reception line. Attendants went into action, shaking their sticks to restore order. Apparently, this always happens.

It was a new experience for me as I was used to order and patience, assured that my turn would come. Luckily, I was near the front on the side where they began the line, so my

55 In Eastern spiritual traditions, one can receive 'dharshan' in a look. In other words, a transmission of spiritual energy happens through the eyes between giver and receiver. As the Karmapa was considered an incarnation of a bodhisattva, this eye to eye contact and transmission was particularly auspicious. At the time, I wasn't sure who had blessed me through the gaze, the Karmapa or the deity himself!

turn came quite quickly. I presented my khata and offering before the Karmapa touched my head to a vase topped with a peacock feather. That blessing filled me with a rush of bliss and light. I lifted my head to a refreshed view of the whole spectacle. I remembered auspicious and lovely experiences of previous blessings. However, this time I had received it from the Karmapa, himself! This experience was particularly profound and auspicious.

Before I exited the grounds, I received my 'prasad' (blessed food) and made my way over to the gigantic statue of White Tara to pay my respects. Gazing at her, I absorbed her benevolent presence and blessing, full of faith, knowing that her loving intention was emanating out and into the landscape of my life. I glanced back at the excited crowd with tenderness, wondering if and when I would ever be with Tibetan people again.

It was with great sadness that I passed under the golden gate, under the towering Wheel of the Law and Deer that I had marveled at when my journey first began. My Buddhist pilgrimage had come full circle, time to return home to count my blessings and assess how I've changed.

With the blessed white khata wound around my neck, my hands in the Namaskar position at my heart, I walked down the dusty main street of Clement Town, fervently chanting “Om Mani Padme Hum,” in an effort to ward off tears of impending sorrow and overwhelming grief.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ This was both sorrow at parting from the Karmapa and the Tibetan people and grief that I was leaving my beloved India. With my love for Tibetans and a great affinity that I have for their culture and spiritual reality, I was aware of feeling extremely bereft and in shock about returning home to my 'secular' world, not knowing when, if ever, I would be back.

PART III: REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER SIX

Post Journey Reflections on Learning

For a short period of time, I have walked in the footsteps of the Buddha, experiencing Tibetan sacred spaces. Encountering another's sense of precious and sacred, I have gained immeasurably. The three precious jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha have become a personal reality. Through a process like osmosis, their significance and meaning has been integrated into my life. As I did the kora with Tibetans, encircling the 'naturescape' of the Buddha, I have, according to them, become 'universally human'. To recognize the Buddha nature of pure awareness that lies within everyone is to realize the ultimate human endeavor. Perhaps this is what my father was pointing towards, knowledge that he recognized in both of us, which is without concrete definition or exact location.

The Narrative

My narrative of this sacred time reveals many levels and areas of relationship. According to Bateson (1979), "A story is a little knot or complex of that species of connectedness which we call relevance" (cited in Doll, 2005, p. 293). These stories rest in memory as a significant collection of experiences that have *grown* me and connected me with my learning and life process. By telling my narrative, I have been able to create a

sense of 'wholeness' within myself, helping to integrate the journey and this newly acquired knowledge, building a 'renovated' culture within my mind. As Pinar (2004) so aptly stated:

Make it all a whole. It, all of it – intellect, emotion, behavior – occurs in and through the physical body. As the body is a concrete whole, so what occurs within and through the body can become a discernible whole, integrated in its meaningfulness . . . Mind in its place, I conceptualize the present situation. I am placed together. Synthesis. (p. 37)

This composite of stories merges with my body, emotions, intellect, and spirit. Taking on a life of its own, my spiritual journey continues to open new spaces, sensitivities, and expanded awareness. Synthesizing these impressions, like telling the beads on a mala, has become an extended time of meditation, centering me within the quintessential 'phenomenal' realm where outside occurrences meet my psyche, creating a praxis of renewed learning. Recounting the experience in this writing enlivened it once again for me.

From this present vantage point, I can see the extent to which I have gained from both the journey and the narrative. I feel more authentic and integrated. Through remembering and recounting my experience, learning continues to happen. As places and events come to the forefront of my mind, I revisit and extend that experience into the present. Through this process, connection and synthesis continue to happen, and with it, change and transformation.

However, this awareness point becomes a juncture from where I 'step away from self-journeyer' *learner* position into an authentic teaching stance. The embodied experience lives in me as *knowledge* which now seems natural and appropriate to share with others.

The Journey into Tibetan Culture

I have come to understand, respect and love the Tibetan people, their culture, and their teachings. If there is a culture on the planet that understands and stands for the natural rights and purpose of human beings, I believe it is theirs. If only we had ears to hear and hearts to embrace, uphold and protect *their* rights. Instead, I watch a beautiful culture recede into the past.

In the face of a multitude of problems – social, political, and environmental – we in North American society (and the world in general) also need help. I firmly believe Tibetans hold knowledge and experience that may aid in preserving the environment and ourselves; perhaps we should turn to each other for guidance and aid? My understanding of Tibetan spiritual traditions and Western culture places me in a position where I feel a responsibility to present, promote and encourage dialogue and communication between us.

The value of cultural context cannot be underestimated. Spiritual practice without the support of community is difficult. There is much to be said for the benefits of collective effort, the strengthening of intention and energies. Also, identity is strengthened by recognition and reflection. My experience has taught me that acknowledging spiritual intention within human communication and interaction creates a greater sense of wholeness. I felt a closer connection to people and life within the context of Tibetan culture because their altruistic intention includes all life. This recognition has helped me open to consider all cultures as part of my human family, traveling along the path of life which is both worldly and spiritual.

Lost Children

On the other hand, I witnessed a deterioration in Tibetan communities within and outside Tibet, particularly among young people. They seemed lost. A centuries-old tradition is being overrun by the materialistic secular vision. The core of Tibetan culture, its religious practices and teachings, is losing its hold. My impression is that those who were practicing and attending monasteries, particularly in TAR, were mostly over the age of 40. At the Dalai Lama's teachings, most of those present were older. I witnessed drug use and violence among Tibet's young people; there was hostility and self-destructive behavior where there should have been peace. With chronic unemployment, many were hanging out in the streets with nothing to do. Resentful about what they see as Chinese oppression, many seem displaced. Without the stabilizing influence of Tibetan Buddhism, without united practice anchored in a spiritual society, the peaceful, holistic, mindful values of Tibetan tradition are waning. What fills that void is negativity. I identified with their dilemma, as I too feel a sense of hopelessness that comes from spiritual impoverishment around me at home.

Spirituality and My Tibetan Buddhist Journey

The journey itself has been a marvel, opening me to new horizons. As a 'pathfinder' stepping outside familiar territory, I have been introduced to new territories of thought which I may now share with others. There is a sense of expansion and incorporation of the extraordinary into my daily repertoire. This new information has instigated a process of

change and stretched the boundaries of my limitations. More willing to adapt to newness and difference, I am seeking it in my Canadian experience, opening more to others – their backgrounds, their cultures, and their stories.

Daily life has become more precious. Even small rituals that I tend to incorporate in my home time reflect sacred value. The way I carry everyday activities, routines that offer spaces for reflection, precious objects contributing to my sacred space, all offer insights into my inclination to explore interior depth and further transformation (Ballengee-Morris, 2006). In moments such as those when I light incense, turn the light on in the corner where I have my Buddhist shrine and thangkas, adjust the mala around a Buddha statue on the table by my favorite chair, or sit with my tea to contemplate or meditate, I am brought back to my Tibetan time. Each time I pause to look within to feel my growing interior space, confirms this ongoing transformation.

I brought home knowledge that might be useful to my family and my community. I bear a responsibility to understand, clarify and share this learning with others to benefit the spiritual process of those I care about, and those who wish to change. Buddhist practice has helped integrate compassionate intention, recognizing that everything said and done influences the well being of all. The necessity to scrutinize thoughts and actions, filtering them through benevolent intention in order to accrue positive karma for a better life, has become more clear. I have adopted this attitude and intend to continue to use and practice these skillful methods of meditation, integrating this in daily life.

Sacred Space – Shrines, Altars, and Art

Looking back to my pre-Buddhist days, when I first entered the shrine room at the local Dharma center on Leonard Street years ago, I felt unnerved and uncomfortable. The colors, symbols, art, deities and ritual objects on that shrine were very unfamiliar and strange. I must have absorbed energy emanating from these sacred objects because I left feeling unsettled. At the time those images seemed sacrilegious and sexual; I felt frightened by their 'devilish' look.⁵⁷ My Christian upbringing conditioned this response and inhibited openness. However, I experienced a strong pull to return to absorb the auspicious atmosphere there. It seemed to offer an intensity and power that I craved, nourishing my inner being in a way that didn't happen at church. This intriguing quality of the art enabled me to over-ride suspicions and fears and return to investigate the teachings.

Now, as I look around my living space, I realize that I dwell in a shrine room. The walls are covered with thangkas, floors are covered with colorful Tibetan carpets, the altar with deity statues, and shelves and tables hold various Buddhist objects such as painted boxes, singing bowls, incense holders, and prayer wheels. I have a Buddha fountain on my balcony. Everywhere I turn, there is Tibetan influence. I dwell within a sacred space.⁵⁸

57 Partha Mitter's book *Much Maligned Monsters* (1992) outlines how European/Western Christian thought has been strongly influenced (as early as the medieval times) by religious art that depicted devils looking much like the Eastern Hindu deities, representations of images that had been brought to the West by explorers (beginning with Marco Polo) from their Eastern travels.

58 I think this transformational process started after I took my Refuge vows and began collecting books and magazines on Buddhism. I also found myself reluctant to part with the mala that my Refuge teacher Jhampa Shaneman gave me. I have worn it around my right wrist ever since receiving it, only removing it to do my mantra practice or to sleep. However, the process was strongly influenced by my first trip to Nepal, walking around the kora in Boudhanath for the first time. After that, I felt myself on a wheel,

What brought about this transition? It remains a mystery. Perhaps there is a living intention within everything pulling me towards the Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha. Something unexplainable was initiated when I took my Refuge and Bodhisattva vows. Some connection was established through the empowerments I received that fill the sacred art and objects with life. Since returning from my journey, I notice these effects more profoundly.

I cherish these precious objects that seem to emanate sacred energy. I ponder the power and value of Tibetan sacred art. There is an aspect of mystery and mystique that is not explainable through the rational mind. However, now that I understand the meaning of the symbols and deities, I recognize the possibilities of what they represent within myself. Every aspect of the art and objects upholds the intention of self realization. Every symbol represents something within myself and within every conscious being. The more I turn to them the more I receive, and the more attention I give them the more power emanates. I constantly question the *aliveness* of it all.

Since coming home, I no longer want to dwell in an *ordinary* space, a secular context. I have created a sacred space within the interior of my home because I prefer to be surrounded by symbols of eternal truths that foster and maintain a continuity between myself and the greater universe. Also, this space restores “access to the imagination” which accomplishes “many things: an emancipation and bringing home from exile, a

turning in the direction of the Buddha and I began collecting artifacts and art that would hold his intention in my visual space at home.

healing and making whole of self and community, a sense of spaciousness and opening up of possibility, a sense of our own rhythm” (Compton, 2000, p. 105). Going about my home, I am held by an 'inner turning' towards the greater aspect of myself, one of healing and restoration, as my life moves in the direction of wholeness and 'enlightenment'. As a first step, I have achieved a sacred intention in my home; the next step is to extend that through the whole context of my life.

Journeying into Tibetan culture, where art is an integral part of everyday life, I became familiar with its symbols; represented everywhere, they serve as a constant reminder of a higher human purpose and intention. The spiritual is rarely separated from the practical in Tibetan culture. The mantra is repeated in both private and public spaces, opening audible channels to attract spiritual energy, augmenting the effect of the art. Within this atmosphere, I experienced through the visual as well as the auditory, an awareness of a universal interrelationship between both material and immaterial worlds, signified through their art as well as music. Art and mantra became channels to extend spiritual experience to a mundane world, opening a door for the extraordinary to pervade ordinary experience.

At first this surprised me. As I assimilated Tibetan Buddhist art and practices, I opened to spiritual experience in my ordinary daily process. I now prefer to hear the music of Tibetan chanting in the background of my home space, reminding and supporting me to 'get out of my head' (my thinking) and open to the spaciousness of empty awareness. Whether it is in the background or whether I join in with the chanting, the effect is transcendent.

“Hearing and saying the *mantra* is an act of worship that 'tunes' one to the basic sound or

vibration of the universe. By a continual hearing and chanting one purifies and transforms one's life until it is vibrating in harmony with the Divine, which is itself pure sound” (Coward and Goa, 1991, p.4). Chanting sends messages to the brain that activate feeling and open spaces in the psyche for the sacred to enter, just as visual symbols do. Since returning home, I want to remain within the circle of spiritual space and seek ways to transpose the spiritual into my everyday life. Meditation and mantra practice, wearing my mala, and surrounding myself with Buddhist art, all benefit this intention.

“Cultural symbols, collective images accepted by civilized societies that have been used to express 'eternal truths' still carry original numinosity, a psychic charge that evokes deep emotional responses” (Compton, 2002, p.110). Now that I understand and have experienced Tibetan symbols within their original cultural context, my consciousness wants to maintain this exceptional psychic experience. I crave the depth of sacred spiritual spaces, feeling bored and disengaged with shallow, secular ones.

The Red Chenrezig Practice

Chenrezig practice has played a significant part in bringing the art to life for me. My visit to Tibetan territory emphasized its importance. Firstly, the *generation* stage of the practice, based on the secret mantra repetition and visualization of the picture of Chenrezig, enlivens the thangka. Then, at the end of the practice where it is necessary to internalize the visualization, becoming Chenrezig, I genuinely feel the value and significance of those symbols, their intentions vibrating and resonating within me. I feel the power of the

consort's sword cutting through the illusion of subjective reality; and the blood cup of death reminds me of the impermanence and preciousness of human life. I hear Vajravarahi's scream subduing and pacifying suffering in all realms existence.⁵⁹ Momentarily grasping the wisdom of the mala, I experience the compassion of the kamala or lotus flower. Embodying the visualization allows me to feel the different dimensions of myself, dwelling within all the realms simultaneously – all aspects of my own suffering. A spring of compassion arises and pours into me, through me, and out to the world. I become an embodiment of all intentions of the symbols, the ultimate intention of Chenrezig – the happiness and well being of all. It is a process of moving from the mental into the experiential.

From there, I sit in meditation, touching upon the emptiness and awareness that lies behind and beyond all thought, realizing the growing results of my practice. The experience brings clarity, peace, and unity. Feeling more connected and at one within myself, I arise and enter ordinary time. With practice, the fruits of the meditation become integrated into my daily life, the effects being cumulative and permanent. Relationships have improved and my quality of life is enhanced, becoming more meaningful and productive. There is less time wasted; clearer more purposeful intention and action is a welcome benefit.

⁵⁹ This refers to the six realms of existence that are in Tibetan Buddhist belief – hell, hungry ghost, animal, human, demi-god, and god realm. The deity in the visualization of the practice lets out a scream that is supposed to subdue the suffering of all the realms of existence. All the visual aspects, images and symbols, described in the paragraph refer to my thangka painting which is the visual aid to my Red Chenrezig practice. Vajrahari is depicted with a sows head, in union (yab-yum) with Chenrezig.

I have come to believe that the Bodhisattva Chenrezig consciously dwells in another dimension, responding to my requests. I can't say whether or not he will materialize before me, as he has done for ardent practitioners in the past; however, I remain open to the possibility. My trip to Tibet has opened me to the mysterious and the unexplainable.

The many extraordinary happenings, such as those before self-emanating Buddha's or within shrine rooms, became a familiar experience as I wound my way through Tibet. The experience of heightened awareness is one I miss at home in Canada. I turn to spiritual practices to recapture and further develop the *extraordinary* aspect. Profoundly moving experiences influence life-understanding within the spiritual realm; because of its limitations, secular thought cannot provide for those needs. Spiritual experience offers a more holistic perspective (Dissanayake, 1995).

First hand encounters with Tibetan art were profound, for example, standing before a towering, massive statue emphasized the greatness of the 'perfect Buddha space' within me. It opened the door to grandeur and magnificence, a far greater reality than my prior perception of self. I opened and I became receptive to a stronger, inner voice. That voice continues to speak to me, developing awareness and understanding of myself and my relationship to Tibetan Buddhist culture. I have come to trust its direction as I experience its presence within my life at home.

On my journey, the dramatically profound voice I experienced in Tibet felt separate from me, yet within me; although I heard it within, it spoke as a separate entity. This voice I heard in Tibet is now merging with the voice I recall from my childhood. There is

transformation happening within me as the inner *directive* gathers momentum and magnitude, piquing my curiosity as to what lies ahead for me! Although I am uncertain as to the exact origin of the voice, I am learning to trust its direction.

Stating Intention as a Ritual Act

Unraveling and following the threads of self inquiry is an ongoing process that evolves through stages. As I began this journey along Sir Edmund Hillary's well traversed path to the base camp of Mount Everest, I realized that I was not alone; there were many others who, for one reason or another, wanted to place themselves before the highest peak in the world, to experience for themselves their greatest aspirations, or goals. For me, it was to realize my highest good, truth, potential. Everest symbolized all that for me. This is where I chose to declare my life an offering of peace and compassion. I stated my intention to realize the ultimate dream, to realize *true* human purpose. This act was like staking a claim for gold within my psyche. I had worked hard to ascend to this great height; I summoned courage and undertook an arduous journey that challenged me to recognize my boundaries and draw on my strengths. It took determination and energy to claim the highest vision for myself. Releasing my father's ashes was a symbolic act, letting go of the past to free myself to move forward, away from my parents' dreams and into my own vision.

It was a ritual act in a sacred space at a sacred time, a spiritual act outside of ordinary time. It opened channels to further learning. For me the ritual was affirming. Standing before the highest mountain, there was a sense of communication with a *greater*

consciousness. Mount Everest served as a natural altar to God, the ultimate divine presence, as well as all the other greater beings (saints, angels and bodhisattvas) who, I believe, were listening to me and able to support and protect me.

The climb and my declaration began the process of transformation. That was my sacred pilgrimage. For Tibetans, Mount Kailash symbolizes the center of the universe; a pilgrimage to the mountain accrues merit and furthers the pilgrim along the spiritual journey. To me personally, Mount Everest has always represented ultimate beauty, a metaphor of the highest intention. To make a bold vow in front of it made my dream into reality. Through this act, my spiritual intention was rendered unquestionable.

Turning to begin the climb back down the mountain, I realized that I had not only witnessed, but claimed the ultimate. Touching that space was transformative and I set about integrating this by taking the next steps in my life.

The Power of Blessings

Seeking blessings from *enlightened* masters, both at the beginning and end of the journey, was important. Receiving blessings from the heads of the four Tibetan Buddhist lineages was auspicious and remarkable. I felt honored and validated. Seeking and receiving these blessings was an achievement that filled me with enthusiasm; it assured me that I was on the right track; there had been many times when I was unsure that a spiritual

path was an appropriate pursuit for me. The recognition and blessings I received were a form of love and encouragement.

These blessings *contained* the sacred space of my journey, holding it within higher intention, closer to 'the gods' looking out for me – particularly as I believe these revered teachers are actual reincarnated masters and, in the case of the Dalai Lama, a bodhisattva! Their blessings were meaningful – support, security, and protection – as I ventured into the unknown territory of self within Tibetan Buddhism. Their blessings remain as powerful and influential within my psyche today as when I received them.

Mandala Practice as an Agent of Change

Photographs of My Mandala Art Project



Figure 1. *Mandala*. (Photo collage) (40 x 40cm.), 2009

Figure 2. *Mandala*. (Photo Collage) (120x103cm.), 2009.



I chose to create a mandala⁶⁰ as a way of offering myself – my life – to this Tibetan Buddhist teaching of compassion, representing my pledge to seek ultimate human accomplishment, not only for myself but for others. The mandala or 'kyilkhor' is a circular diagram representing the three-dimensional world of a meditation deity.⁶¹ There are numerous forms of mandalas that have distinct concepts and diverse uses (Till, 2000, p. 6). Used as a meditation device, this complex diagram signifies mental transformation. It is also used to represent entrance into a 'wang' or empowerment ceremony of a particular deity. Without entrance into the sacred space represented by the mandala, the empowerment cannot take place; the practice will not be activated and meditative efforts will be less fruitful. Mandalas are also offerings to divinity, establishing sincere motivation and invoking entrance into sacred, palatial dimensions of benevolent intention.

The mandala is composed of circles that represent the spiritual world, enclosed within squares that represent material aspects of life. Mandalas are usually painted with the five sacred colors, white, blue, yellow, red, and green, corresponding to five elements of space,

⁶⁰ Refer to pages 137-138.

⁶¹ For example, the Wheel of Time is a mandala of the Kalachakra initiation with the deity Kalachakra in sexual union with his consort Vishvamati. The union of male and female depicts the union of wisdom and compassion, the two necessary components of enlightenment. The teaching promotes universal harmony. There is a three dimensional representation of this mandala in the Potala. Diligent practice the teaching encapsulates mind and body within an astrological and cosmic framework represented in the mandala. The union of body, mind, and universe creates an energy that dissolves the physical and enables consciousness to enter into mystical dimensions of Shambala, the Tibetan heavenly utopia believed to exist in another dimension parallel to our own world.

air, earth, light, and water.⁶² There are four gates representing the four cardinal directions, resembling doors of royal palaces and the walls are decorated with auspicious symbols and emblems (Till, 2000).

The innermost center of the Tibetan mandala harbors a deity that represents a divine aspect of life. This is the focus of the meditation or teaching. By offering a mandala, a request is made to establish the particular divine intention or quality within life. Setting myself as spiritual aspirant, at the center of the mandala accomplished a dual purpose:⁶³ Firstly, it established my spiritual journey as the most important, central aspect of my life. By placing myself as pilgrim and journeyer within the central circle, the focal point and ultimate vision of the mandala, I inaugurated the vision of my awakened self as the transcendent reality to which I aspire. Secondly, it offered my spiritual intention and life as an offering to the greater intention, acknowledging my life as a sacred act of service for betterment of the whole. Using photographs taken on my journey, I included a self-portrait in front of Mount Everest, at the highest point of my climb, the initial step of my journey. My portrait is surrounded by four lineage holders that gave me blessings, the eight auspicious symbols, and representations of Hindu deity Ganesh who removes obstacles, and Mahakala, the Tibetan protector deity. My spiritual venture was contained and

62 Tibetans add the element of space (void, imagination) to their list of elements of the Western/Greek tradition of earth, air, fire, and water. These are also different from the Hindu elements of fire (red), water (white), and earth (black), and the Chinese elements – metal (gray), wood (green), water (blue/black), fire (red/purple), and earth (brown).

63 I began my mandala in July, 2009, working on it throughout the month and finishing it in November of the same year.

protected by representations of divinity. I surrounded myself with rainbow light that represents enlightenment, the realization of my highest dream.

The second, larger circle, moving outward towards the material world, is composed of photographs of my 'love life', my significant relationships with family and others. These photos depict times of happiness, when I felt most loved, as well as very meaningful times embodying deep and memorable impressions. The pictures also represent my loving intention and responsibility to others. This circle symbolizes the happiness that people value and strive for. It depicts the strong sense of grace and well being I have always striven to achieve regardless of difficulties and suffering that accompany familial responsibility and dedication to personal relationships. The predominant portrayal of love reflects the immeasurable importance of this quality for me, as a mother and grandmother. As the maternal figure and a spiritual seeker, I see my role as one of teaching and modeling love in my interactions with family.

The photographs of myself reveal my changing appearance over the years. They enabled me to view and analyze my life journey to date. The happy times remind me that even in times of stress and difficulty, a sense of well being is possible. Reviewing the past from this positive position counterbalanced middle-age despair. The process of making my mandala offered renewal.

I took liberties with colors and chose backgrounds that appealed to my sense of pleasure and fulfillment. Personalizing the art form, I strayed from an orthodox style and manner of making Tibetan mandalas, giving myself permission to adjust the form to fit my own ideas.

This would not be considered acceptable in the traditional sense of Tibetan mandala making, but personal stylization is acceptable in the Western 'modern' sense. It was not my aim to make an exact replica of a traditional mandala, but rather, to use the Tibetan style to reflect my overall objective. For me, this captures the essence of a mandala and the sacred space it invokes. While involved in this mandala making, I felt secure within a greater intention that was both respectful of the tradition and sacred. The meditative and creative act left me feeling supported, and anchored within something far greater than my ordinary experience.

Revisiting the span of my life offered an opportunity to remember, looking at situations, events, and relationships, scouring them for 'unfinished', unresolved issues that I might need to work on in my meditations in order to let go of the pain of the past. It also gave me time to recall some of the happiness I had forgotten. This brought forward positive feelings to override some of the present difficult emotions I have been experiencing, particularly anxiety and sadness. The experience was nourishing, serving as a reminder that happiness is as close as a thought away. It is a matter of choosing where I'll let my mind lead me. Some memories are held in place with threads of painful thoughts rather than happy ones. I can change that. This examination proved therapeutic and made me realize the value of contemplative meditation as a means of enhancing my inner reality, making it a more comfortable place to abide in.

Watching the wheel of my life turn, within the process of placing pictures within the circle, I felt the wheel spinning around a solid, secure center of clear lifelong spiritual

direction. I may not have known where I was heading in the material world with regards to relationships and life choices, but within the center of myself. I have always felt secure in the area of my spiritual life. Realizing how fortunate I am to have been so aware of this inner world from such an early age, I have come to understand that not all people are so privileged as to have spiritual options presented to them. Herein lies the value of spiritual education and the introduction of spiritual ideas in early childhood.

The second circle is surrounded by female deities of the five Buddha families as well as the four teachers that I have been privileged to encounter and learn from in this lifetime – my father, my Reiki teacher, my root Tibetan Buddhist guru (Thrangu Rinpoche), and my Hindu satguru (Amritanandamayi) who gave me my spiritual name. In this pictorial representation, I carefully sought to balance male and female. There have been many other teachers on this spiritual journey; however, these four have been the most important. The four gates are guarded by the three kaya Buddhas⁶⁴ – Amitabha on the left, Chenrezig on the top, and Shakyamuni on the right – and Padmasambhava, the renowned Buddhist scholar, at the bottom. They are situated to welcome, support, and protect the participant's entrance into this teaching.

Using a traditional idea of a ring of fire or rainbow light that usually circumscribes the mandala, I semi-outlined the square with a repeated motif using multiple photos from a Tibetan monastery roof. In a traditional mandala the border is circular and surrounds the entire mandala. The flaming barrier represents samsara or the phenomenal world and

⁶⁴ The three kayas are the Dharmakaya, the Samboghakaya, and the Nirmanakaya. See Appendix.

consciousness that must burn away all ignorance. It is usually lined with an inner border, a black band with vajras or diamonds symbolizing cosmic illumination, the overall intention of the spiritual journey. I have used the sacred mantra 'Om Mani Padme Hum' in gold lettering to replace the vajras or diamonds.

Tibetan mandala practice depicts the world as a palace, introducing the aspect of human majesty. This is a significant change from an ordinary view of life. Reflecting upon this idea of the palatial 'special' aspect of inner life and inner space became a significant learning experience for me. I came to recognize spiritual reality as a colorful, sacred creation capable of revealing one's thought process. This insight reinforced the importance of taking care to be vigilant about negative thinking through the exercise of inner assessment and spiritual work.

The experience of creating this mandala was precious. It served as a self honoring, acknowledgement of my life efforts. The idea of royalty and palatial space that Tibetans identify with the spiritual, offers extraordinary opportunities for the representation of self. It elevates spiritual intention, upholding it as extremely valuable. The royal depiction reveals the possibility of the 'majestic' – that human life is extremely precious because it offers the possibility of self realization and ultimate enlightenment. I had glimpses of my life as a royal procession, worthy of honor. I was inspired to view my life from this special vantage point, extricating myself from the usual position of doubt, fear, and self criticism. Reminded that human life is an exceptional gift and that earthly presence is an honor, my past efforts came to light as worthy opportunities to work for the betterment of all. The

mandala practice emphasized this precious opportunity. The essential choice always rests within each and every moment of life – the choice to live life from the position of a majestic and holistic intention.

As I worked with the concept of circles and squares, those shapes played upon my psyche, introducing order and containment. From that arose a sense of unity and security. The seeming 'hodge podge' of my life, with its myriad impressions and memories, like unrecognizable pieces of a puzzle, began to take on a shape that held sense and meaning. The underlying spiritual aim was a unifying force in this mandala creation, giving meaning to the process itself. I came to appreciate the creative inspiration that spurred me into various experiences, bringing color and motivation into an otherwise ordinary human process. Moving through the circle of time, entering into a framework of life's process from birth through the present moment and on towards death's final exit, I came to accept the inevitability of the end. We all face an inevitable decline of later life. My mandala process introduced resolution in place of fear. As I worked to finish the project, enclosing my circles within squares upon the black background, I experienced a further sense of grounding and self-acceptance. Coming to terms with a lifetime by recognizing there has been order within chaos, the order signified through a higher spiritual purpose, offers me a sense of accomplishment. Embracing the fact that I have remained true to my heart, I am much closer to realizing my higher purpose than I realized.

Finally, I have come to see that striving for perfection is a process requiring patience and diligence. A Tibetan mandala is based on geometric and aesthetic exactness and

symmetry. During the process of my mandala making, I found my patience tested. I lacked the skills for precision and the commitment necessary to follow through to completion. I found myself overwhelmed by the Tibetan mandala's extremely complicated process. My obsessive striving for perfection was challenged as I came to accept the fact that at the moment, I wasn't prepared to undertake the in-depth study required to make an authentic Tibetan mandala; this would take years of study. I didn't possess the knowledge to comprehend the layered aspects of this art form and its multidimensional meanings. As a result, I chose to modify my original idea to simply represent the essence of a Tibetan mandala, and to embody my particular version of a personal teaching and learning. In the end, I came to terms with my simple representation. As a Westerner, I am hampered by a lack of cultural/religious knowledge of Tibetan tradition and understanding; I am a beginning learner in a very complicated process. Letting go of internal pressure to accelerate my learning and become a master of the mandala art form has helped me accept my place as a sincere and enthusiastic beginner. Beginning something opens up new vistas and horizons. As I study and practice Tibetan Buddhism, I will assimilate enough knowledge to move on to the next stage, and the next . . . Such is the process of life. Perfection is an ideal. In this case, enlightenment waves its victory banner on this particular spiritual horizon – a perfect vision to work towards and a worthy and interesting life endeavor.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Buddhist Methodology in Education

Unfortunately it is not possible for us to rid the world of its misery. We cannot take the task upon ourselves, and there is no magic wand to transform affliction into happiness. Yet we can develop our own minds in virtue and thereby help others to do the same. (Dala Lama, 2001, p. ix)

There is a direct correlation between the Buddhist foundational premise of suffering and the symptoms of our present global dis-ease. Educators must help students prepare for the world they're entering and for which they will one day be responsible. They must also develop strategies and skills that teach people to cultivate their happiness. Buddhist meditation practices and ethical methods support the growth and development of happy, healthy, and productive individuals.

Harris writes: "What the world most needs at this moment is a means of convincing human beings to embrace the whole of the species as their moral community" (2009, p. 69). When approached as a *contemplative science*, Buddhist discourse offers methods that address the whole spectrum of human experience and aspiration, developing mental processes that support spiritual development. Buddhist thought is based on ethical precepts and meditation; it develops spirituality in a way that is not constrained by dogma or cultural prejudices. These concepts may be transposed into secular language with universal application.

Buddhism – Education and Curriculum Vision

The Buddha was a great teacher. It seems unbelievable, but it is written, that he taught the same premise 84,000 ways in order to address the capacity of individual students' minds. It shows the scope of his understanding, the flexibility of his pedagogical methods, and the universality of his teachings. All his teachings focus on gaining knowledge of the mind in order to promote self control and achieve happiness, a focus worth considering within the scope of present day curriculum.

As the Dalai Lama (2002) has stated, every human being, regardless of age, race, religion, education, or economic standing has a potential for happiness. Indeed, our innate nature is that of seeking happiness, despite the fact that there is so much suffering in the world. Schools could play a major role in providing a solid foundation of self knowledge and spiritual development to support personal well being. This could easily be done by linking psychology and spirituality. Teaching people how to achieve contentment and how to maintain inner happiness is of utmost importance in a world that offers so much chaos and suffering. Amma (2002), a prominent spiritual teacher, not from the Buddhist tradition, agrees: “There are two types of education. One type of education will enable you to find a suitable job; the other shows you how to live a life of peace and happiness. That is spirituality. It is the knowledge of the mind” (Amritanandamayi, 2002, p. 237). A Buddhist curriculum is based on this understanding of the mind. From my journey into Tibetan Buddhism, I have come to realize that this path to enlightenment has much to offer the world.

First and foremost in Buddhist thought is the underlying belief that we are more than

our thoughts. Kenchen Thrangu Rinpoche (2004) reinforces this idea:

Of course, it is true that when we look at our minds, we have mental afflictions, we have thoughts, we have all kinds of suffering and problems. But at the same time we always have the innate potential to transcend these. And the reason why we have this innate potential is that the nature of the mind and the nature of everything that arises in the mind is emptiness. Regardless of what is passing through your mind, your mind is always a boundless space of emptiness. (p.8)

Our Western education curriculum focuses on secular, scientifically-based information; our educational system then calls for analytical, critical, and creative skills to integrate new ideas. Little attention is given to cultivating knowledge about the nature of ourselves as human beings. As the basis of self is the underlying space of awareness, we must therefore learn ways to ‘get behind’ the facade of ideas. It is a matter of moving from the relative to the absolute. The next step in the educational process involves moving from the personal to the universal; this furthers integration of the personal within the greater whole.

Separating beliefs are beliefs that disconnect thought from awareness or self from others, causing polarization and conflict. Students need to learn ways of overcoming these damaging beliefs. Meditation techniques focusing on one's breath, mindfulness, or visualization are methods that need not be presented in a religious context; they could easily be applied to classroom instruction. In art education, mandala art establishes holistic, circular, interconnected thinking and feeling, which is also an excellent method for centering and promoting self awareness.

A Science of the Mind

The idea of a science of the mind that is neither psychological nor philosophical opens a field of research that could introduce and engage students in a process of lifelong inquiry. Curriculum based on understanding the mind and how it works could draw a great deal from Buddhist principles. Much is taught about the outside world but it is of equal importance to establish a relationship to inner reality as it is experienced within the mind.

Ideas incorporated in Buddhism could be adopted as a framework to establish a sense of identity. People construct their views about the world through their belief system. What we see and what we hear is interpreted through that lens. Every individual must decide what beliefs to follow, choosing a personal vision through which to interpret the world. Education can further that aim by presenting frameworks to establish beliefs.

Buddhist thought offers one such framework, one that supports transformation. Through its focus on meditation, it offers a means to investigate and analyze beliefs, perspectives of subjective experience, and one's relationship to them resulting in a more authentic relationship with self. People tend to cling to things physically, mentally and emotionally. The more rigid and narrow the thinking, the less a person is able to absorb or understand, hence the more difficulty there is in life. Probing our tendencies of attachment and resisting change could be investigated to reveal what lies beneath these habits. And once exposed, these barriers to growth can be dismantled.

Through meditation one may come to understand that “all our experience is a subjective projection of mind, and therefore our *attitude* towards things is decisive. Through changing

attitude we change our experience, and when we meditate . . . transformation is possible” (Kalu Rinpoche, 2006, p.6). Meditation can open the mind, making it more flexible to consider and adapt to the views of others. While this requires courage and perseverance, the result can be strength, clarity, self-confidence and steadfastness. These attributes can benefit relationships among students, promoting harmony within the classroom and the school.

Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind

In the Buddhist tradition, there are four thoughts that are said to ‘turn the mind’; thoughts that are frequently reflected upon at the beginning of any preliminary practice. Firstly, the idea that the human body and human life is precious. Because humans possess the faculties of mind and consciousness, a human being has the capacity to think and understand. From a spiritual point of view, humans are ‘precious’ and ‘perfect’. Through thinking and understanding, we can strive for enlightenment as we strive to improve life and achieve happiness. This concept reflects a greater value – that of compassionate intention. It acknowledges the value of the life of others and the responsibility we humans have to the environment. It stands to reason that if we value ourselves, we will value the lives of others and life itself.

The second thought that turns the mind is that of impermanence. A fact of life is *death*. Life itself is impermanence. Another fact of life is *change*. Nature reflects this as day turns into night turns into day, seasons change, bodies change, minds change . . . nothing remains

the same. Impermanence stresses the value of now and helps us to realize the importance of utilizing the gift of mind. According to Buddhists, we might not be reincarnated as a human and only through human form can a person achieve enlightenment. Those who realize the value of impermanence are fortunate for they realize the value of turning to the Dharma, the path to understanding the mind (Shantideva, 2007).

By understanding impermanence, we begin to understand life rather than attempt to run away from it. Facing fear, we develop courage to embrace life. Once again, meditation is a means to achieve this understanding; a student may use the mind to watch the mind and reflect upon the nature of thought. Realizing that thought is not permanent inspires an open minded and more accepting position in life. This is a valuable lesson in learning, one that has classroom applications both in cross-cultural, spiritual, and peace studies.

Thirdly, there is the aspect of karma or cause and effect. Nothing exists on its own. Everything is interdependent and interconnected. To overcome suffering, it is first necessary to remove the causes. Here, personal responsibility is developed as a person must make the decision to do something about his or her own situation through personal investigation and analysis.

Present education practice focuses on using analysis to investigate cause and effect existing in the outside world. Turning the mind to do the same with the inner world of the mind is also valid and useful because the outside is related and interconnected to how we think and perceive. This encourages a more authentic relationship with the world and others. A sense of connectedness and interconnectedness is essential for global

understanding. Investigating and understanding karma (cause and effect), could help advance students' understanding; it verifies that anyone may influence the course of life through making choices that lead to different outcomes. The possibility of introducing and participating in life change is empowering. Teaching responsibility and autonomy create a stronger, more intelligent individual and a healthy community.

The fourth thought that turns the mind is that of samsara, understanding the world of desire. It is human nature to want something other than what we have. There is always something wrong, some defect or deficiency. When desires are not met, there is dissatisfaction. The root is greed. We all succumb to emotionally influenced thoughts that offer promise and end up in disappointment. A tendency to seek happiness through satisfaction of craving is itself an addiction.

Buddhists have clear and distinct views on the nature of happiness. They regard happiness as being free of our emotional attachment to desire and desire itself. Samsara is built from emotions whereas nirvana or enlightenment is based upon being free of emotions. Understanding this, one has an opportunity to achieve freedom and contentment. Shamata and Vispassana meditation, as well as contemplation on the Four Immeasurables (equanimity, loving kindness, compassion, and joy for all) promote a cessation of emotion and subsequently an end to suffering.

Buddhism challenges our ego-based way of thinking. Overcoming self-centered thinking develops compassion and awareness. Understanding that the cause of suffering is the ego self, the individual comes to realize the destructive nature of desire. By practicing

'skillful means' or methods that promote self-awareness, self-destructiveness is counteracted and the value of human life (both of self and other) is introduced in its place. When the 'me' identity is unraveled, compassion arises.

The foundational teachings of Buddhism provide a framework for creating a Pedagogy of Happiness. A curriculum based upon inner investigation and experimentation opens a broad field of ideas through which inner vision could be cultivated and developed. Such a curriculum could further the development of the human body, mind, heart, and spirit.

Mindfulness and Meditation

Mindfulness is the Buddhist antidote for mental ignorance. Mindfulness is used to promote well being – “the key to the present moment. Without it we cannot see the world clearly, and we simply stay lost within the wanderings of our minds” (Goldstein, 2007, p. 65). Well being stems from a sense of personal connection. Connection with others is impossible without an experiential sense of inner connection. The depth and breadth of our experience is directly related to the clarity of inner perception. Like a mirror that reflects simply what comes before it, mindfulness connects us to our subjective reality, enhancing our experience (Goldstein, 2007). Unity within, promotes unity without; mindfulness connects us to those around us.

Through meditation, one may learn to control the mind – to objectively follow the thought process, understand the roots of the pain, and return to center, dissolving into the

emptiness of original awareness. Ease or dis-ease, pleasure or discomfort, are manifestations of thought, emotional states directly related to thinking. The optimal place of rest is in the middle or neutral state of awareness which offers luminosity and clarity – an ultimate state of balance. This is the state of mindfulness. Meditation is the basis of the Buddhist term 'skillful means', offering various methods to achieve this state of balance.

For those committed to fostering positive relations within relationship, meditation and mindfulness extend further opportunity to cultivate caring attention. What is happening, and how we perceive and respond to it, is directly influenced by how clearly we see the moment. Clarity promotes wisdom to “direct our choices and actions, rather than old habits simply playing out their patterns of conditioning” (Goldstein, 2007, p. 66). Positive choices influence peace and well being, furthering life in a creative, caring, constructive direction. The Dalai Lama is an impeccable example for he is one who completely embodies this quality.

Employing meditation as mind training is the Buddhist method to overcome the hold of 'shempa' or clinging and the emotions that result from attachment. Generally people are caught within the web of their emotional 'stories' unable to see outside of themselves. Lost in our own melodramas depletes energy that could be better employed serving others. Relieving this dilemma means taking “an active interest in discovering the very nature of emotion” (Goldstein, 2007, p. 67). Freeing oneself of negative emotional tendencies brought on through the clinging nature of the mind, empowers individuals and offers a sense of freedom and liberty.

Mindfulness is empowering and broadens the scope of life choices, presenting unlimited possibilities for exploration. It also helps develop qualities of concentration, clarity, steadfastness, and inner strength, as well as other virtues necessary to maintain and continue healthy relationships to self and society.

Mindfulness and meditation could easily be incorporated within the classroom and would prove a valuable addition to existing curriculum programs. If introduced at an early age, reflection regarding the relationship of thought to behavior could be introduced as the basis of spiritual education in a language that could avoid reference to religion. Universal in its nature, a study of the mind is a fascinating subject that offers admission to interior landscapes of self and truth, enhancing spiritual conversation in a way that would not offend members of the various cultural groups present in classrooms. The realization of universality among students due to this foundation of mind could provide a common *space* to create or develop new curriculum, better serving the needs or addressing problems present within schools today.

Buddhist Practice and Adult Learning

As well, Buddhist methodology is a viable option for adults continuing their education. The Buddha's Eightfold Path and other Buddhist practices can aid people in becoming more responsible, harmonious individuals, capable of participating more fully and compassionately in society. Negative thinking happens in moments of forgetfulness. Vigilance, strength, courage, and tenacity are determinants to achieve a more attentive life. This is not a path

for the weak; it requires an ongoing commitment to practice meditation and other methods offered by the Buddha in the sutras and tantras. A need for more meditative practice grows proportionately with an awareness of mental delinquency and the pain it causes. The importance of mind control, diligent vigilance, and responsibility for self grows as a person sees the direct relationship of the inner being to the outer state of reality.

The theory of karma and reincarnation offers a logical explanation of life and death that coincides with the natural law of the universe. God, or the ultimate presence or intelligence, seems more just if several chances of incarnation are offered – more opportunities to correct the mind and body to harbor the true nature of the soul's intention. Working out the consequences of negative thoughts and actions and acquiring merit through positive, compassionate action resulting in a better life next round is a belief that makes sense. Life based upon cause and effect seems an intelligent theory, aligned with the natural order.

States of fear, discomfort, depression, and weariness are, according to Buddhists, manifestations of the mind and the practitioner's laziness to control it. Various Vajrayana and Mahayana practices such as the Red Chenrezig Teaching serve as correctives to develop 'bodhicitta' (awareness and compassion for the well being of others).

The process of turning and returning to the Three Jewels strengthens the Refuge vows and the original commitment to take refuge in the perfect state of awareness (the Buddha within), in the Dharma (the teachings), and the Sangha (support and compassion of the bodhisattvas and teachers who have traveled this way before and remain close by to assist others along the path). Practicing the Refuge and Bodhisattva vows helps establish the

practitioner upon the foundation of Mahayana Buddhist ground.

It also helps to understand and bring closer the sorrowful reality and predicament of the Tibetan people. In the past, Tibet harbored a people whose lives and culture embraced and upheld the teachings of the Buddha. As a Theocracy, its social, political, and religious activity were woven together into a devout fabric of reality that began and ended in full view of enlightenment and compassionate action. As hard as it may seem for many Westerners to believe, most Tibetan people, regardless of the present challenges, still appear to remain true to this intention. Exploration into this culture and Mahayana and Vajrayana practices might open new vistas of thought for the secular Western mind. Certainly the need for a more fulfilling lifestyle that offers a practical spiritual basis can find a response in Buddhism, and in this case, Tibetan Buddhism.

Art Education in the Classroom

Classrooms today are riddled with the problems that are besetting the entire North American culture. “Incivility, mean spiritedness, and outright hatred often rule the day. . . bad manners and belligerence have become capital in this culture of hostility” (Cosier, 2005, p. 53). Art educators are being asked to take an active role in the education of the human spirit, to help achieve balance and well being within the hearts and minds of young people.

Spirituality, with its implication to religion, is a contentious subject in education because of the multi-cultural and secular nature of present society. It seems logical to simply avoid

the subject by omitting all reference to spirituality from the classroom, keeping education within the context of secular discussion. It is likely, however, that repercussions of this position are being reflected in the often uncontrolled negative behavior of some students, causing concerned educators to investigate possibilities of introducing spiritual education. It has become evident that addressing the spiritual well being of students is paramount. “Defining spirituality within secular contexts is crucial, and adopting the view that spirituality is an awareness and acceptance of the interconnectedness of all living things serves this need” (Campbell, 2009, p. 125).

Educators, in exploring strategies to help students search for meaning and purpose and find ways to address the stress in their lives, are turning to visual art because “art making and critiquing have always been concerned with making sense of the world” (Campbell, 2009, pp. 124-125). Art is an avenue into the deeper, less visible realms of the human psyche and spirit. Within the context of art making lies permission to open to hidden depth and meaning, permission to access and develop consciousness and power often denied through ordinary thinking or communication. It provides avenues to self whereby one may question and explore ideas about existence, wonder about the world, connect to higher or greater spaces, access and explore personal power, and investigate relationships within and without that lead to experiences of interconnectedness (Campbell, 2009). Through using a more holistic spiritual approach, introducing methods (such as mandala art) to encourage self exploration and investigation, the art classroom could become the needed *sacred space* in which to restore balance and harmony. Within this valuable

spiritual space, students would feel safe to identify and re-invent themselves, in turn establishing more authentic, peaceful connections with the world around them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

A Personal Reflection

The point is to live our lives because they are ours. Or to shape our narratives in ways that do not duplicate other narratives. At least we can work to render them the kinds of stories that open out to possibility. This does not depend upon representation; it depends upon creation and invention, preferably among others who are also in quest, who recognize us for what we are striving to be and who win our recognition for what they are not yet. (Green, 1988, p. 207).

My story is that of an adventurer, pathfinder, learner, and teacher. The opportunity to travel into Buddhist territory – India, Nepal, and the Autonomous Region of Tibet – has strengthened my belief in the philosophy and practice of Tibetan Buddhism. At the same time, it has given me a new perspective on the culture in which I was raised. By immersing myself in the Buddhist culture, I have come to understand and more fully appreciate the context within which I do my practice. Receiving blessings and empowerments alongside the Tibetan people has been a precious experience that has proven very supportive. My spiritual commitment has been recognized and honored by teachers and fellow seekers who strengthened my convictions and encouraged me to continue the spiritual journey. I feel validated and supported.

I have come to accept that the state of my life is a matter of choice. The opportunity is mine to transcend suffering, or at least to change my relationship to it by putting this new learning into practice. As a scientist would experiment and document findings, I too must

test this process of thinking, investigate these techniques of strengthening and coming to awareness in order to mold a new identity. It is my responsibility to determine how to assimilate this information, constructing a new belief system to include these ideas. In doing so, I establish new ground to stand upon, new territory to act within, and a new identity from which to manifest a life.

Embarking on a spiritual journey, I wonder about matters of freedom and influence. Are my choices influenced by a previous lifetime's positive karma? What is it that inspires the spirit and mind to turn inward, to assume responsibility, to set the mind in motion to create change? For those in the process of turning, it seems useful to embrace new ideas, stretch boundaries, and incorporate the previously unknown into one's current body of knowledge.

The aim of this project, a journey of discovery and change, is a reflection of the *universal* stemming from the *personal*. Life is a process of growth; its cycle of birth towards death is a natural flow. The Buddha has identified methods to train the mind to transcend itself, with peace, happiness, and compassion its end.

In this paper, I have exposed two aspects of the spiritual journey: There is the outer religious/cultural context and the inner spiritual/personal experience. This segment of my spiritual journey has encompassed Buddhist religious practices, a path that has led me far away from the Christian beliefs and practices of my culture. However, as a spiritual aspirant, I don't view them as competing belief systems. I have come to recognize parallels. The mystical spiritual journey lies both within and outside religious contexts, crosses international and cultural borders, and is universally available to anyone who is

spiritually inclined. Metaphorically speaking, the pavement of the road may be made of different materials but the journey, destination, and goal leads to the same place. The human 'home' lies within.

It has been said that the longest journey is the journey from the head to the heart. Through following my heart I have come to Tibetan Buddhism, through the heart I have adhered to its practice, and within the heart the journey continues. Through faith, practice, and accrued merit I hope to finally transcend my negative karma, liberate my mind, and come to dwell in the place of the heart and the true nature of my mind. Through faith in the guidance of Buddha – his compassionate action and words – I will continue to follow this profound path towards self-realization and liberation.

My journey continues, simply, along a path the Buddha, the Awakened One, recommended twenty-five hundred years ago, following the harmonious 'language of the heart'. The Buddha taught that awakening depends on each person's commitment to walk the path and to experience it. As a master teacher, one who had gone before and walked the way himself, he could merely offer methods and point the mind away from the darkness towards the direction of the light. In his own words taken from the Dhammapada (2001):

With a quiet mind
Come into the empty house, your heart
And feel the joy of the way
Beyond the world.

Look within –
The rising and falling.
What happens!
How sweet to be free!

It is the beginning of life.
Of mastery and patience,
Of good friends along the way,
Of a pure and active life.
So live in love.
Do your work.
Make an end of your sorrows.

For see how the jasmine
Releases and lets fall
Its withered flowers.

Let fall willfulness and hatred.

Are you quiet?
Quieten your body.
Quieten your mind.

You want nothing.
Your words are still.
You are still.

By your own efforts
Waken yourself, watch yourself.
And live joyfully.
You are the master.
You are the refuge.
As a merchant breaks in a fine horse,
Master yourself.

How gladly you follow
The words of the awakened.

How quietly, how surely
You approach the happy country,
The heart of stillness.
However young,
The seeker who sets out upon the way
Shines bright over the world.

Like the moon,
Come out from behind the clouds!

Shine

(pp.120-122)

As I continue the journey out of personal darkness towards the light, may these words guide the way of others traveling towards liberation. May the merit accrued through these efforts be offered for the happiness and enlightenment of all sentient beings.

OM GAYA GAYA GAYA

May All Beings Be Happy.

APPENDIX




Chart of Tibetan Buddhist Iconography (Maraini, 2000, p. 388)

	Kalpa	Supreme Buddha	Bodhisattva	Manusm Buddha
I	<i>Vairocana</i>	<i>Samantabhadra</i> (Kuntu-zangpo) "The wholly good"		<i>Krakucchanda</i>
II	<i>Akshobhya</i>	<i>Vajrapani</i> (Chanadorje) "He who holds the <i>Vajra</i> "		<i>Kanakamuni</i>
III	<i>Ratnasambhava</i>	<i>Ratnapani</i> "He who holds the Jewel"		<i>Dipamkara</i> (Marmedze)
IV	<i>Amitābha</i>	<i>Avalokitesvara</i> (Chen-re-zi) "He who looks down [with compassion]"		<i>Sakya-Muni</i> (Sakya-thubpa)
V	<i>Amoghasiddhi</i>	<i>Visvapani</i> "He who holds the double <i>Vajra</i> "		<i>Maitreya</i> (Champa)

Lastly, the group of the Five Supreme Buddhas serves as point of reference for a notable series of other pentads (directions of space, colour, elements, etc.) which vary from one school to the next; below is a tabulation that may serve as a general reference:

	<i>Vairocana</i>	<i>Akshobhya</i>	<i>Ratnasambhava</i>	<i>Amitābha</i>	<i>Amoghasiddhi</i>
Space	centre	east	south	west	north
Colour	white	blue	yellow	red	green
Vehicle	lion	elephant	horse	peacock	garuda bird
Element	ether	water	earth	fire	air
Mudra	<i>dharmachakra</i>	<i>bhūmisparsa</i>	<i>varada</i>	<i>dhyāna</i>	<i>abhaya</i>
Symbol	wheel	thunderbolt	jewel	lotus	double vajra
Syllable	<i>Om</i>	<i>Hum</i>	<i>Tram</i>	<i>Hri</i>	<i>Ah</i>
Family	<i>moha</i>	<i>duṣa</i>	<i>cintāmani</i>	<i>raga</i>	<i>samaya</i>
Aggregate	<i>viññāna</i>	<i>rūpa</i>	<i>vedanā</i>	<i>samjñā</i>	<i>samskāra</i>
(skanda)	(conscience)	(body)	(sensation)	(perception)	(volition)
Wisdom	of universal law	of the mirror	of equality	of discernment	of fulfilment
Poison	ignorance	hatred	pride	passion	greed
Shakti	<i>Akasadhat- visvari</i>	<i>Locanā</i>	<i>Māmakā</i>	<i>Pāndari</i>	<i>Samayatārā</i>

(Maraini, 2000, p. 331)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Sanskrit name</i>	<i>Tibetan name</i>	<i>Usual Aspect</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>Dhyani Buddha</i>	Amitābha	Ö-pa-me		Incarnated in the Panchen Lama
<i>Dhyani Bodhisattva</i>	Avalokitesvara	Chen-re-zi		Incarnated in the Dalai Lama
<i>Manushi Buddha</i>	Sakya-Muni	Sakya-Thupa		The Prince Siddhartha of history, who became the ascetic Gautama

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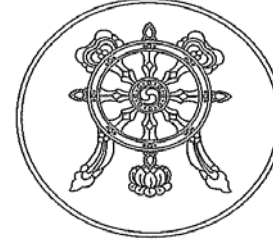
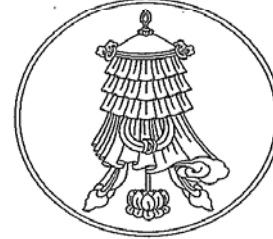
The Eight Auspicious Symbols (Beer, 2003, n.p.)

Victory Banner

Fish

Vase

Lotus



Conch

Endless Knot

Parasol

Wheel of Dharma

Glossary of Buddhist Terms

- Absolute truth – absolute reality, pure awareness beyond subjectivity, ultimate true nature of self.
- Adibuddha – overarching primordial Buddha, one absolute power, sometimes referred to as Vairocana, Vajradhara, Samantabhadra, or Vajrasattva.
- Ahimsa – the practice of 'no harm'.
- Amitabha – Dhyani Buddha of the Padma or Lotus family. Buddha for this age. Means 'immeasurable light'.
- Amitayus – Longlife Buddha.
- Amma – Amritanandamayi. An incarnation of the Divine Mother. An Avatar living in Kerala, Southern India, also known as the 'hugging saint'.
- Avalokiteshvara – also known as Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Samboghakaya Buddha for this age.
- Avatar – an incarnate being that embodies the Divine. One who has no further karma on this plane but remains in human form to help other beings spiritually.
- Awareness – original state of the mind, beyond subjective thought.
- Bardo – the intermediary state existing between death and subsequent rebirth. The stages of the Bardo are outlined in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a guide which gives detailed instructions on how to successfully pass through the Bardo and is read to a person upon death.
- Bhikshu or Bhikshumi – Tibetan word for monk or nun.
- Bodhicitta – the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the sake of all.
- Bodhisattva – a being who has achieved enlightenment but refrains from entering Nirvana in order to stay behind to help sentient beings achieve the same.
- Bonpo – the original religious tradition of Tibet, based on shamanism.
- Boudhanath – the center of Tibetan life in Kathmandu where there is one of the two great stupas of the city.
- Buddha – awakened or enlightened one. Founder of the Buddhism. Also the first object of refuge.
- Chakra – 'khorlo' in Tibetan. Wheel, disc, circle. Symbol of Buddhist teaching and term for the energy centers of the body.
- Chenrezig – Tibetan name for Avalokiteshvara, Deity or Bodhisattva of Compassion. Also father of the Tibetan people. The Dalai Lama is believed to be an incarnation of Chenrezig.
- Chorten – stupa. Architectural structure. Buddhist sanctuary. Tower to hold relics, funerary monument.
- Chuba – Tibetan traditional dress, a woman's outer dress worn with a colorful striped apron and silver buckle or man's outer coat worn with one side dangling at the waist, tied with a belt. The men's coat usually has Chinese silk trim and is lined with sheep

skin.

Circumambulation – circular walking around a holy site, usually a stupa or temple.

Completion Phase – in Vajrayana meditation of deity practice, it follows the generation phase where one rests in equanimity and emptiness in order to realize the fruits of the practice.

Consort – feminine deity represented in union with male deity. Represents wisdom or emptiness.

Dakini – feminine principle associated with wisdom. There are ordinary dakinis with some spiritual power and there are the wisdom dakinis that are fully realized.

Dalai Lama – political and spiritual head of the Tibetan people and Tibetan Buddhism. He is a reincarnated tulku, found and recognized as a young child to be the incarnation of the previous master. The present Dalai Lama lives in exile near Dharamsala, India. Believed to be an incarnation of Chenrezig.

Damaru – small Tibetan drum.

Darshan – a meeting with, or being in the presence of, a realized master.

Demons – terrifying energies or negative spirits.

Dependent Origination – Buddha's teaching on the interconnectedness of all things and the nature of emptiness.

Dhammapada – original sayings of the Buddha.

Dharma – teachings of the Buddha. The second object of refuge.

Dharmakaya – one of the three realms representing the emptiness aspect of Buddhahood.

Dhyani Buddhas – five, meditations or incarnations of mystical wisdom or transcendental buddhas residing in the realm of the dharmakaya. Also referred to as Jinas (conquerors) or Tathagatas (perfect ones). They are Vairocana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, and Amogasiddhi.

Dorje – vajra or thunderbolt scepter. Represents the stability of method and used with the bell or drilbu to represent transcendent knowledge. Represent Wisdom and Compassion (skillful means), the two necessary components of enlightenment.

Drilbu – bell representing emptiness, the void, intuition, and impermanence. Used along with the dorje as symbol of transcendent knowledge.

Dzogchen – direct path. The highest Vajrayana teachings. Called the Lightening Path. Its focus is to meditate directly on the Ultimate, rigpa or true nature of the mind.

Dzong – fortress.

Eight Auspicious Signs or Symbols – corresponding to parts of the Buddha's body: the eternal knot, fish, vase, wheel, banner, canopy, lotus, and conch.

Eightfold Path – second teaching of the Buddha, encompassing Right View, Right Purpose, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Awareness, and Right Concentration.

Emptiness – absence of form, true existence in all phenomena.

Enlightenment – the realization of the true nature of self and purification of all obscurations.

Equality – all things are equal in that they possess the nature of emptiness.

Five Elements – earth, fire, water, air, and ether (space, imagination).

Five Families – the Buddha, Vajra, Jewel, Lotus, and Action families of Buddhas.

Four Immeasurables – teaching based on equanimity, loving kindness, compassion and joy.

Four Noble Truths – first teaching of the Buddha regarding Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the Way out of Suffering, and the Path.

Garuda – mythical eagle-like bird.

Gelugpa – the newest lineage or sect of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Tsongkapa. The Dalai Lama belongs to this sect.

Generation Phase – in meditation, it is the first phase which includes visualization and repetition of mantras.

Gods – class of existence dominated by pride.

Greater Vehicle – the second and third cycles of Buddha's teachings known as the Mahayana and Vajrayana whereby one strives for enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

Guru Rinpoche – Padmasambhava.

Guyuto Temple and Monastery – residence of the Karmapa. This is the monastery that the Dalai Lama built with the monies received from the Nobel Peace Prize.

Hell – class of existence that experiences extreme suffering.

Hungry Ghosts – class of existence representing greed and insatiability.

Jhator – sky burial. Means 'giving alms to the birds'.

Jokhang – the temple in Lhasa that houses the Jowo Buddha statue. The most sacred temple in the TAR region.

Jowo – statue of Buddha brought from China by one of the two wives of Trisong Detsen.

Kagyupa – one of the four lineages or sects of Tibetan Buddhism. The Karmapa is the head of this sect.

Kalachakra – a Vajrayana teaching that is said to be the greatest teaching for this time, necessary to bring unity to the universe and establish Shambala on earth.

Kalpa – an age or eon of time.

Kamala – 'padma' or lotus blossom, symbol of compassion.

Kanjur – the 108 original sutras or teachings of Buddha. One of the two collections of works that form the foundation of Buddhist literature, the other being the Tengyur.

Karma – principle of cause and effect. The effects of past actions.

Karmapa – head of the Kagyupa lineage of Tibetan teachings. He is also recognized as an embodiment of Chenrezig.

Kayas – realms of existence, Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya.

Kham – Eastern province of Tibet now absorbed into the Sechuan province of China.

Khata – ceremonial scarf. Scarf of happiness, usually white or light yellow.

Khorten – prayer wheel.

Kora – circumambulation around a stupa or a temple usually done while chanting the

sacred mantra and telling the mala.

Kyilkhor – mandala.

Lesser Vehicle – first cycle of Buddha's teachings where one strives for enlightenment for the sake of self only. Also called Hinayana.

Lhasa – the sacred city, of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage. The Jokhang temple is here as well as the Jowo Buddha, the first Buddha statue to be brought to Tibet. Lhasa was the capitol of Tibet and is the capital of the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China. The biggest center for the Tibetan Buddhists. The city of the Potala, the palace of the Dalai Lama.

Losar – Tibetan New Year, usually in February.

Lungta – also called a windhorse, a good luck charm. Often small square pieces of paper with horse or prayers printed on them which are cast to the wind. Most common form is the prayer flags.

Lungtungs – prayerflags

Mahayana – School of the Greater Vehicle. Embodies the second and third cycles of Buddha's teachings.

Maitreya – Nirmanakaya Buddha of the future said to be presently living in Tushita heaven.

Mala – rosary of 108 beads used for counting repetitions of mantra.

Mandala – mystic circle representing the environment of the divine universe or residence of a deity, used in deity empowerment to create the sacred space. Geometric in design.

Mani stones – stones with painted or carved mantras found everywhere throughout Tibetan territory. Reminders of Buddha's message of compassion.

Manjushri – bodhisattva of wisdom.

Mantra – mystic invocation, a prayer that protects the mind. Most famous one is 'Om Mani Padme Hum'.

Meditation – concentration of the mind. Buddhist meditation is comprised of two types, Shamata or calm abiding and Vipassana or contemplation.

Merit – 'sonam' in Tibetan. The energy generated by positive actions leading to a better rebirth.

Mindroling Rinpoche – previous head of the Nyingmapa order living in Clement Town. He died in February, 2009.

Momos – Tibetan dumplings stuffed with meat, potatoes or vegetables. A very popular Tibetan food.

Mount Kailash – revered mountain in Eastern Tibet where many devout Tibetans make a pilgrimage of the three day kora around it. Said to symbolize Mount Meru, the sacred mountain of the gods for both Hindus and Buddhists.

Mudra – sacred ritual gesture, most common form of the mandala.

Namaskar – hand position with two hands at the heart. Greeting or parting, it is done in acknowledgement of the perfection or light within one another.

Nirmanakaya – third realm of existence. Aspect of Buddhahood that arises out of

compassion to help ordinary beings.

Nirvana – Buddhist heaven. The state beyond suffering.

Nyingmapa – the ancient tradition. The oldest Tibetan Buddhist lineage or sect. Brought to Tibet by Padmasambhava in the eighth century.

Obscurations – that which conceals the Buddha nature.

Padma – lotus flower and symbol of compassion.

Padmasambhava – the adept who brought Buddhism to Tibet and conquered the evil spirits there. Known as Padmakara and Guru Rinpoche.

Panchen Lama – second in line as leader of Tibetan Buddhism. Was considered the head of the Gelugpa order. The last true Panchen lama was kidnapped by the Chinese and replaced by the present Panchen Lama, one of their choosing. He lives in Shigatse, TAR at the Tashilumpo Monastery.

Papaji – an Indian teacher who was a student of the enlightened master Ramanamaharshi. Papaji taught in Lucknow, India and died in 1997.

Poisons – negative emotions such as ignorance, desire, hatred, pride, greed, jealousy.

Potala – the mountain where Chenrezig lives. Also the winter palace of the Dalai Lama, in Lhasa.

Prasad – blessed food usually handed out at the end of darshan or an empowerment.

Prayer Wheels – wheels containing thousands of prayers for the well being and happiness of all. Tibetans believe that these wheels, whether large or small, if kept in perpetual motion, will aid all sentient beings to come to enlightenment.

Radong – musical horn.

Ranjung – self emanating or self growing images on rocks usually of the Buddha or the secret mantra.

Refuge – the practice of turning to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha for support.

Reiki – means Universal Life Energy and is known in the form of a hands on healing energy therapy and meditation technique. Balances, purifies and harmonizes the body with its natural state and the universe.

Relative truth – the apparent, subjective truth taken as real by the deluded mind. World of desires propelled by negative emotions and karmic forces in the endless cycle of death and rebirth.

Rigpa – ultimate awareness.

Rinpoche – reincarnated master or tulku. Holder of precious teachings. Lineage holder of specific tantric or vajrayana teachings. Abbots of monasteries.

Rogyapas – body breakers. Men who prepare the bodies for sky burials.

Sakya – one of the four lineages or sects of Tibetan Buddhism established at the Sakya monastery.

Sakya Trizin – head of the Sakya order, presently living in Dehradun, India.

Sambhogakaya – second realm of existence, body of perfect enjoyment, and reflects the spontaneously luminous aspect of Buddhahood. Perceptible to highly realized beings.

Samsara – the world of delusion, or worldly desire.

Sangha – practitioners of the Buddha's teachings. More commonly refers to the community of ordained monks, Arhats, Bodhisattvas, etc. The third object of refuge.

Sangkang – large bottle shaped incense burners.

Secret Mantra – Om Mani Padme Hum. Most special mantra of Tibetan Buddhists meaning the 'jewel within the lotus', signifying compassion, Buddha, and enlightenment.

Shakyamuni – another name for Gautama Buddha.

Shambala – the Tibetan Buddhist utopia to be established on earth when light conquers darkness.

Shantideva – Indian adept from the Nalanda University who wrote *A Guide to The Way of the Bodhisattva*.

Six Classes of Existence – the Tibetan Cosmological order of incarnation involving Hell, Hungry Ghosts, Animals, Humans, Demi-gods and Gods. Necessary karmic stages to transcend before enlightenment.

Sutras – first written teachings of the Buddha. Found in the Kanjur.

Tantra – vajrayana teachings considered the most esoteric and sacred. Mostly practiced in the Nyingma-pa or Kagyupa tradition.

TAR- the name for the new province of China, The Tibetan Autonomous Region, previously known as Tibet.

Tara – the female deity of compassion. The female counterpart of Chenrezig. She is depicted in many colors but the most important two are green and white representing the two Princesses who brought Buddhism to Tibet. Green for the Nepalese princess, Bhrikuti Devi, and White for the Chinese one, Wengchen.

Tengyur - 227 commentaries on the sutras or Buddha's teachings. The second part of the collection of the collection of works, forming the basis of Buddhist literature.

Terma – sacred hidden treasures or teachings placed in the environment by Padmasambavha and YesheTsogyal for future times. Held within the Nyingma-pa or Kagyupa tradition.

Terton – those who discover the sacred terma.

Thangka – scroll painting and meditative device.

Theravada – school of the Small or Lesser Vehicle embodying the first level of Buddha's teachings.

Three Jewels – the three treasure wisdoms, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Torma – offering of flour and butter often made into cone like objects with colored wheels that represent the body, mind and speech of the Buddha.

Trizong Detsen – the Tibetan King who initiated Buddhism in Tibet.

Tsampa – staple Tibetan food made from barley flour.

Tsuglagkhang – the temple of the Dalai Lama at McLeod Ganj near Dharamsala.

Tulku – reincarnated body of a master.

Tushita Heaven – land or heaven of the gods.

Vajrayana – the diamond way. The highest level of Buddha's teachings whereby

enlightenment may be achieved in one lifetime. Embodies the sacred esoteric Tantra teachings.

Wish-fulfilling jewel – represents Buddha, the perfect true nature of the mind, enlightenment or liberation.

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