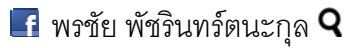


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Padmasambhava: The Lotus Born (2)

(Continuing from last issue.)

Padmasambhava and Tibet

King Trisong Detsen (B.E. 1285 – 1340) was the 38th king of the Yarlung Dynasty and was the first emperor of Tibet. He was the first king to succeed in bringing various ethnic groups in Tibet under one and the same rule. According to one of the legends, in B.E. 1303 this king invited the monk rector of Nalanda University, Santaraksita, to Tibet. Santaraksita had started to construct Samye Monastery which is the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet when demons who resided in the area decided to obstruct the establishment of the Buddha Dhamma there. The King then invited Padmasambhava to come and get rid of those demons. It turned out that the demons were all succumbed to Padmasambhava's power but they did not die or escape. They were and are still around, converted to Dhamma practitioners by Padmasambhava. This is the right way to fight evil forces under all forms of Buddhism. Buddhism doesn't destroy evil (It's not possible to be destroyed anyway.) but converts it to supporting power for the journey of dhamma or the dhamma practice aiming at enlightenment.

Mentioned above is a legend combining facts and myth. There is another legend likely to be more factual since it has less paranormal incidents. According to this story, in B.E. 1304 Emperor Trisong Detsen invited Abbot Santaraksita to Tibet at an unfortunate time of a smallpox epidemic. A group of courtiers accused Santaraksita of bringing the epidemic to Tibet and had

him expelled. Before leaving, Santaraksita recommended the emperor to invite Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) from the city of Swat (in modern day northwestern Pakistan.) The Guru came and performed a ceremony to successfully drive away the demons who caused the epidemic. Then the Emperor re-invited Santaraksita back.

The first thought of Guru Rinpoche when he arrived at Tibet was to transmit the dzogchen teaching to Tibetans so that the practice got permanently established in the land. (Dzogchen is an advanced Vajrayana dharma practice comparable to insight meditation of Theravada.) Later the Guru realized that Tibet at the time was not ripe for dzogchen so he hid away his scripture. The hidden scripture is what we today call **secret scripture or terma**. Padmasambhava's termas are all about dzogchen. (Beside Padmasambhava's termas, there are very many more termas belonging to other Vajrayana masters.) After hiding all the termas for good, Guru Rinpoche left Tibet in B.E. 1317.

Nobody knew what happened before he left. It just turned out that the Emperor relinquished one of his wives, Yeshe Tsogyal, to Padmasambhava.

Emperor Trisong Detsen ordered the translation of all available Buddhist texts in Sanskrit into Tibetan. The group of translators comprised of Padmasambhava with 25 of his disciples together with Santaraksita and another 108 men. The group worked hard for many years in one of the greatest translation projects the world has ever seen. Translated texts from this period formed a great basis for dharma propagation in Tibet. Padmasambhava oversaw the translation of tantra while Santaraksita directed that of sutta, both Mahayana and Theravada versions (in Sanskrit.)

Since Padmasambhava had a better command of tantra (Tantra is a practice of mysterious ceremony believed able to lead to enlightenment.) than sutta, (Sutta teaches mental development practice to bring about enlightenment.) he naturally taught Tibetans to practice tantra Buddhism. Tibetans first learned about Buddhism in the form of Tantrayana or Vajrayana. Even today, most Tibetans still think Buddhism is only Vajrayana without knowing much about teachings in the sutta of other schools.

Padmasambhava is the founder of the Nyingma sect which is a sub-school of Vajrayana. Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet now is divided into four sects: Nyingma, Gelug, Sakya and Kagyu. Details of all these sects might form another article in its own right. It is suffice here to say that Nyingma is the first and the oldest sect to introduce Buddhism to Tibet, about 300 years

before all the other three sects. **"Nyingma" literally means "archaic"** because it is the first sect to translate Sanskrit Buddhist scripture into Tibetan, at the beginning of the 14th Buddhist century.

The Nyingma Sect has been able to do the good job of keeping and disseminating the early tantra teachings (in Tibetan, of course.) This sect incorporates the belief of the indigenous Bon which is an animistic religion, worshipping ghosts, devas, gods, etc., together with ancestors' spirits. So beside Buddhist deities, Nyingma also believes in ghosts, devas and geographical gods such as gods of rivers, gods of mountains, gods of lands, gods of the sky, gods of the sea, gods of trees, etc. **But the main belief for Nyingma is there are still many and many secret texts waiting to be discovered.** It is a tradition of Nyingma to transmit the teaching orally through networks of householder practitioners. (Be reminded that the founder of Nyingma, Padmasambhava, was himself a householder with at least two consorts!) Monasteries, monks and nuns are all later extensions. The belief in Tulku or rebirth of Buddhist leaders is also a later extension. **Buddhism came to Tibet as a layman's religion. Laymen upheld Buddhism without help from monastics** who came late! It is possible that, though Padmasambhava was regarded as the founder of Samye, the first monastery in Tibet, the monastery was not supposed to be monks' residence, at least when it was built. It could have been a place for ceremony performance and dharma practice for householders. In the modern times, the Nyingma is centered in Kham district in eastern Tibet.

Padmasambhava and Bhutan

There is a famous monastery in Bhutan named Paro Taktsang meaning Tiger's Cave Monastery. This monastery is "hung" against a cliff wall at an elevation of 500 meters above the Paro Valley floor. Bhutanese believe that Padmasambhava had a deep relationship with this monastery, which is built surrounding the Taktsang Senge Samdup Cave where Padmasambhava allegedly meditated in the 14th Buddhist century. Legend has it that Padmasambhava fled all the way from Tibet on the back of Yeshe Tsogyal whom he had transformed into a flying tiger for the trip. Later on, Padmasambhava traveled to Bumthang District to fight a powerful deva deploying his power wrongfully, because the deva was not pleased by the local king.

Padmasambhava printed a silhouette of his body on a cave wall at another nearby monastery named Kurje Lhakhang where the silhouette can still be clearly seen today. (This

might be like the Buddha Chaya in Saraburi Province, Thailand.)

Padmasambhava's Teachings

Important teachings of Padmasambhava are as follows.

1. **Vajra Guru Chant** or Padmasambhava Chant. The chant is in Sanskrit, "Om Ah Hum Vajra Guru Padma Siddhi Hum." This is a popular and believed to be powerful chant among Vajrayana followers. Since Tibetans pronounce Sanskrit words not very clearly (This also applies to all other Sanskrit chants.) their chant becomes, "Om Ah Hung Benza Guru Pema Siddhi Hung." (In fact, this is reasonably close to the Sanskrit pronunciation.) In Vajrayana, especially Nyingma, practice, this chant is regarded as very powerful, being able to bring the chanters close to Padmasambhava's heart and the hearts of all the enlightened ones.
2. **Seven Line Prayer to Padmasambhava.** This is a famous prayer. Many Tibetans recite it every day. The prayer's content is a sacred and most important teaching on the practice of Dzogchen.
3. **Secret Texts.** Padmasambhava hid secret texts or termas in various places such as lakes, caves, fields and forests in the Himalaya in the hope that those who discover them later on would bear the responsibility of the interpretation and propagation of the practice. (Discoverers of termas are called tertons.) It is believed in the field of Tibetan studies that **the Bardo Thodol or the Tibetan Manual for the Dead** is one of Padmasambhava's termas discovered by a Tibetan terton named Karma Lingpa.
4. **Teachings on Samantabhadra Buddha.** According to Padmasambhava, his father was like Samantabhadra Buddha which represents inner self awakening and his mother was like Samantabhadri which represents absolute truth. According to Nyingma teachings, Samantabhadra is the original Buddha and Samantabhadri is his consort! Padmasambhava claimed he was lotus born, who was the most progressive one, coming from the land of no birth where all the phenomena in the world originate. (Land of Nibbana?) He allegedly came to the world to perform the duties of all the Buddhas in the three periods: past, present and future.

(To be continued.)

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An image of Padmasambhava. This image is situated on the bank of Lake Rewalsar, Himachal Pradesh, India.

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