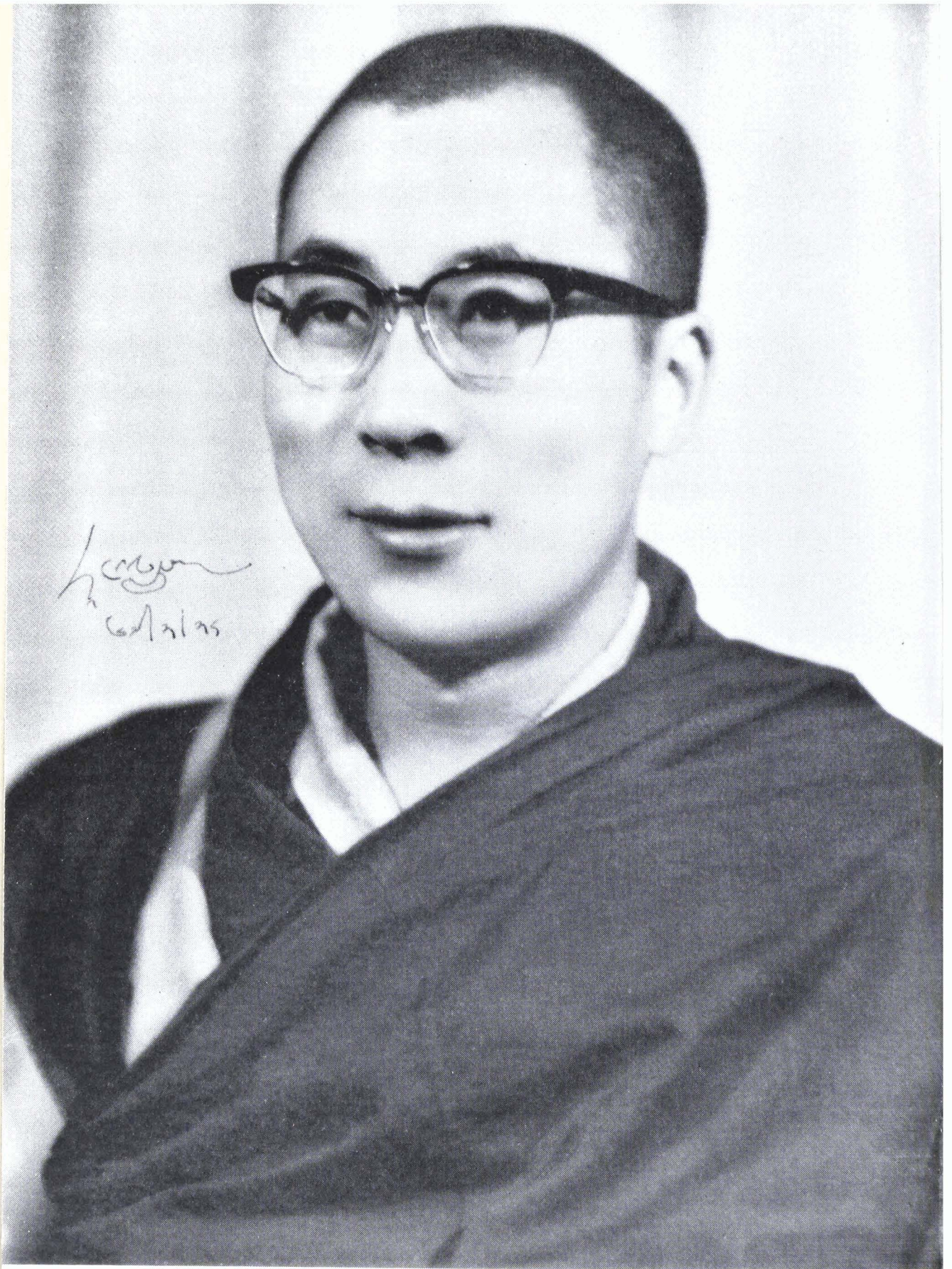


# The Message

of the **TIBETANS**

Arnaud Desjardins





His Holiness The Dalai Lama  
(frontispiece)



ARNAUD DESJARDINS

**THE MESSAGE  
OF THE TIBETANS**

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY  
R H WARD & VEGA STEWART

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## **PART ONE**

# **THE MYSTERY OF THE TIBETANS**

DHARAMSALA IS A MOUNTAIN VILLAGE TO WHICH INDIAN FAMILIES OF THE Punjab come in summer in search of fresh air. Higher still, at the end of a dozen kilometers of winding road, at every turn of which an even more beautiful landscape is revealed, stands the village of Upper Dharamsala, still called MacLeod Ganj. This region of hills buttressing the Himalayan range which neighbours the Kangra valley, famous for its ancient school of miniature-painting, has never before in its history been inhabited by Mongols, Ladhakis or Tibetans.

Yet today one meets Tibetans there on all sides, dressed in the clothes, high boots and cloaks for the men, long dresses and aprons for the women, with which the photographs taken by Harrer and Maraini have made us familiar.

This was my fourth stay in this remote region, where the government of India has given His Holiness the Dalai Lama refuge.

I had just been watching for several hours a performance by the troupe of musicians, singers and dancers which is called the Drama Party there. Their costumes are beautiful, their programme well arranged. Refugees, simple peasants, make up the wondering and wholly attentive audience. Yet this spectacle has about it something terribly sad. One of the boys of the troupe had been my guide. He already spoke English fluently. As he walked beside me, he played a refrain on his flute—the famous ‘Never on Sunday’ from the film of that name. I looked at him in some surprise. Twisting his lips and with the flute still in his mouth, he shot at me: ‘Never on Sunday’, in English and in an accent suggestive both of Broadway and the Paris boulevards.

I looked at the dancers, male and female, dressed up, made up. They

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danced well. But they had already lost the spontaneity, wild, proud, smiling, of the other Tibetan refugees.

When a people is reduced to the setting up of 'folk' dancing and singing troupes for the presentation of their ancient customs, the folklore of their past is already dead. When it comes to the founding of Conservatoires for the preservation of yesterday's music and dance, it means that the source of those arts has already dried up. The best, the most clear sighted of today's Tibetan refugees know that very well.

When I first went to Dharamsala, seven months before this, I had lunch with Miss Pema, the young sister of the Dalai Lama, who is the moving spirit in the important work of looking after orphan or abandoned children. Miss Pema is a beautiful and distinguished person. Though the Dalai Lama's family is of humble peasant origin, Pema has the aristocratic air and the manners of a princess. Her English is faultless, her conversation full of charm. At no matter what Parisian dinner-table, Pema would be the centre of attention. She talked to me about her travels, about Hollywood, the stars whom she had met there, Jerry Lewis or Dean Martin (one of the two, I forget which); about American women, about the museums and galleries she visited. But I had come among the Tibetans having read deeply in G.I. Gurdjieff and René Guénon, and after years spent in Hindu *ashrams*, and was prepared to pay whatever might be the full price exacted in order to study whatever is left of a traditional civilisation protected from the influence of the modern world, and from its tendency to forget the inward life for the sake of outward action. And here I was listening to Pema, the ravishing and aristocratic Pema, who was asking, 'Don't you find that Tibetan artists have never understood how to renew themselves and their art? None has ever sought to paint the young woman with whom he's in love. Always the same deities, and the same ferocious faces. Tibetan artists must discover modern painting, learn to use their own freedom. We have so much to learn. In music too. I have by now a fine collection of records; jazz, English and American singers. It's wonderful. You're a Parisian; you'll understand what I mean.'

Yes, Miss Pema. I understand what you meant. I understand all too well. You are amazed at Jerry Lewis and the Beatles, but I am amazed at your ancient scriptures and your wise men of today.

It is a long road which has led me to you, to your brother, to these *Kargyud-pa* yogis and these bewildering *Nyingma-pa* lamas. It all began in 1949, when I was twenty-four years old. That is about as old as you are now. You want the marvels of the West to regenerate and vivify



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what remains of your ancient culture: but I know how many Europeans, of the most varied backgrounds and callings, are turning nowadays towards an East which is forswearing itself and vanishing. The best, the most clear sighted, of the Tibetan refugees now in India count on us, the men of the west, to help them save whatever can be saved.

How has this come about?



Since the defeat (all too easy to foresee) of the Tibetan people's rebellion against the Chinese administration, and those measures, particularly those taken against religion, which followed it, some seventy thousand Tibetans from the various provinces have taken refuge on Indian soil. Not one, as far as I know, has been rejected by the Government of India, which has taken immediate steps to provide them with a livelihood.

The lot of these refugees is a dramatic one; the conditions of their flight, weeks of walking through mountainous country, fear, hunger, have left their mark on the children, perhaps for always. Often their parents undertook extremely difficult tasks, such as road-building at high altitude, and had to leave their children to such institutions as were able to take charge of them, the nursery at Dharamsala and the Tibetan Home Foundation at Mussoorie, where they are cared for and educated. But these children are not only refugees like other involuntary exiles and emigrés who, almost everywhere on the face of the globe are trying to learn to smile again in spite of parents dead, homes destroyed and freedom lost. They are also the frail heirs to the Tibetan Tradition, and to that extraordinary Buddhist wisdom on which, as many have testified, rests the fame of their country, a country all the more mysterious for being virtually unknown.

Until 1959 only a very few Westerners had been able to enter Tibet.

The works of tibetologists, with the possible exception of those of the celebrated French explorer, Alexandra David-Neel, were scarcely read by any but a highly specialised few. The word Tibet evoked only a few images, the ceremonial costumes, the tall headdresses, the long horns of the monks of Lhasa, the isolated monasteries clinging to the mountainsides, long and dangerous rides over desert plains; in short, everything that goes to make up a reputation for the mysterious, magical and legendary. Against such a background the incredible seemed credible. High on the list of Tibet's high places was Lhasa, and the famous Potala,

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at once fortress, dwelling, monastery, prison and mausoleum. It was there that the strange rites of the lamas took place, with their spectacular and spell-binding sacred dances. . . .

What remains of all that today? Naturally the accounts given by the last refugees to leave gainsay the information put out by the Chinese. But this book is not concerned with political problems, or with precise enquiry as to whether genocide and other crimes have or have not been committed upon the Tibetan people. No Tibetan sage or lama, the Dalai Lama included, ever suggested that I should write or speak against the Chinese. All they asked me to do, to the best of my modest ability, was to draw the attention of people of goodwill to the danger, in which their traditional wisdom stands, of disappearing altogether. The Buddhist *dharma* in the form of tantric mahayana, which was wiped out in India by the Muslim conquest and the revival of Hinduism, was preserved in and transmitted through the Tibetan religious orders. Is it now to perish for ever? People become concerned when the architectural remains of a civilisation already dead for a couple of millenia are threatened with destruction; the newspapers of the world have borne witness to the efforts made to preserve the Egyptian temples of the upper Nile, and to the immense costs involved. It appears that we are a great deal less moved by the imminent destruction, before our very eyes, of a culture still very much alive. Will anything be left of the Tibetan tradition and its wonderful Tantric Buddhism? For it must be said that it is neither the world-wide fame of the Tibetan lamas as yogis and occultists possessed of magical powers, nor the commercial success of certain sensational writings about them, which will make it possible for these dispossessed refugees to sustain those true spiritual masters who today are to be found on the Indian side of the Himalayas, and in Sikkim and Bhutan, and to revive the fire, which has been put out on the High Plateaux, where it burned so brightly and for so long.

The Bible says that 'There is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed'. Rather than that their psychological, mystical, spiritual and cosmological knowledge, together with their transcendental wisdom, should vanish from the face of our planet, the Tibetan gurus (masters) and yogis accept the necessity for opening doors hitherto closed, and for delivering up their eternal message to the world; but certainly not without regard to the way in which this shall be done, and to whom, and at what price.

I will quote in a moment what Sonam Topgey Kazi wrote to me on



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this point; Sonam Topgey Kazi who was my travelling companion guide, interpreter, and has become my personal friend. It is to him that I owe my meetings, week by week, with all the greatest lamas, rimpoches, abbots and gurus whom he used to know in Tibet. A Sikkimese, and therefore born and brought up under *Nyingma-pa* (or 'red-hat') influence, Sonam lived over seven years in Lhasa and travelled in all parts of Tibet. He married a Tibetan of one of the most aristocratic families, a lady related to high circles in Bhutan. A civil servant in the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sonam Kazi, who speaks several Asiatic languages and dialects, is attached to the Dalai Lama as interpreter in chief. He works too as an expert at Tibet House, a tibetological museum at Jor Bagh, New Delhi. It is to both His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that I owe the invaluable help of Sonam Topgey Kazi; and I never remember all that I have received from the Tibetan masters and all that they have taught me, without remembering at the same time my gratitude to those who commissioned Sonam to accompany me, to say nothing of my gratitude to Sonam himself, so great is my debt to him.

In December 1965 and January 1966 Sonam Kazi was asked by the Director of French Television to supervise the editing and the sound-recording of two documentary films, and he stayed with me in Paris. Together we went through all the notes which I had made on the numerous interviews at which he had interpreted. Whatever value this book may have is due to him, and for whatever there may be in it which he would not recognise as genuinely Tibetan I must ask his forgiveness; for it is not so much the message of the Tibetans, as it is what the man called Desjardins has understood of that message.

On the 14th of July 1966, then, a year after I left India, Sonam wrote to me (in English):

'Whatever is lost in Tibet is found in traces in India still. But how long will they withstand the daily impacts they are facing now? Probably within the next few years the purely cultural characteristics of Tibet will be no more, even in India. Even the existence of H.H. the Dalai Lama may be coming to an end. Tibetans have not been able to write many books on their own culture. Only books available are done by outsiders who might have been able to communicate 25 per cent of what really is. . . . I have found a lot of people here who are interested in doing yogi researches. But neither the lamas nor the Tibetans are too eager to reveal their secrets just for amusing uninterested mundane populace.'

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The evidence I am giving now is inevitably incomplete. I am not a Tibetologist schooled in the scientific disciplines of universities, and I do not speak Tibetan. Certainly I learned a small number of Tibetan technical (psychological) terms, but their meaning requires to be rigorously precise, and I shall abstain deliberately from using them in this book, which is not addressed to specialists. No purpose would be served either, by translating them approximately (as is too often done) by such words and phrases as 'mental', 'spirit', 'attention', 'consciousness', 'the thinking mechanism', 'impressions', 'understanding', 'knowledge', 'intellect', and so on, of which the ill-defined use can only give the illusion of comprehension, not comprehension itself.

I have made use also of the few dozens of Sanscrit words whose exact meanings I learnt little by little from Hindu gurus, swamis and pundits. But while many Tibetan sages use a sanscrit vocabulary, they rarely attribute to its terms the same meanings as that given them nowadays by the Vedantic masters; so that I have been under the necessity, here too, of making new and detailed definitions. The language in which I heard the teachings of the Tibetan lamas and sages explained was the English of my interpreter. Sonam Kazi speaks English as fluently as Tibetan, and it is the language which he mostly uses when speaking to his eleven-year-old daughter. He was not content simply to translate word for word. Using a vocabulary which is as much his own as it is Tibetan, he formulated a way of thinking with which he has been familiar for years, since he himself is a disciple well advanced along the tantric non-dualistic way of *zog-chen*. I was under the necessity of making that way of thinking and that teaching my own, of testing their truth and the possibilities of putting them into practice, and of expressing them in turn in French. I am neither a specialist nor an expert, merely one of those persons, of whom I have met a certain number both in Europe and in Asia, who are looking for certainties about self-knowledge and about what is known in a general sense as 'the spiritual life'. But the latter expression can be made to mean almost anything, and I think the simple phrase 'the search for Truth' says clearly enough what it means. The Hindus use the term *sat* to designate both Truth and Being. Being, ontology; these sound very erudite. Yet if I say, 'That which is'—meaning neither what, in my opinion, ought to be, nor what I believe to be—then we are on firmer ground, the ground on which every true teacher and every sincere disciple stands. That which is, is the Truth. And Christ said, 'The truth shall make you free'. To free a slave is to set him at liberty, an independent and responsible man. And the word



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Liberation is used, as well by Buddhists as by Hindus, to indicate the aim of their efforts and of their ascetic disciplines.

Can a Westerner, immersed in the life of this century, yet desiring to know himself better and to understand others better, find help and knowledge of the kind he needs today with the Tibetan teachers? It was in search of an answer to that question that I travelled, questioned, listened and, best of all, shared in the silence of the hermitages I visited.

What I am able to pass on of the message of the Tibetans, such as I have received and understood it myself, I have tried here to set down. It is incomplete; my references and quotations are inadequate, and at certain points I have been obliged to gainsay what I have read in other books. But I have lived what I have spoken of; I have experienced it, recognised it for the truth, and tested it daily, back here in Paris.

\* \* \*

Up to 1959 photographs and a few films (for the most part, however, made in Sikkim or at Darjeeling, in India) showed us a surprising world, a pantheon of deities with monstrous faces, terrible and distorted, for the most part represented in the act of coupling, and brandishing weapons of many kinds. Sexuality and murder appeared to share between them the iconography of the Tibetan *gompas* (or temples). To honour these divinities 'tantric' lamas (and the word tantrism suggested above all the relationship between eroticism and asceticism and the search for occult powers) celebrated macabre rites indicative of a general degeneracy of Buddhism. One evening, on the way back to the home of the Cultural Attaché of one of our embassies in Asia, after one of those dinners at which the traveller who has lived for eight months on tea and rice is astonished to find himself drinking a Muscadet or Pouilly-Fuissé, the conversation turned by chance to my sojourn among the Tibetans. I hasten to explain that there was no French Tibetologist among the guests, but a young archaeologist, who would surely have followed some course of studies in eastern religion or Asiatic art, launched into a lengthy and detailed description of tantrism in which there was no question but that high priests copulated with virgins in graveyards, virgins who were subsequently done to death and their skulls used as cups from which to drink the blood of sacrificial victims. Whenever I showed any hesitation about accepting what he was saying, his invariable response was, 'The texts are there, my dear sir. The texts are there to prove it.' Yes, it was indeed difficult for the majority of Europeans, and

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for Christian missionaries in particular, to see in the strange and repellant symbolism of the *tantras* any sign of a wisdom worthy of our acceptance. What then is this 'lamaism', as the Westerner calls *vajrayana* or *tantrayana*, the religion of the Tibetans?

I do not think I am wrong to say that Europeans, Frenchmen, who have some vague idea of Tibet and the Tibetans, would formulate no more than five concepts concerning them, (besides that of 'lamaism'): the title, the Dalai Lama; the name of the great yogi poet, Milarepa; 'The Book of the Dead' or *Bardo-tho-dol*; the 'lamaist dances'; and yoga. There have in fact existed for the last thirty years translations to do with these subjects, together with some documentation, which are available to the ordinary reader. Without having actually read these books, which are often difficult going, many people have at least heard them spoken of. And so there arise many notions which have only the most exiguous connections one with another, the linking of which (frequently done nowadays) can give only a profoundly untrue idea of the reality.

The monks whom it is easiest for foreigners to meet are certainly those in the entourage of the Dalai Lama, the official personage who represents and symbolises Tibet in the eyes of the world. Go to Dharamsala or to Dalhousie, obtain audience of one of these dignified and learned monks, and turn the conversation to 'that remarkable Book of the Dead, and the interesting study which the famous psychologist, Jung, wrote for the important English edition of the text'. You will see what happens. You will have much the same reception as an Asiatic would have who, received by a Protestant clergyman, said to him, 'I do so much admire Christianity! Please tell me about the Immaculate Conception and meditation on the Sacred Heart'. The *Bardo-tho-dol* is a text of the unreformed church of the 'Red Hats', and the 'Yellow Hats' attendant on the Dalai Lama are only very distantly concerned with it.

The majority of Tibetan monks do not practise yoga, and Milarepa is deeply revered only by yogis. As to the celebrated masked dances, if a lama has decided to tell you the truth because he has just decided that you are worthy to hear it, he will confess to you, 'Lower, lower! All that is dualism. The higher tantras are non-dualistic.'

Divided as they are into several orders or sects, the one thing the lamas are in agreement about is their absolute rejection of the name of 'lamaism' in the sense commonly given it as 'a fusion of the old cult, primitive and aboriginal, of *Bön-po*, with a degenerate Buddhism mixed with tantrism (or the teachings of the texts called "*tantras*")'. All of them consider Tibetan spirituality to be an orthodox Buddhism, in

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fact 'tantric' Buddhism, as it was accepted in the north of India before the Muslim conquests, and as devout Tibetans recovered it, and as devoutly preserved it until 1959. Vanished from India, blotted out from Soviet Central Asia, ruled out in China, distinctly half-hearted in Japan and suppressed in Tibet itself, this tantric Buddhism, which the lamas believe to be the most perfect expression of the supreme Truth and of the methods of arriving at its 'realisation', persists on the surface of our planet only thanks to a handful of monks in Ladhak, Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal and to some twenty thousand ill-starred Tibetan refugees who have taken their unhappy refuge in India, all of whom, of course, are far from claiming to be sages and spiritual masters. For the elite among the exiled lamas, then, it is not only Tibet as an independent nation, or the Tibetans as a people of common origin which is in peril, but a reality far more important than two or three million mountain-dwelling Mongols, a reality which is of importance to humanity as a whole, to the universe as a whole: the *dharma* or doctrine of the Buddha himself. It is this sense of the danger in which this doctrine stands which has silenced today the dissensions dividing the two great Tibetan churches, that of the Yellow Hats, known as the 'reformed' church, and that of the 'unreformed' Red Hats. For while the Dalai Lama is, seen from a distance, the most famous of the Tibetan dignitaries, he is not, fortunately, the only one who deserves to be approached; and when an approach is made it shows us first of all that tantric Buddhism is divided into several orders which have often been rival Orders throughout history, the *Geluk-pa*, or Yellow Hats and the Red Hats, *Nyingma-pa*, *Sakya-pa* and *Kargyud-pa*, *pa* meaning 'people' (having a particular provenance).

Since this division is what first strikes anyone who sets out to explore the Tibetan world, I point it out at the beginning of my report. But I shall speak of it later at greater length. Meanwhile it constitutes the frame within which all one's searches, communications, and findings are contained; and all one's difficulties as well.

★ ★ ★

Nowadays I have no doubt but that the discovery of Tibetan Buddhism is a fundamental experience. But the last thing one can say of it is that it is an easy experience. I am not thinking only of the difficulty of language, for no important Tibetan guru speaks English or French, nor of the difficulty of getting to know the names and the whereabouts of the



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men who are the most remarkable to meet. I mean rather the general atmosphere which surrounds that approach.

I must make it perfectly clear that I have never set foot on Tibetan soil. Among the various forms which I had to fill up and sign before I could get from the Indian authorities permits to enter certain restricted areas was an undertaking that I would not, on my honour, try to reach Tibet. So, apart from some Sikkimese lamas and monks long settled in the neighbourhood of Darjeeling, the masters and the communities which I visited were all refugees, torn from their home surroundings and the familiar framework of their lives, uprooted, without material security, deprived of all physical comfort, subjected to unstable political conditions as the foreign citizens of a country at enmity with India: citizens of China, of which Tibet is today no more than a province.

In Tibet itself there existed immense monasteries of four thousand, even of eight or ten thousand, monks, nunneries of some tens of thousands of nuns, small hermitages situated for the most part in remote and inaccessible mountains, and finally yogis or ascetics, not unlike the *saddhus* and *sannyasins* of India, who had no fixed domicile. According to the refugees, nothing, or almost nothing, remains of all that age-old mystical life. The monks have been defrocked, the nuns in many cases married off to Chinese. The libraries have been burned, the majority of the *gompas* have been transformed into barracks, a few into museums.

In India there have been reconstructed from the ruins small monasteries of a few dozen monks, with the exception of the camp at Buxa-Dwar, which has brought together more than a thousand. But there exist, too, small communities made up of a few disciples grouped round a guru, and one meets as well wandering ascetics without ties or roots other than the one Supreme and omnipresent Reality, the single Here, the unique Now. On the dry and rocky sides of mountains a few cubic centimetres of soil here or there will sustain seed carried on the wind, and there it will germinate and begin to grow. So it is with these heroic Tibetan believers; give them only a cracked wall, a leaky roof, a little rice and a cake of tea, and at once their ascetic lives renew their courses, their disciplines are organised again, the bells ring and the horns sound once more.

Books have described for us the richness of the Tibetan monasteries, the splendour of their ornaments, the pageantry of their ceremonies. For seven months, from end to end of the Himalayas, I encountered poverty and uncertainty about the future, and on all sides was made aware of the fragility of a threatened existence. And yet, to anyone who attaches

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value to Tibetan Buddhism, the situation is perhaps less dire than he might have thought. For this is the fact: the flower of the elite among the abbots of monasteries, the sages, yogis and gurus, is there on Indian soil, in Sikkim or Bhutan. And how often has Sonam Kazi said to me, as if he were the first to be astonished, who knew all these masters during eight years of Tibetan pilgrimage, 'All theses rimpoches\*—whom together we are going to visit in a few months—it took me years to meet in Tibet, and with what difficulty too!' And Sonam told me about his long and dangerous journeys on horseback or yakback, and how it was necessary to wait before making them until there were enough travellers to constitute a caravan capable of standing up to encounters with brigands and robbers. Today, to go to one guru from another is a matter of a few kilometers and a few hours, or possibly days, and no danger.

No danger, but considerable trouble, all the same. The discovery of this Tibetan wisdom through its representatives, now emigrated to India and Sikkim, is always an adventure, though, to a certain extent, the adventure of a traveller: many important places are inaccessible even by jeep or landrover, and can only be reached, accompanied by bearers, on mule-back or even on foot. But it is above all an extraordinary spiritual adventure which in no case, and I speak from experience, can one at all imagine in advance, however many books one may have studied.

Between the Tibetan world and ours there exists at present no common yardstick. I say at present, for I have the impression that circumstances are going to change, and that quickly. And above all, at the present time the lamas still find it deeply repugnant to pass on their knowledge except on extremely strict conditions.

If the discovery of living Hindu spirituality is relatively easy for sincere Europeans, and if it is even possible, by means of the minimum of effort and the proprieties, to get oneself admitted to the presence of brahmins and swamis somewhat more exclusive than the great ashrams which are open to all comers, the acceptance of strangers by the Tibetans poses many more problems. This journey was difficult for me; and it was difficult, I very soon realised, for Sonam. It is never easy to introduce into a closed environment, folded in upon itself, given over to a very exact activity, ruled by customs and a rigorous etiquette, a peasant from a far country, atavistic, basically heterogeneous by education, who

\* Rimpoche means 'precious'. It is the deferential title given to the religious elite, spiritual masters and ecclesiastical dignitaries.

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starts off by brandishing his intransigence in everyone's face with the claim that he has no intention of letting himself be converted to Buddhism.

There are in effect two very different ways (and this is particularly evident in the twentieth century, when meetings between people of all countries, and the exchanging of information through books, photographs and films have become possible to an unprecedented extent) of envisaging the Way or the Path which leads 'from the darkness to the Light', and 'from death to the Resurrection and the Life'. One way is the metaphysical or traditional, the other the religious.

The metaphysical way has been, from the beginning, that of the great majority of Hindus: Truth is eternal, the *dharma* is eternal, without historical origins; and the Truth is one. The descriptions of it alter, the roads which lead to it alter according to time and place; but in all times, in all civilisations, certain men have perceived, 'realised' that Truth, and have borne witness to it, some for a few disciples, others for whole peoples and for centuries to come: Krishna, Gautama Buddha,\* Jesus of Nazareth. Hindus have a genius for resolving all contradictions in the name of principles in which, as they love to reiterate, all contraries are reconciled. It is either the most admirable tolerance, or the most insidious syncretism, as you choose. But the idea of conversion is foreign to them. For them all religions are complete in themselves; they cannot be other than they are; and they are all equal, as God wills them to be. For the Hindus, to judge between religions is to judge the Almighty (*Baghavan*). This metaphysical viewpoint which reconciles the contradictions of dogmas and theologies has been admirably expressed in French by René Guénon, who shows how a single Tradition, timeless and super-human, took upon itself the forms of the different human traditions. It was this vision of things which inspired the teachings of Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi and Ramdas and, more recently, of Ma Anandamayi, and which runs in the blood-stream (so to say) of almost all the Hindus, whose profound respect for the other religions is without equal. In this sense Hinduism is not a religion. It is a metaphysic, and a series of paths (*yoga*) and of points of view (*darshana*), all of which are orthodox.

The way of religion, on the other hand, gives the primacy to a Founder, and considers His teaching, and His Path or His Church, or His Communion, to be the only perfectly true ones, and therefore

\* He indeed was eventually accepted as an *avatar* of Vishnu, and his image is a feature of the private chapel (or *pūja*-room) of many Brahminic families.

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intended for the whole of human kind. A time of fair words and mutual respect has succeeded that of calumnation, and the grosser kinds of criticism, but each one maintains his position. I have often heard protestants and catholics say, 'We are far from misjudging the greatness of religions other than Christianity. When we read certain texts, hear about certain saints, we see clearly all that is to be admired in them. God has not left other peoples without some foretaste of His Truth and His Light. These peoples already pray to Christ without knowing it, and Hinduism (or Buddhism or Islam) will discover its own perfection, its finality, in the Christian revelation.' Seven thousand kilometers away, in Afghanistan, I have met Muslims, the flower of their kind and remarkably tolerant, who knew Europe and Christianity, and who were as distinguished, well-informed, generous, intelligent and pious, as sure of their facts as the Christians of whom I am thinking. I had passed into another world, that of Islam, having another history and other memories, other feelings and other associations of ideas, other scriptures and other beliefs, another architecture and another symbology; but not another way of speaking of such matters as we are considering; 'We study Christianity and Hinduism with the greatest respect, we admire their greatness, we recognise their sages. But we know that Mohammed is the seal of the prophets, the last prophet sent by Allah'. And they explained to me, with arguments deeply rooted in the whole of their theology, founded upon that by which they live and are ready to die, that Islam is the most perfect form of religion, the form in which they know that one day the whole of mankind will be made one.

Then, two or three thousand kilometers further on again, the same note is struck by Tibetan or Sikkimese Buddhists, superior beings, wholly sincere, whose lives are consecrated to all that is spiritual, and whom I could not but admire and take seriously: 'Gautama Buddha gave men the Doctrine, teaching as to the Truth and the Way of arriving at it; he gave them the Three Refuges, the Eightfold Path; yet the Hindus in their blindness have rejected his teaching, and have returned to their ancient errors. Yet there have been saints in all religions. Christ, too, taught non-violence and the love of one's neighbours. But we cannot but point out, while seeing clearly enough that the germ of the Buddha's teaching is to be found in other religions, that in Christianity there are inadequacies and errors.' And the conclusion is the same: 'The Buddha himself said that one day the whole of creation would be set free. Before that happens all men will be united in Buddhism; and that will be the perfecting, the consummation of the religious history of humanity as a

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whole. The other religions will not be destroyed; they will be overtaken by and fulfilled in Buddhism.' The idea of a dialogue with the other religions is found not only among the best of contemporary Christians, but all over the world. It is astonishing to see how, the Hindus apart, the absolute certainties and the ways of expressing them are exactly the same when a religionist speaks of the superiority of his own religion over the other three.

I ought to say, however, that I have heard the metaphysical or traditional attitude expressed by certain Sufi masters of Afghan *Tariqats*, and by the greatest of the Tibetan gurus with whom I have discussed the subject. In fact, while the Tibetans lived in Tibet this question did not arise. There was no need for them to consider other religions. The Tibetans called their religion, quite simply, the religion (*tchen*). The idea of a transcendent unity of traditional forms or of a single metaphysical attitude lying at the root of these divers forms was foreign to them. They knew only the Truth of Buddhism. I remember a conversation, one evening in Sikkim, when the question which arose was of Westerners who had really come near enough to *tantrayana* to understand something more than words and formulas. One such person, of whom those present spoke with the greatest regard and deference, was repeatedly referred to in this conversation by the English word 'Tradition'. 'Tradition' had spent some time with such-and-such a guru; 'Tradition' has visited such-and-such a monastery. And all of a sudden it became apparent to me that this Mr 'Tradition' was Marco Pallis, (under his Tibetan name of Thubten Tendzin), who, as an adherent of the René Guénon school, had spoken again and again of 'Tradition' to the Tibetans and Sikkimese without their realising what was really his point. This is why it was so difficult and delicate a matter for Sonam to open every door to me and show me everything: I was not a Buddhist. There was something as paradoxical, even shocking, in the situation, as if I had said, and gone on saying, 'I want to take my medical degrees, but I refuse to enrol at the medical school'.

I remember discussing this point with the extraordinary, the altogether original and special *Nyingma-pa* guru, Chatral Rimpoche, at Ghoom, who put to me several questions about Christianity, which he had just discovered, and about my approach to Hinduism and Buddhism. He had pointed out to me that the supreme achievement, the aim of all the religions, was the same: to pass beyond birth and death. And he had made reference to the distinction, essential and fundamental to Tibetan



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Buddhism, between two Truths, the relative and conceptual (*samvriti satya*), and the absolute (*paramartha satya*), which is inconceivable. Sonam translated for me: All 'isms' are relative truths: Jainism, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikkism and so on; and he did not hesitate to include Buddhism and Tantrism. All initiations (*abishekas*) are likewise relative truths. The absolute truth is that there is neither ignorance nor deliverance from it, that there is no one to be redeemed from ignorance and no Buddha who has ever shown the way to such salvation. And Chatral Rimpoche made a drawing for me of a point upon which converged a number of radii which, as a Hindu might have done, he compared to the different religions.

But it was Gyalwa Karmapa who took up the most clearly defined position, Gyalwa Karmapa whose immense authority is unquestioned, and who is the only Tibetan dignity, other than the Dalai Lama, to whom the title His Holiness is attributed. I was due next day to leave Sikkim and the neighbourhood of Darjeeling, to return to the plains and part company with Sonam for several weeks. It was the end of our three months' companionship in adventure in this part of the Himalayas. I was in Karmapa's room for the last time. I was sorry to be leaving him. I was sorry to be leaving all those *Nyingma-pa* and *Kargyud-pa* gurus. When should I see them again? And should I, who loved all of them so much, see all of them again? (In fact, I did see all of them again between January and May 1967.)

Just forty years old, Karmapa is one of the most impressive sages, Tibetan, Hindu or Sufi, with whom I was fortunate enough to spend some time, and my own experience of him, of the radiance there was in his presence, easily explains the grateful reverence accorded him by the humble Tibetans, Bhutanis or Sikkimese who come and prostrate themselves before him to receive his blessing.

Though he is a very stout man, Gyalwa Karmapa's face is majestic, with strongly marked mongolian features which often take on an expression of hieratic immobility, revealing all his mastery and inward strength. The day before I had taken part in an unforgettable ceremony peculiar to the sect of the *Karmapa*, the ceremony in the course of which the guru assumes the black hat, sign of his pontifical authority (the hat-wearing ceremony). The music which accompanies it is the most meaningful of any that I have heard in Tibetan monasteries; I never elsewhere so clearly felt the possibilities for consciously willed action that lie in music which is responsive to the laws of a wonderful science of sound and its influence on the inward dynamisms of the human organism. Seated on a

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'throne' covered with stuffs woven with the sign of the *dorje*,\* beautiful as a statue of one of the Pharaohs, Karmapa wore the Red Hat of his order. After the ritual offerings had been made, in a burst of sound from horns and cymbals, an attendant presented to him the casket in which the famous black headdress is kept. With a nobility, a dignity beyond words and superhuman, Karmapa took off his lama's hat and slowly set the sacred tiara on his shaven head. He held it there with his right hand, which quivered with no slightest movement throughout the whole course of the ceremony. Then his face underwent a transfiguration, breaking upon the beholder with the dazzling radiance of the level of consciousness on which he has his unchanging being. His glance, steady, directed towards a point infinitely far away, is like a summons from the depths of reality. It is as if Karmapa's consciousness, transcending every limitation, reaches far beyond what we see as his corporeal nature, penetrates everyone and everything around him, and reveals, to anyone who is ready to recognise it, that Oneness which is veiled by the limitless variety of appearances.

And now, sitting in a small room, I was still under the influence of the ceremony of the wearing of the black hat. To see Karmapa wearing that headdress is accounted a very great blessing, and I too was convinced of this now. I was comparing the solemn grandeur of the hat-wearing ceremony and the superhuman majesty of Karmapa on his throne with his astonishing simplicity in this modest room of his, with his well-worn garments, the absence of any richness, or even decorum, and I was giving myself over to this lesson in the acceptance of fate, for at this time the new Rumtek Monastery was not yet completed, and Karmapa was living in a humble building which I occupied two years later. This Tibetan potentate, though he has managed to transfer into Sikkim part of his Order's wealth, has lost everything by comparison with his former situation. But nothing is changed as far as he is concerned, and his joyful serenity (*mahasukha*) remains intact. I looked at him without speaking. Besides Sonam and some monks, there were present Mrs. Kazi and their eleven-year-old daughter, Jetsun Pema, who was born in Lhasa and is recognised as a *tulku*† by His Highness the Dalai Lama and Karmapa himself. Then Karmapa began to speak, and the things he explained doubtless were not always easy for the Buddhist Sonam Kazi to translate. With his power (*siddhi*) of knowing what no one

\* The *dorje*, or 'diamond sceptre', is a symbol as important to the Tibetan as the Cross is to the Christian. It is made up of a symmetrical arrangement of two groups of five flames, each group roughly forming a circle.

† *Tulku*: The 'reincarnation' in a new body of a sage no longer living. cf. pp. 42-3.

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has told him (and Sonam formally confirmed that this is so) Karmapa said to me: 'You have been courageous in remaining faithful to yourself and refusing to let it be thought that you are prepared to recognise the superiority of Buddhism, and that you are considering being converted. You have maintained that attitude because you believe that Truth is greater than religions, and you have done so at the risk of endangering not only your own spiritual search, but a year's work in your profession. You were right. Important though the outward forms of initiation are, they are nothing by comparison with inward initiation. You are not a Buddhist, you have received no formal *abisheka* (initiation). But I, Karmapa, am going to make you a present. I am going to give you something which you would doubtless be able to buy in a Darjeeling antique shop, but which many Tibetan monks are not skilled enough to receive and keep; something which no guru has ever solemnly remitted to anyone, unless in the *abishekas*: I give you a bell and a *dorje* as a sign of your non-Buddhist initiation.' But I must say at once: this bell and *dorje* in no way make me an initiate in the orthodox Tibetan tradition; and I never permit myself to handle them. They are simply the public recognition, Karmapa's own recognition, of the validity of other paths and other teachings.

Since then Karmapa has confirmed his œcumenism by meeting, when he was official guest of the Government of India at Delhi, the celebrated Bengal saint and sage, Ma Anandamayi, when she was staying at Kalkaji, on the outskirts of the capital. On the eve of his visit to me in Paris with his daughter, Sonam was interpreter at their long interview; and when he came to France he brought for me in his luggage one of those scarves which the Tibetans exchange when they greet one another, and one of those garlands which Hindu disciples set at the feet of their teacher, and they in turn put round the necks of visitors.

I love the East deeply, whatever may be its faults, its corruption, its psychological complexes and jealousies, its lies and naïveties. Beyond its deceptive exterior, sometimes painful or repellent, I have found the living heritage of a great and wise past, and I can never think of Asia without at once feeling profoundly and personally grateful. It has sometimes happened that I have welcomed at Orly airport, and guided on their first steps in France, young Indians, Afghans or Pakistanis come to Paris on a student's travelling scholarship grant. Arriving in Europe is always a terrible shock to them. I think particularly of the Afghans, whose country is one of the most beautiful, noble and hospitable that I

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know, but also one of the most technologically backward. These students or technicians are at the centre of their nation's efforts to modernise and equip themselves. They have seen with their own eyes the construction of roads, the erection of buildings with lifts, the building of factories and airports, the setting up of traffic-lights at the intersections of their capital's streets. They are happy and proud to have these things, and think of them as what they have in common with Europe. But when they land there and realise that the whole of their airport could be encompassed in one of the restaurants at Orly, then discover the South motorway and the underground railway, and then that a mere workman has his own motor car, his refrigerator and his television set, and then again that an engineer of their own rank earns not merely twice or thrice as much as they do, but ten or even twenty times as much if one considers the real rate of exchange, which is that of the black market—then (and I say this with much friendliness and affection) I always see a kind of tacit despair take hold of them. It is not that the West, even Europe, which they know to be underdeveloped by comparison with America, is fifty years ahead of them; it is a thousand years ahead. By comparison with us, their Five Year plan is nothing, their 'balance-sheet of twenty years of independence and progress' is nothing, their scheme of 'building a new nation' is nothing.

I, on the other hand, have had, with a like total reversal of perspectives, the same impression of inferiority, *vis-à-vis* four or five thousand unfortunate Tibetan lamas in exile; and it has only been confirmed by the passage of week after week, month after month, among them. For eighteen years now I have concerned myself as deeply as I have been able to with whatever can be taken seriously regarding the life of the spirit in Europe. I have kept my Christian adherences and stayed a number of times in a Cistercian abbey. But above all I have long been in contact with the most vigorous and valid schools, whether of psychological disciplines or of the search for Truth, which are to be found in France.\* Having crossed the boundary line into the restricted area, to which I could not have returned had I once left it, and having spent several months alone with Sonam amongst these Mongolians who are not at all used to strangers, far from everyone and everything familiar, I understood very well the sense of bewilderment of my student friends. In that which concerns self-knowledge and self-mastery, the attainment

\* In *Ashrams* and in *Hinduism and Ourselves* I have described my visits to celebrated Hindu masters, to say nothing of unknown gurus who refuse all publicity, and whom I have no wish to publicise.

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of a level of consciousness transcending the mental categories of space and time, the immediate experience of Truth and the Real beyond sensual appearance, and the perfecting of the methods and techniques of reaching it; in that which concerns the answer to the only really vital question, 'Who am I?', the Tibetan lamas are a thousand years ahead of us. The things which I had known in Europe, and which had seemed to me so important, were mere approximations, mere amateurism, by comparison with their skills and the tangible, patent, overwhelming results which they have achieved and continue to achieve.

I made contact with more than twenty enlightened men, *Nyingma-pa* and *Kargyud-pa* for the most part, any one of whom would have amply justified the journey to India; sages the like of whom I have never met—or at least have never been able to meet—in Europe. Each day I discovered some new aspect of their science. For it is a science or perhaps many sciences—complex and methodical—a whole world of different knowledge with its symbols, exercises, techniques, experiment and verification, with its masters, specialists and students.

The mark at which one is aiming is simple enough; the Truth, at least the ultimate and absolute Truth, is simple, indeed infinitely so. And by comparison with it all the books, the disciplines, the relative truths disappear 'as at day break the stars are blotted out by the light of the sun'. I shall always remember the words of the *Kargyud-pa* guru, Khempo Kaloo Rimpoche, spoken one morning in January 1964, in his tiny cell in the monastery of Bhutya Busty, near Darjeeling. At that time I no longer wanted to ask questions. I had made a great effort to clarify a whole series of ideas relative to the tantric rites, I had tried very hard, not so much to take note of the answers themselves, as really to understand what lay behind them, and I was as tired with listening as Sonam was with translating. We were both sitting at the feet of this wonderful old man, his face so emaciated, his glance so piercing as to be almost unbearable, his smile every now and then so gentle that I did not know how to respond to the love which flowed from him nor how to make plain to him the depth of my own feelings. All the questions which for several days had been filling my head were as if tacitly laid before him. We remained there without saying anything, waiting, concentratedly waiting. And suddenly, without my having asked him anything, Khempo Kaloo addressed himself to me. I doubt if Sonam ever interpreted more perfectly. It seemed to me as if there were no interpreter, as if I understood Tibetan. I can live that morning again in its least detail, recall the sentences spoken, word by word. Khempo Kaloo spoke to me,



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and his eyes laid my whole being bare. I had heard the words many times before in India. 'There is nothing to be gained, nothing to be found, which is not there already.' Then he went on, 'Truth is so simple, Buddhahood is so simple, *bodhicitta* is so simple. Truth is here, even here in this very cell. Truth is in you. The silence, *shunyata* (the Void) is in you. You are the silence, you are the truth, you are Buddha. It is here, it is here at this moment, so simple and so near. Yet we make it so distant when it is so near, so complicated when it is so simple. Do you know what it is like to be ready to set out, to be at the roadside and beside your motor-car, but to have lost your way? You are Buddha. Then why do you not feel it, why do you not know it? Because there is a veil in the way, attachment to appearances, the belief that you are not Buddha, that you are a separate individual, an *atma*.\* If you cannot remove this veil wholly and at once, then you must dissolve it little by little. It is because we have made what is the simple so complicated and what is the near so distant that such complex exercises, *mandalas*, tantric meditation, the creation of mental images, yoga, and so on, are necessary. A complex discipline is necessary in order to deal with all the aspects of the human being, all the aspects of that barrier which we have set up between us and Truth. But for someone who wished to be persuaded, who wished to know that *That* is so near and so simple, all those techniques which are the inheritance of tantric Buddhism, and for which it is famous, all that skill would be completely useless.'

For these techniques exist, and they are applied so seriously and so rigorously that this 'laimism' constitutes for the Western observer a challenge which cannot be conjured away, always asking him, 'And what about you?' This *tantrayana*, as I have glimpsed it, has something so persuasive about it that it is impossible to treat it lightly or merely as a curiosity, impossible not to seek to understand. And that is not easy. Someone who was there told me that in 1956 the Dalai Lama (who was twenty then) and the Panchen Lama, official guests of the Government of India, were invited to visit the Indian atomic Centre near Bombay. The Dalai Lama has a passion for learning and understanding things, and he put many more, and many more searching, questions than official visitors habitually do. But despite his interest he did not manage to understand how the atomic reactor worked. After half-an-hour the Panchen Lama simply said to him, 'Why, then, do foreigners claim to

\* Buddhists do not use the Sanscrit word *atma* in the impersonal sense given it by the Hindus, corresponding to *shunyata*, but in the sense of the Hindu *ahamkara*, meaning the individual ego.

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assimilate the whole of tantric Buddhism in one half-hour's interview with a lama?'

If, for Tibetans, the discovery of the modern world in which they will now be obliged to live is so staggering a thing, for us the discovery of the Tibetan Tradition is a thing no less astounding. I say staggering for the Tibetans, because, to take only one example, many of their learned men, deeply read in philosophy, metaphysics and logic, were still teaching, ten or twelve years since, that the sun went round the earth, or even that the earth was flat, and somewhere or other came to an end. And I assure you that when one approaches such persons one has not the impression of naïvety or childishness but on the contrary, of culture, of wisdom and profundity. But here I must quote one interesting remark, for which I cannot vouch since I am repeating hearsay. A lama explained that though the knowledge that the earth goes round the sun might be scientific truth useful for the development of modern techniques, it was not useful for the inward belief, for the realisation of ultimate Truth. On the contrary, man learns more about himself and about movement and change (fundamentals of all Buddhist disciplines), in thinking that the sun rises, gains the zenith and declines day after day, and in accepting natural phenomena as they appear to him to be, and as he appreciates them with his senses.

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After living for seven months among the yogis and lamas of its different sects, I am convinced that Tibetan tantric Buddhism, as it is to be found on Indian and Sikkimese soil in 1966, fully deserves still to be as celebrated as it used to be. Yet that is a statement which it is hard to substantiate; and there are few books, even those written by the most competent authorities and by eminent Tibetologists (which I certainly am not, as I ought to say as plainly and simply as possible), which can bear witness to it. The fact is that for Tibetan gurus their teaching, and the transmission of their yogic and tantric knowledge, is to be understood only within the framework of the relation of masters with disciples, with all the restrictions which that involves and all the mystical background which it implies. For the Tibetans spiritual research and the thirst for self-Transformation are entitlements to the acquisition of Knowledge (or Understanding). 'Objective' and Scientific research, 'uncommitted' intellectual curiosity, even of the most respectful and learned kind, are not. This is why the task of the scientific Tibetologist

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is not an easy one when he cannot be considered as a disciple by one of the Tibetan masters. But it is also why those few lamas who read English should not be surprised by, or critical of, those Western specialists when they find themselves profoundly disappointed (to put the matter no more strongly) in those works, regarded as authoritative by us, which fall into their hands. And the reaction to them which I have most often met is not 'It is false', but, 'We cannot tell you what is true and what is false here because we do not understand what is written; we can recognise nothing that belongs to our way of expressing ourselves. It is something different; perhaps it is valid, but it is certainly neither *tantrayana* nor Tibetan culture.'

The lamas are very willing to help in the translation of certain manuscripts, though not all. But as I have so often heard them say, 'Do you think that, because you have read a book about mangoes, you know what mangoes taste like and that you have lived on mangoes?', or some similar comparison. For them there is no knowledge which does not come from one's own experience and so is graven on one's being. A painter knows how to paint because he has the being of a painter; a sculptor has the being of a sculptor. 'You know how to drive!' a *Kargyud-pa* guru once said to me, astonished to see along what narrow and dangerous Himalayan roads I had been taking him in my Landrover. Tibetan gurus are concerned with no transmission of their teaching which is not in terms of initiations (*abisheka*), to which are admitted only those who have decided to give themselves completely, keeping nothing back. That self-giving often has a highly dramatic appearance.

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Can one, then, come anywhere near this Buddhism; and if so, how? For two questions certainly arise: What aspects of knowledge do these refugees possess, and in what does the famous Tibetan wisdom consist? And again: Which of these aspects of knowledge are accessible to foreigners who are not destined to stay for good in India, to speak Tibetan fluently, or to become converted Buddhists? Two ways of approaching the matter are in fact possible, the external and the internal.

The internal approach is actual contact with a still living Tradition, with an actual source of life, with the possibility of getting real and effective help on one's way. This is the approach of the disciple.

The external approach, on the other hand, is that of the scientist, the

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scholar, the ethnologist, who refuses to become identified with what he is studying, to involve himself in the game. It is not that this strict and exacting approach has no importance of its own; but these two domains are very different one from the other.

Where the internal approach is concerned one at the same time expects much more and is prepared to give much more. One hopes for, one demands, much more. But one is also ready to pay a much higher price, if necessary in money, but above all in difficulties, effort and courage. And from the first, and as its first condition, that internal approach requires that a man should go at whatever cost to the centre and to the height of the Tradition. For the 'seeker after Truth' only meetings with very great masters and very great sages can be really interesting. It is better to seek, seek, and seek again a real sage, a truly liberated sage, and spend perhaps no more than a single day with him, than to dissipate one's efforts in encounters and conversations with less representative persons, or persons who are in any case further from true Realisation. It is no longer a matter of talking to Tibetans who have the title Lama; it is a matter of meeting Masters.

Certainly all Tibetans love to chat about philosophy. But it profits nothing to discuss with people who, even if they are scholarly and learned, are content to compare or oppose this idea and that, but whose words have no meaning in live and personal experience. It is a question of awakening, of realisation. Are you awake? Have you realised the Truth? Do you know with the whole of your being what is meant by *numparshespa*, *namshe*, *lha*, *srog*?, the existence, or not, of a soul, or a conscience? Then, Rimpoche, describe your experiences to me and help me to share in them, so that I may know for myself and in my own being. And do not talk to me about the Absolute, *shunyata* or *brahman* unless you know *shunyata*, unless you really are *brahman*.

How does one know the difference between a true sage and someone who is not a true sage, or is not yet one? Only an awakened sage can recognise another awakened sage. But at the same time the difference is much easier to see than one might think. A person who is thirsty, very thirsty, need not be a genius in order to know whether the glass being offered him is full of water or empty; he knows at once which it is. By the same token a person who is a seeker and has profound and important questions to ask will know very well what is the quality of the answers he receives and the help he receives, and will know it by personal experience and the use of a criterion which, because it is his own, is none the less to be relied upon.

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So it is a question, where this book and the witness it bears are concerned, of meeting 'Masters', those whom the Tibetans, like the Hindus, call gurus. It seems, however, that the Tibetan Tradition attaches more importance to these gurus than the Hindu Tradition does; which is to say a good deal. The word 'lama', wrongly attributed by foreigners to all Tibetan religious, is in fact the translation of the word guru. But to every Buddhist's three 'refuges', the Buddha, the *dharma* (the teaching), and the *sangha* (the community), the Tibetans have added a fourth refuge who is invoked at the beginning of almost all the rituals, namely the guru, the lama. This is the origin of the name lamaism commonly given to their religion, and which they firmly reject, saying, 'Lamaism is an English word which we do not recognise.' The name Lama, then, should be applied only to a teacher who is qualified to have disciples, a teacher who has himself 'reached the other shore', who is himself liberated and can take absolute responsibility for his disciple, undertaking from the beginning to lead him, in time and in eternity, step by step to that opposite shore of Liberation; Liberation. deliverance, freedom, as the writers of the gospels say ('The Truth shall make you free'), keywords likewise for Buddhism as for Hinduism, which mean in the first place that human beings are not free, but are slaves, are not independent but dependent. Slave, free, these are two opposed states; one is or one is not, one is either the one or the other. And nothing is commoner in the search for independence than merely to fall from one kind of dependence into another. But it is necessary to distinguish between meeting *a* master, and meeting *one's* master; between meeting one or more sages whose presence, radiance and conscious influence upon one bring about one or more unforgettable experiences capable of changing the direction of a man's life, and meeting that one whom one knows for one's own master, who will accept one as his disciple and will take the personal responsibility (much heavier than that which a psychoanalyst assumes in regard to his patient) of guiding one through all the turns and twists and dangers of one's own path, and will do so to the end of it.

How can a guru exercise such a function, and do so without fail? Because, before concerning himself with others, he has first attained complete self-knowledge, the death of his own personality. There is nothing in him, to the very depths of his unconscious, which is still subjective, so that he is able always to be perfectly objective and impersonal. Whatever he does is never a reaction, but always a response. It is not a matter of the master emerging from his own preoccupations in



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order the better to understand the preoccupations of others, or a matter of going into the silence within himself in order the better to perceive the disciple's own difficulties. The master is above all necessity for effort. He is the inward silence, and has no preoccupations whatever of his own. Nothing belonging to his heredity, his temperament, his personality or his history colours his insight into men or things. He understands everything, and in both the French and the English senses of the word: the French *comprendre*, whose etymological origin is *comprehendere*, to include within oneself ('you dwell in me'), and the English *understand*, to stand under, at the base of, rooted in ('I dwell in you'). The master's consciousness is enhanced to the point at which it contains the disciple within itself, and is one with the source of the disciple's vital energy. For the master nothing remains to be achieved in any sphere; there is nothing above or beyond what he is. Evolution has reached its end for him. He wants nothing. He rejects nothing. He has a body, but his consciousness is not limited by his body; and it is no longer he, but his disciple, who has need of that body. The master feeds and cares for his body for the sake of his disciples; for him it has played its part and has brought him to the end of his journey. For there is an end for the Tibetans. Perfection belongs to this world ('Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect'). Many are called and few are chosen, yet some are chosen in every generation.

Thus it is that the meeting with the true guru plays so important a part in every account of the Tibetan Tradition. To find *one's own* master is even more important than to work with him and follow his teaching thereafter. When the master (and I say again not *a* master, but *one's own* master) has been found, the essential has been achieved. That is not yet Liberation, *moksha* for the Hindus, *nirvana* or Buddhahood for the Buddhists, but it is the promise of it; the hope of success if not deliverance itself. How often one has heard of Tibetans who have, searched and searched, at the cost of terrible difficulties, living for two years, even three years in a hermitage, undergoing many ordeals, only to be told one day, 'I am not your guru; go on searching; search until you find the one who is.' Indeed one is not ready to recognise one's own master before one has already made a certain number of experiments, suffered a certain number of checks, explored a certain number of dead ends, and begun at last to know what it is that one needs.

The first thing to be learned when a person first lays himself open to the Tibetan Tradition is, then, a new way of approaching this question of a teacher, a new demand and a new hope. Somewhere there exists, for

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him who desires it above all things, a being destined to lead him to the End he has in view. It is no longer a matter merely of meeting a sage, a *jivan muka*, in the sense in which so many Westerners have approached Ramana Maharshi, Ramdas, or Ma Anandamayi in India, perfected and miraculous and, I do not hesitate to say, divine persons though these may be. It is necessary to find one's own teacher, he whose Realisation, and also whose language, method of teaching and approachability will in the course of the years make him a guide at once overflowing with love and quite ruthless.

Consequently the first question which arises, or ought to arise, on entering the Tibetan world, is this: Teachers, perhaps several of them, or *my* teacher? One can have only one teacher, but one can have several *upa-gurus* or subsidiary teachers. I think of the words of the old *Kargyud-pa* yogi, Lopon Sonam Zangpo, who lives below Kurseong and was the first sage I stayed with: 'Because you already know something, I will teach you something more which will be useful to you.' I have not received any regulation tantric initiation, and for me the Tibetan masters have all been *upa-gurus*; that, I hope, is abundantly clear.

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Regarding this meeting with sages, and the shock which one can receive from it, I ought at once to state what one may expect from this shock or influence, and what are its limits. The extraordinary, the superhuman impression which I so often felt in Hindu ashrams I felt again in the presence of most of the gurus to whom Sonam Kazi took me. I have already described Gyalwa Karmapa, and the ceremony in the course of which he assumed the black hat, the sign of his office. It is only an example, a memory among other memories. I think above all of my two meetings with Kangyur Rimpoche, a *Nyingma-pa* whose young son speaks good English, and who lived at that time in the tiny *gompa* of Chhata Gong, at Lebung, near Darjeeling. It was the morning of the day of my departure from Darjeeling at the end of my second stay there, and Sonam and I were due to return to Kalimpong, where Dudjom Rimpoche was awaiting us. 'There is still one great Rimpoche whom we have not seen. Would you like to meet him before we leave?' Naturally I said that I would, and we went to find him, though that was no easy matter, in spite of the fact that Sonam speaks so many different languages and dialects.

What happened that morning and the next day went beyond even





Dudjom Rinpoche



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what one would expect or hope from the mysterious and fascinating legend which has always surrounded Tibetan lamas. We came, by way of a little wooden balcony which ran round all sides of a very modest house, to a room which was almost in darkness, and there took our seats before the couch, covered with rugs, which is to be found in all Rim-poches' rooms. In the half-light I made out the shape of a man, sitting cross-legged, motionless, from whom came a kind of lucency, like an indefinable phosphorescence, and whose eyes appeared in the darkness to be luminous. I turned to Sonam, whose position near the little door on to the balcony illuminated him a little better. He was looking at the lama, but his eyes showed no particular brilliance. Then I turned again to Kangyur Rimpoche, and again I was aware of that same luminosity, and particularly of his eyes, which were as if lit up in the darkness. He was looking at me fixedly, and I was aware that an extraordinary and indescribable feeling was beginning to take hold of me. I was aware that Sonam was going out of the room, and after that it seemed to me that nothing existed in the world save that presence in the shadows and myself. The intensification and acceleration of the whole of my psychic existence, of all my thoughts and emotions, was beyond all description. All memories, mental images, possibilities, were present at once. I had ten, a hundred brains which were all working at the same time. Perhaps people who have believed they were drowning and afterwards claim to have re-lived their whole lives in a few seconds have a somewhat similar experience. I was able to follow ten lines of thought at once, at once live through ten remembered situations (remembered now, but at other times how totally forgotten!) Then all inward functioning came to a stop, but this was neither unconsciousness nor the blank associated with a fainting-fit. Indeed consciousness, wakefulness was absolute; this was to know the true silence 'beyond the mind', which Transcends thought and individuality, names and forms, time and space, and above all, duality.

Afterwards Sonam simply said, 'I saw you were in deep meditation with the guru and I left the room'; and pointed out that what he called 'meditation with the guru' lasted for nearly an hour. Wanting to confirm my opinion of Kangyur Rimpoche, I persuaded Sonam to put off our departure for a day. The next morning exactly the same thing happened, an experience as intense and of the same length, and one whose effect was to last for several days and leave me only gradually. To disappear completely? No; for the memory, the imprint of this experience (or others of the same order) are ineffaceable. But it is no less true that that



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exceptional state, that level of consciousness, does not last. Suddenly comes the thought, 'I am living at this moment through a sublime, a miraculous, experience', and at once all is lost.

This glimpse of Realisation owed nothing to me, and everything to the guru. Then why not drugs, LSD, or mescaline?

It was an experience which can never be forgotten. But the Tibetans know, and teach, that such exceptionally conscious moments, which their gurus have the power consciously to arouse in their disciples, have value only as a call, a sign, like the beam of a lighthouse on a foggy night. This experience is only a loan, something borrowed which has to be paid back, only the reaction of the individual to a combination of outside influences, not the manifestation of a freedom which he has conquered for himself. It is the teacher who is already free, not his pupil. The master is the virtuoso, the pupil the instrument on which he plays. The master is the Light, and the disciple reflects only as much of it as he is given. May he in turn become the source of Life, the conscious manifestation of Reality!

That no one else can become for him. It is true that many disciples, whether Hindus, Tibetans or Europeans, seek to live their disciplines at the expense of their teacher's Realisation, to shine with their light, to be still with their stillness. But that will not take them one step forward on the way to the independence and autonomy whose aim is Liberation and Freedom itself. Are you awakening, you who sleep? What awakening? Why awaken? How awaken? To these three questions Tibetan tantrism can certainly help one to reply.

But whatever may be the powers of the great sages and the value of certain transcendent experiences, the serious study of Tibetan spirituality and esotericism is not a romantic and mysterious enterprise pursued, as so many European dreamers whom I have met try to persuade themselves, in a supernatural world of magic and of outlandish phenomena. On the contrary, it is a series of problems requiring to be solved day by day, and a discipline requiring to be observed every day and without flinching. These things demand feet well planted on the solid earth, the determination not to tell oneself lies, and the ability to keep in view what actually is, even if, indeed especially if, that is not what one expected, imagined or hoped.

The way in which the Tibetan situation presents itself today in India is the product of the past history of Tibet and of the position as it obtained there on the eve of the country's annexation by the Peoples' Republic of China. That history was shaped by the victory of Buddhism,



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imported originally from India, over the old indigenous religion, *Bön-po*, and then by the successive appearances of the Orders with their different teachings, and the rivalries which have for so long divided them, and sometimes make themselves felt even among some refugees.

A minimum amount of information about the history of the Tibetan people and about its religious life is needed before any solidly based study 'from within' of the Message of the Tibetans can be undertaken, and before anyone is received by sages or can begin to take the first steps into the realm for so long reserved to Tantrism and the lamas.



## PART TWO

# THE TIBETANS WITHOUT MYSTERY

THE FIRST REQUIREMENT ON WHICH THE TIBETAN LAMAS INSIST WHERE those who wish to make contact with them are concerned is that they school themselves not to put everything indiscriminately into the basket labelled 'lamaism', and specially not what has nothing to do with *tantrayana* itself.

Before the coming of Buddhism, and then side by side with it, there have always existed other cults, sorcery or shamanism, in Tibet. The principal and the oldest of these religions is *Bön* or *Bön-po*, whether in its primitive pre-buddhistic form, or in its reformed, post-buddhistic form. The setting up of Buddhism in Tibet, where it was proclaimed the state religion in the eighth century, was highly prejudicial to *Bön*. Buddhism is one thing, *Bön* quite another; and sorcery is another again which should not be confused with it. Yet that confusion is sometimes easy to make, notably with certain Buddhist ascetics, not attached to one of the big monasteries, belonging to the order of the Red Hats, the *Nyingma-pa*. Like the Tibetan Buddhists, many sorcerers and shamans have fled their country in these latter years and taken refuge in India, Bhutan or Sikkim. I got to know some of them. The headdress or mitre and the ritual instruments (the small drum, trumpet, bell, dagger) are, with the exception of the sceptre or *dorje*, those of the lamas. Superficial observers sometimes take them for lamas, and Tibetan Buddhists resent such hasty assumptions.

The first of them that I met was an old man, an occultist and a healer. A rich Sikkimese had appealed to him to heal his sick wife. Within a very short time, after a few minutes of invocations accompanied by the ringing of this little bell, this man who appeared to be so feeble and

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weakly, went into a trance. At once his expression changed, he was shaken by convulsive tremblings of his legs and arms, and announced that a goat must be sacrificed in exchange for the lady's life.

When he returned to his normal state, this old man seemed to me altogether good and compassionate, with nothing about him to inspire fear or repulsion.

Near Gangtok, too, I spent a morning with an old woman who was unforgettable. Her appearance, her face, her surroundings, even the lighting-effects, all seemed rather too good to be true. No scene-designer or maker of film-sets would have dared to have everything quite so perfect. A girl came to consult her about her future during the next few months, and to ask her advice as to the attitude she ought to adopt towards it. The sorceress, too, went suddenly into a trance. But I learned later that this only happened occasionally, and that I was privileged that morning. She appeared to be possessed, to have fallen into the clutches of—well, of what? The fact remained that one neither wanted to laugh, nor even to smile, but rather felt respect and even a certain sense of the holy.

The official Buddhist church permits oracles too, male or female; but their recognition, and calls upon their services, are subject to extremely strict controls and rules.

More or less put down in Tibet itself, sorcery, and animal sacrifice in particular, has continued to spread in the border regions, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim.

I am thinking for example of those Nepalese called *jakris*. I often met one who lived, again, near Gangtok. I ought also to say that even certain Sikkimese Buddhists do not hesitate to call him in if a member of their families is ill or in some way threatened. The orthodox Tibetan monks, on the other hand, severely condemn all animal sacrifice, the one sacrifice permitted by the Buddha being that of egoism and attachment to the world of appearances, the inward, personal sacrifice, not that of goats or chickens. However, the majority of Tibetans are not vegetarians and eat meat even though they think the butcher's trade an abominable one! I have seen this *jakri* of whom I speak prepare to sacrifice a black goat and two chickens. A rite of this kind is in the first place a syncretic affair, a 'chop-suey', as I heard a Sikkimese call it, involving various cult objects, among them human bones, and various invocations and sacred formulae as much Hindu and Buddhist as primitive. Here no confusion with a *Nyingma-pa* lama is possible. We are in an altogether different world. When the religion of the Buddha became the official religion of

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Tibet, the followers of *Bön* and the sorcerers were forced to observe certain rules, notably to do with vestments, and were laid under certain interdictions. For example (and the *jakris* still held to this), they must, unlike the orthodox monks, beat their drums on the side furthest from their faces. The Tibetans say that they conceal their faces behind their drums to hide their shame since the time when their forebears were beaten by the Buddhists in regular tournaments of metaphysical argument and in competitions to test their magical and miraculous powers.

For Buddhism, born in India at the foot of the famous *bodddhi* tree, where five centuries before the coming of Christ Gautama Buddha received Enlightenment and Awakening, had, twelve centuries later, reached, and then conquered, the wide tablelands of Tibet. It all began at Buddh' Gaya, a hamlet in Bihar, which became the chief place of pilgrimage for the Buddhists of the whole world. For centuries Tibetans have crossed the Himalayan passes and walked the torrid roads of India in order to visit this place, whose name alone speaks to their hearts as the names of Bethlehem and Nazareth speak to those of Christians.

Here at Buddh' Gaya meditated, struggled with himself, and triumphed the man whom millions have for two and a half thousand years looked on as the Saviour, the Liberator, the Conqueror of Suffering. Here, having himself found the way to the life which is beyond birth and death, Gautama Buddha decided to set the wheel of the Doctrine turning, and to give to men the teaching of those Noble Truths which clearly mark the Path leading from darkness into Light, from appearance to Reality, from death to Eternal Life. His message is: Nothing lasts and everything is perpetually changing; there can be no joy without suffering; and nothing and no one, neither you nor I, is what it thinks itself to be.

Here under a tree, like the one whose sacred leaves still tremble and whisper in the wind, the noble prince, who had renounced his throne, his wife and his beloved son, and become a monk in order to set himself and all men free of all pain and suffering, Gautama the *muni*, the ascetic of the Sakyas, became, on the morning of a night for ever blessed, the Buddha, the Enlightened, the Awakened, the Perfected One. Buddh' Gaya, miraculously off the beat of the tourists, remains a holy place, preserved from profanation, where nothing comes that sullies its holiness. Today this sanctuary has become a Tibetan town. And although Chinese and Thai and other temples are to be found there, the Tibetan *gompa* is the most important, the most visited and the most alive.

The architecture of the great temple at Buddh' Gaya, taken as a whole, is in itself a symbol and a lesson.

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The precincts, gateways and minor buildings are all positioned in relation to the temple—or more precisely to the *stupa*, round which pilgrims circumambulate, always from left to right. And their arrangement is a geometrical description of the whole secret of creation, which is also the secret of our own being.

With every circuit of the successive enclosures, the pilgrims approach nearer to the central *stupa*, and this external journey is made at the same time within themselves, towards their own centre. Their pilgrimage ends at the entrance to the *stupa*, the place of Realisation. Hour after hour monks, peasants, simple women, prostrate themselves at full length on the boards provided for this, and worn smooth by the thousands of bodies which have stretched out upon them, have risen up again, prostrated themselves again, risen up again, prostrated themselves again, indefatigably.

Uncouth peoples, technologically under-developed, peoples belonging to an ancient culture, the Tibetans, the Bhutanis, the Ladhakis, the Sikkimese, the Mongolians, have preserved their ancestral traditions until today.

What will be left of these traditions tomorrow, when men have conquered outer space and reached the moon? After these two thousand five hundred years of burning faith, will those peoples prostrate themselves for much longer before the three refuges of Buddhism: the Buddha himself, the Saviour, the Supreme Reality, or Buddhahood; the *Dharma*, the Justice of the Kingdom of Heaven; the *Sangha*, the communion of the saints and of all the faithful?

Not far from Buddh' Gaya is another of the spiritual summits of our planet: Rajgir and Vulture Peak, the special sanctuary of the Mahayana Buddhists, those of the 'Greater Vehicle', who believe that it was on that mountain, where he lived for fifteen years, that the Buddha gave out the teaching which fulfils that of Hinayana or the 'Little Vehicle', the teaching on which is founded one of the most important and best known sacred texts humanity possesses, the *Prajnaparamita*, the Perfection of Wisdom, that which goes beyond Wisdom. It was here that the Buddha gave to the world the great secret which is yet the simplest of all secrets: everything, all creatures, all happenings, all that is passing away or coming to be, whether wonderful or dreadful, has no more reality than that of a shadow-show appearing and disappearing on the soundless and timeless screen of voidness, *shunyata*.

For centuries Hinayana, the Buddhism of Ceylon and Burma, and

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Mahayana, the Buddhism of Tibet, China and Japan, have rejected, criticised, decried one another and accused one another of heresy. In this same state of Bihar, where Buddh' Gaya stands, is also Nalanda, whose immense ruins are so powerful a reminder of the great period when thousands of monks meditated and studied in its cells; Nalanda, a famous university, was the cradle of Mahayana whence its teachings spread throughout Tibet. But today, in Asia as elsewhere, œcumenism's hour is sounding, and Buddhists from North and South, from every direction, are meeting and trying to understand one another in the name of their common guide, Gautama Buddha, the Lord of Compassion. Though it arose in India, Buddhism completely disappeared thence with the renaissance of ancient Hinduism. But a few kilometers away from the ruins of Nalanda, where their ancestors lived a thousand years ago, Indians have built a new university, to which Buddhist monks come from all over the world to study the ancient sacred texts.

While Pali is the language in which the Hinayana texts have now been made available, it was Sanscrit, the language of the Hindu writings, which the Mahayanists used, and it is from the Sanscrit that the works of the Tibetan canon were translated, whether by Indians invited into Tibet or by Tibetans who came to India. These texts are of two kinds: the *sutras*, precepts to be observed by all the monks, and the *tantras*, esoteric works which are at once theoretical explanations and manuals of ascetic or yogic practice.

In Tibet itself the Tradition was preserved and transmitted in several different ways. In the first place, and apart from manuscripts, printing-presses used woodcut blocks of the oblong and rectangular shape characteristic of Buddhist books, and many Sanscrit texts, which disappeared from India itself at the time of the Moslem conquests, were preserved in their Tibetan versions and furnished the great libraries of the *gompas*.

Works of art were also a medium for the communication of knowledge. An artist, whether sculptor, engraver or painter, would never have thought of expressing his personal and secular dreams, desires, fantasies or conflicts. As in the Egypt of the Pharoahs, as in Romanesque or Gothic Europe, an anonymous art transmitted laws, truths, a teaching as a whole. A strict iconography lays down the attributes and the appropriate colourings of the tantric deities, those anthropomorphic symbols of the powers which animate the universe and each human creature in it. Tibetan paintings on woven materials, *thankas*, in spite of, or perhaps



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because of, these strict rules imposed on their makers, are mostly of very great beauty.

An essential role was likewise played by sacred music, a music made by cymbals, horns and trumpets, in no way resembling our oratorios and requiems, which was capable of producing very profound effects on those who heard it. The Tibetan Tantrists asked themselves with regard to all things, 'How can it be made to serve my spiritual aims?' Out of the human being's sensitivity to sound, they elaborated a highly scientific kind of music, the purpose of which is not sensual pleasure or delight, but to assist at certain points in a spiritual search.

But in Tibet, as in India, as with the Moslem sufis, the essential thing, where the transmission of spiritual influences is concerned, is the succession of Master and disciple. 'Lama' is the translation of 'guru' in Sanscrit, and sages qualified to initiate disciples and guide them thereafter in the way of Liberation alone are worthy of it.

There are as many as there are disciples, each one of whom must be directed according to his own nature. Likewise there are many different kinds of teachers. Some are monks and celibate; some are married. All take their stand upon a total inward freedom, whence it is possible for them to take up any attitude, give any answer, accomplish any task.

But the kind of succession which seems especially to belong to Tibetan Buddhism is that of those masters who are chosen in their earliest years and are called *tulkus*. The word *tulku* has been translated to mean a 'living Buddha'. If Buddha means awakened or enlightened, fortunately for human kind there have always been living Buddhas on our planet, outside as well as inside that form of religion which is called Buddhism, whether that condition is theirs by birth or whether they have obtained to it in the course of this life. *Tulkus*, whether abbots of monasteries, or abbots general of some religious order, are recognised as such at about the age of two.

Many books and magazine articles have told how the present Dalai Lama, like his predecessors, was sought for a long time and then discovered. An oracle had directed the search towards the east of Tibet and given certain indications as to the appearance of the house. There a small boy recognised at once that the man dressed in civilian clothes who came towards him was a religious personage, and cried out 'Lama, Lama!' Then he triumphantly passed the test of the certified true copies: he was shown several objects (such as a tea-bowl), and in each case there were three exactly alike, though only one had belonged to his

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predecessor, 'the thirteenth incarnation'. Each time the child chose without hesitation the one 'which had been his in his preceding existence'. But the Dalai Lama is not the only Tibetan dignitary or pundit discovered by this system of 'reincarnations'; the custom has been tending to spread more and more widely. This rather baffling system requires some further explanation if it is to be clearly seen in the Tibetan perspective.

Our words reincarnation, metempsychosis, transmigration, are highly inadequate translations of the Buddhist idea, which does not recognise any stable and permanent principle capable of passing from body to body and from century to century. Tibetans speak rather of predecessor and successor, or simply of continuation. Let us imagine that on the death of St. Bernard of Clairvaux or St. Francis of Assisi, the Cistercian and Franciscan monks had sought to recognise in what other human being the impulse of active wisdom or of boundless compassion, which those Founders of their Orders had manifested in the flesh, was going to manifest itself again, and that even today Christendom could present us somewhere and in some physical form with the real St. Bernard or St. Francis.

This method of recruitment to such ranks is highly impartial, not to say democratic, since the *tulkus*, far from always being recognised among the families of the nobility, may be discovered in humble surroundings and in any part of the country.

The surprising thing is that this custom of recognising great men before they have, for obvious reasons, been able to give any proofs of greatness, generally affords excellent results. Many of the present-day Tibetan gurus, of whose wisdom and Realisation I have had no doubt, were set aside for the veneration of their disciples from their early childhood. I think particularly of Gyalwa Karmapa and Dudjom Rimpoche among many others. I met each of them several times, and each time my belief in them was strengthened. I, too, had no difficulty in recognising them as Masters, and I know very well what I owe to them, and what I learned from them, which has become a part of me forever.

This led me to take an interest in this Tibetan custom, which has no parallel in any other kind of Buddhism. There are three possible explanations for it: the Tibetan idea of 'an incarnation which is the consequence of a preceding incarnation'; or a particular ability for recognising in little children an exceptional quality of being, which, with growth and the passage of years, must make an authentic sage; or pedagogic methods which are remarkably effective. Many of the young

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*tulkus* whom I have met seemed to me to possess, at ten or eleven years old, a nobility of nature and a dignity which were altogether striking. I lived under the same roof with one of them, who was already accustomed to receive homage and various marks of respect which would have turned anyone else's head. And yet at the same time, what simplicity, what naturalness they had besides; what willingness to serve others, what wakeful attentiveness towards others the moment the occasion for these things arose! The way in which the most rigorous disciplines, such as we should never dare to impose upon our children, went side by side with the exuberant and joyous gaiety of games and pastimes seemed to me significant, and I am sure that the education of *tulkus* deserves to be studied very seriously. It is the case also that, though they are not removed from their parents and continue to see them regularly, the influences which are brought to bear upon them are none the less free of all traces of subjectivity, of neurosis, of mechanical attitudes and reactions. Their masters are chosen among those lamas whose personal attainments are the most clearly manifest, men who have fully integrated into their consciousness the forces of their unconsciousness, whose self-knowledge is complete, who are evidently themselves, and are free of psychological mechanicalness and conditioned responses. The terrible bondage which in the West is passed from one generation to another, the inward inhibitions and the neurotic tendencies of parents (due to the influence of their own parents and passed in turn to their children), that series of mere reactions which is well understood in these days by psychoanalysts, the poison which makes something grotesque of so many lives, these things the young *tulkus* are spared. How the Tibetans produce teachers who are so free, so inwardly integrated and so conscious, is indeed the great question.

But all the young monks, children and adolescents, whom one meets in the Indian communities or reconstituted monasteries are not *tulkus*, while many Tibetans, who were in no sense recognised as lamas in their early infancy, still entered monasteries in their childhood.

Many go to swell the ranks of those monks who act as supernumeraries at the temple services. In Tibet itself certain monasteries, notably the big *Geluk-pa* monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Ganden, contain several thousands of monks divided among different faculties. No Tibetan tried to hide from me the fact that these men are of very unequal calibre. On the other hand, those thousands of monks and hermits who refused to be deprived of their sacred status, and left their country to make their difficult and dangerous way into Indian territory, represent an elite, even

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though there may be among their number a few who are mediocre and idle. I have often seen young children, dressed in the religious habit, studying with the greatest seriousness for whole days together. Some learn to play musical instruments, not the least difficult of which is the cymbals, from which the Tibetans produce a variety of extraordinary effects. Others are occupied in rehearsing to the point of perfection the sacred formulas or *mantras*, or in executing the ritual movements, or *mudras*, faultlessly, or in practising the use of the *tilbu*, the ritual bell, and the *dorje*, or 'sceptre'.

Not only children, but women too have their place in the religious life of Tibet. Ever since Gautama himself was persuaded that they should be accepted in the Community, the *sangha*, all the schools of Buddhism have agreed that women may embrace the religious life, receive the tonsure, and wear the conventual robe. In Tibet there used to be tens of thousands of nuns. Only about a hundred reached India, but they continue to perform the offices, to practise meditation, and, in a few cases, yoga. Some of them live, side by side with a thousand or so monks, behind the high barbed wire fences of the big camp at Buxa, near Assam, where the English once interned Indians who resisted the Raj. The rest of the nuns are installed at Dalhousie, at the other end of the Himalayas. They are yogini nuns belonging to the *Kargyud-pa* order.

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Born in India, then, Buddhism grew up in Tibet, and its teachings have been transmitted there century after century, though not without vicissitudes and conflicts (even pitched battles wholly contrary to the spirit of Buddhism), all of which have left their mark on the face of tantric Mahayana or 'lamaism' as we see it today, when it has returned once more to India; and particularly as we see it divided into its various sects, orders or churches; the four principal ones (though these are only the best known), sharing among them the great majority of the faithful monks and hermits, are the *Nyingma-pa*, the *Sakya-pa*, the *Kargyud-pa* and the *Geluk-pa*.

A brief sketch of Tibet's politico-religious history will make its situation today clearer.

After a long period of which little is known, and of which there are few historical records but many legends, Tibet entered upon an era of monarchy.

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Buddhism made its first appearance in the seventh century. King Songtsen Gampo had two wives, one Chinese and one Nepalese, and both Buddhists. In his reign something fundamental happened: the adoption of Tibetan writing and grammar based on an Indian model. And, at the same time as Indian scholars and doctors, some Chinese and even some Persians visited Tibet.

In the reign of Thisong Detsen (742-804), Buddhism under its tantric form, as it flourished at that time in the highly respected university of Nalanda and among anchoritic yogis, was officially accepted in Tibet with the coming of two Indians, Santakaraksita, who introduced the basic rules of Buddhist monastic discipline, the *vinaya sutras*, and the celebrated Guru, Padmasambhava, most often spoken of today simply as Guru Rimpoche, the precious guru. For the three orders called the Red Hat Orders, Padmasambhava has remained almost as celebrated and revered as Gautama Buddha himself. The first temple or *gompa* was built at Samyê, and Buddhism was proclaimed the state religion (791). Thisong Detsen promulgated a code which remains in force; it distinguished between the monks who were subject to the strict monastic discipline and the *ngags-pa*, or tantric ascetics. Meanwhile, at that same period, certain Chinese missionary monks were likewise active in Tibet. At that time, about 792, there took place at Samyê, in the presence of Thisong Detsen, a famous debate between representatives of these Chinese monks and certain Indian monks. The Chinese taught the way of T'ch'an, (the famous Zen, *dhyana* in Sanscrit), called the swift or sudden way, founded on realisation of the identity of *samsara*, the world of phenomena or manifestation, and of *nirvana*, immediate awareness of the non-manifest (and taking little account of the action of Karma). The Indians on the other hand set forward the way called the slow way, the way of the observation of rules, the way of works. The duel of words fought by the Chinese monk Mahayana, and the Indian monk, Kamalasila, gave the official victory to the Indians holding to the ethical way, but in fact their victory was of a rather limited nature, and the identity of *samsara* and of *nirvana* has remained fundamental to all Tibetan metaphysics. But since Chinese Buddhism was itself Indian in origin, the Tibetans consider that it is to India alone that they owe their religion. In the reign of Thitsug Detsen, also known as Ralpachan (815-838), Sanscrit became the official language of religion. But reaction set in with Langdarma, who has come down in Tibetan history as standing for all the darkness of the world; for Langdarma not only renounced Buddhism, but persecuted it so severely that he ended his life by assassin-

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ation at the hands of a monk who, since he succeeded in escaping, thereby vindicated his cause. Tibetan legend has fed upon this historic occurrence, and traces of it are to be found in many stories and in the themes of many plays.

Now began the period of the decline of royal power; the rule passed into the hands of the nobility and the religious communities. During the whole of the tenth and eleventh centuries Tibetan tantric Buddhism was reformed little by little, in that it returned to its Indian origins, drawing on Nalanda where Buddhism was still very much alive. Many Tibetan monks were sent to India, the best known of them being Rinchen Zangpo, to whom we owe great works of translation. At the same time Indian monks were invited to Tibet, among them the celebrated Atisa (982-1054), founder of the *Kadam-pa* Order. This was also the day of the great *Kargyud-pa* yogis, Marpa (1012-1096), and above all Milarepa (1040-1123), whose sublime poetical and mystical works have been translated, at least in part, into all the principal languages of the West.

The Tibetan twelfth century, like our European Middle Ages, is characterised by the spread of rich and powerful monasteries.

At the time when Buddhism disappeared from India under the repeated blows of the Moslem invaders, it had definitely taken root in Tibet. But which Buddhism? Chiefly, that of the three Indian schools: *Madhyamika*, *Yogacara* and *Tantra*.

The name *madhyamika* is given to the teaching of the sage Nagarjuna, who is taken to be the author of the *Prajnaparamita*, a text which exists under different forms, from the longest and most voluminous to the most condensed. Quite unknown in Europe to all but a few specialists, Nagarjuna is none the less as important as Plato or St. Thomas Aquinas, and perhaps more important. *Yogacara* is the teaching of the Master Asanga, who lived some time in the fourth century. The main difference between the two systems is that Nagarjuna describes the Absolute by negatives, as later on Shankara, the founder of the Hindu *advaita vedanta* was to do: *shunyata*, the Void, is neither this nor that, the Absolute is empty of all qualification or limitation, of all meanings or attributes, and phenomena have only a relative reality. Asanga, on the other hand, describes the Absolute positively as non-dual, as permeating all things, as involved everywhere and in everything. Between these two men one recognises that dual tendency which has characterised every Hindu attempt to define the undefinable *Brahman*—a term which Gautama Buddha firmly excluded from his own vocabulary because his con-

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temporaries had falsely made of it a positive and describable entity.

In the thirteenth century the Mogul emperors, notably Khubilai, controlled the political life of Tibet, and they recognised the authority of the *Sakya-pa* Order, and the Sakya monks.

In the fifteenth century occurred a fundamental event, the pivot on which Tibetan history turns, the reform instituted by Tsong Khapa (1357-1419), founder of the *Geluk-pa* or Yellow Hats, the sect which was to become the most powerful because it was within its fold that the Dalai Lamas were to appear.

Tsong Khapa studied long and deeply with the *Kadam-pa*, the *Sakya-pa* and the *Kargyud-pa*, from whom he had learned the six yogas of Naropa, subject of one of his most important commentaries. The essential thing he did was to restore monastic discipline, celibacy in particular, and the slow way of self-preparation by the observation of the ethical rules. He is venerated by the Yellow Hats, who set up his statue in the place of honour in all their *gompas*, as the Red Hats do for Padmasambhava. While the *Geluk-pa* regard him as the supreme manifestation of Truth, his teaching is regarded with some caution by certain of the *Nyingma-pa*. The least one can say is that his knowledge was vast, and that he left behind him written commentaries on the fundamentals of the teachings known in Tibet. It was in his time that the great monastery-universities of Sera, Ganden, and most important of all, Drepung, were founded.

In the sixteenth century the Mongolian ruler, Altan Khan, was converted to Buddhism by a *Geluk-pa*, Sonam Gyamtso, Abbot of Drepung (1578). The day of the *Sakya-pa* had closed. Sonam Gyamtso received the title of Dalai Lama (Dalai being in fact a Mongol word meaning 'ocean'), and this title was retrospectively given to his two predecessors, Gedundub, a personal disciple of Tsong Khapa, who thus became for posterity the first Dalai Lama, and Gedun Gyamtso, recognised as the first reincarnation of his predecessor. In the seventeenth century the fifth Dalai Lama, 'the Great Fifth', wielded an exceptionally wide influence which he consolidated throughout the country, to the detriment of another extremely powerful abbot, the abbot of the *Karma-pa*, a branch of the *Kargyud-pa*. The building of the colossal palace of the Potala at Lhasa was begun under his direction. At this time the abbot of Tashilumpo took the title of Panchen Lama (though some contemporary writings refer to him on occasion as Tashi Lama). The word Panchen is the Tibetan equivalent of the Sanscrit pandit, learned. Traditionally the Panchen Lama is the guardian of the



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doctrine and, whether intellectually or spiritually, his importance is superior even to the Dalai Lama's. The fifth Dalai Lama succeeded the regent, Sangye Gyamtso, who finished the building of the Potala.

The sixth Dalai Lama is remembered as the author of some celebrated love-poems. History does not relate whether he was only a lover of beautiful women (and a great poet), or whether he was initiated into the sexual practices of tantrism and an authentic master.

With the opening of the eighteenth century begins the first period of the intervention and direct influence of the Chinese, which lasted until Sun-Yat-Sen's revolution of 1911, and which is instanced by the presence of two diplomatic representatives (*amban*) at Lhasa. But this political protectorate was offset by the spiritual effulgence which shone from Tibet upon China and Mongolia, where several *Geluk-pa* monasteries were built.

With the thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyamtso (1875-1933), recognisable in all his portraits by his long, delicate and pointed moustaches, Tibet emerges from its mysteriousness and enters into contemporary history. In 1904 the English expedition under Younghusband reached Tibetan soil, and occupied Lhasa, the capital. In 1910 it was a Chinese expedition which obliged the Dalai Lama to take flight into India; but with the revolution under Sun-Yat-Sen, China let go her hold upon Tibet. The Dalai Lama re-entered Lhasa, and his country enjoyed a degree of independence which the Mongolians, and then the Chinese, had denied it for centuries. But once the régime of the People's Republic was established in China the old attempts at the penetration of Tibet were renewed. In 1950, with the connivance of India, China annexed Tibet, though it was accorded internal autonomy and the right to maintain its religious and social structures. Nevertheless the situation deteriorated, and the young fourteenth Dalai Lama, on an official visit to India, did his best to put his country's position before Mr Nehru. The Prime Minister of India's only counsel was patience and moderation, an attitude which was, and still is, sharply criticised in certain Hindu circles which are particularly concerned for the protection of the Buddhist *dharma* from the advances of Marxist materialism.

In 1959 a popular revolt broke out in the Kham district. The Dalai Lama was required to present himself, without escort, to the Chinese representative in Lhasa. He decided instead to fly the country southward, and left Norbulinga by night accompanied by a considerable retinue. About the days and nights of this epic journey on foot and on yak-back, all kinds of stories have arisen and been circulated, their

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general tenor being that miraculous protection was accorded the incarnation of the Boddhisattva Avalokiteshvara. It was said, for instance, that a fog which was inexplicable at that time of the year hid the fugitives' caravan from Chinese airmen; but a Tibetan told me that this was altogether untrue. It has been said too that a false caravan with a false Dalai Lama, taking a different route, sacrificed itself by making itself a decoy and turning aside the search for the real caravan.

What is certain is that the Dalai Lama was already expected in India a few days before he arrived there. Indian opinion was almost unanimous in favour of his being made welcome there, and the news that he had crossed the frontier was received with great emotion and great rejoicing. With the Dalai Lama (and then of course with many other Tibetan monks and dignitaries) tantric Mahayana Buddhism returned to the land of its origin, to the soil of Buddh' Gaya, Rajgir and Nalanda. The Government of India received them fearlessly and without political motive, thus compromising its friendship with China with results which we have seen since. Mr Nehru went to meet the distinguished refugee and never later withheld his friendship. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama of the Tibetans later took part in the ceremonies attending the cremation of the Prime Minister, there were some privileged people who knew how strong was the bond which united the two men, and the personal bearing of the Pontiff during those funeral rites did not escape their notice.

Thus the history of Tibet since the seventh century may be seen as the growth of a sense of nationhood, continuing beneath the intrigues and the struggles for power of ecclesiastics and noble families, and beneath the criss-cross of Indian and Chinese influences. Those Tibetans who repudiate the political claims of China fall back on the differences of race: 'We are Mongolians, not Chinese', and on the fact that their culture, even its alphabet and its grammar, is of Indian origin. They emphasise also the further fact that the Chinese dynasties which succeeded in exercising a right of control at Lhasa were successively a Mongol and a Manchu dynasty. But everyone recognises the admiration of the Tibetan people, and particularly of the nobility, for Chinese culture and the Chinese way of life as far as secular matters are concerned. 'In religious matters, and those are the only ones which really count, we owe everything to India. But where it is a question of refinement, of manners, of taste in beautiful things, then it is to China that we owe everything.' It seemed to me that they always distinguish between the communist régime, to which they are strongly opposed on ideological

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grounds, and 'the great Chinese people', for whom their esteem is unimpaired.

We see then that Tibet, though it is surrounded with deserts which are deadly to caravans and with mountains which are to be crossed only with difficulty, was not as cut off from the rest of Asia as it has often been said to be. It received the most from India and China, but in turn it has given much to its neighbours, Mongolia, Ladhak, Bhutan, Sikkim and even Nepal; and all these countries have embraced tantric or lamaist Buddhism.

Sikkim in particular (nowadays more or less inaccessible for military reasons) was for a hundred years the principal meeting-place between Western civilisation and the Tibetan tradition. Since it was impossible to visit Tibet itself, but many Tibetans came to Sikkim, while Sikkimese lamas often studied in Tibet, it was from Sikkimese Red Hats that the essential information came on which modern Tibetology is based. This is why, for example, *The Book of the Dead*, by which the Yellow Hats set so little store, is so well known in the West. Padmasambhava himself was said originally to have gone to Sikkim, and that kingdom has remained faithful to the *Nyingma-pa* (whereas Bhutan is mostly *Kargyud-pa*). The oldest of the Sikkimese *gompas* is the one at Pemayangtse, not far from Kanchenjunga, the sacred mountain of this small independent kingdom. There are many temples, too, round about Gangtok, the capital; among them, the one which stands in the gardens of the Maharajah's palace is the most impressive. The sovereign is himself an ardent *Nyingma-pa*. It was largely due to him that Sikkim welcomed refugees of all the Red Hat sects, and it is beside the ancient monastery of Rumtek, on land made available by the Maharajah and with capital made available by the Government of India, that the great Abbot Gyalwa Karmapa has built a new *gompa* which, for a few decades at least, will, with its monks, ascetics, artists, craftsmen and musicians, be a living museum of all that was ancient Tibet. Thanks to its Institute of Tibetology and to the presence of its refugee lamas, Gangtok may well become the best centre for the study of the Tibetan civilisation.

But are Indian wisdom and Chinese culture the only components of the Tibetan tradition? No; for history records the fact that Tibet came also under Christian influence through Nestorianism and heretical Manichaeism, and, from the seventeenth century onwards, through certain missionaries; while there was also contact with Greece through

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Persia. Neither must the ancient pre-Buddhist sources, particularly *Bön*, be forgotten; there we approach a field of study which will afford great thrills to all lovers of the occult and the mysterious.

It is undoubted that there are a relationship and similarities between the Tibetan 'Book of the Dead', the *Bardo-tho-dol*, and the Egyptian 'Book of the Dead' of the time of the Pharaohs. But the Tibetans themselves have kept alive the fascinating idea of a land of wisdom supposed to lie to the north of their country. How much is symbolism and how much is reality in what is said about the mysterious Kingdom of Shambala? And there are many other questions which I do not propose to raise, since they have less than nothing to do with the one question which I did wish to raise in my encounters with Tibetan gurus and yogis: that of the search for, and of apprenticeship to, an ultimate wisdom, a real psychological and metaphysical knowledge capable of being actually experienced.

Several of the Dalai Lama's official interpreters told me of their astonishment, and the young monk-king's, at the time of some of the first audiences he granted (he was then at Mussoorie) to strangers delighted to seize the chance of his exile on Indian soil in order to approach one whom they regarded as standing for everything that is most mysterious in occultism, and most transcendent in magic. They did not ask questions about the *Prajnaparamita* or the *madhyamika* and *yogacara* systems, but instead a mixture, a regular *olla podrida*, of questions about high initiation into the secrets of the Great Pyramid, Atlantis, relations 'on the astral plane' with the Seven Great Spirits, the visits of a certain European magus to Tibet, and some of the picturesque inventions of the talented author of 'The Third Eye'. I am in a position to say that the Dalai Lama and some of the other *Geluk-pa* dignitaries were somewhat taken aback and began to wonder what sort of people these Westerners were; and the more so since some of their visitors represented themselves as being gurus in their own countries.

\* \* \*

But if the Dalai Lama is the best known of the Tibetan dignitaries, he is not the only one who is worth meeting. Such meetings are in the first place (as history has been instructing us) the discovery of the existence of the different Orders or sects, the *Geluk-pa*, or Yellow Hats, and the *Nyingma-pa*, *Sakya-pa* and *Kargyud-pa*. The very name *Nyingma-pa* means the ancients. Their Order is the first which was founded in





Gyalwa Karmapa (Rumtek, Sikkim)



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Tibet by the Indian Padmasambhava, the Precious Guru. It is believed by the *Nyingma-pa* that he hid certain texts intended for future generations, and that these indeed began to be discovered in later centuries. It is to the *Nyingma-pa* that the famous *Bardo-tho-dol* belongs, the Tibetan 'Book of the Dead', which has been translated into French and English, and which, after being the subject of a study by the psychoanalyst, Jung, apparently serves nowadays as a manual for Americans experimenting with the drug called LSD, and is used in 'psychedelic sessions'! It is against the *Nyingma-pa* that both some Tibetan followers of the new school and certain Westerners have brought the most accusations of immorality, witchcraft, murder, erotic depravity, the perverting of Buddhism, and other criticisms, which fail to hold up when one lives for a time close to one of their qualified representatives, such as Khentse Rimpoche, Kangyur Rimpoche, Chatral Rimpoche, or Dudjom Rimpoche.

Dudjom Rimpoche is the leading man of the *Nyingma-pa* in India today. He wears his hair long and tied, after the fashion of Tibetan men, in what we should call a chignon or 'bun', and like so many Mongolians he is clean-shaven. An experienced European, looking at some of the photographs of him, might think his face a woman's, but Dudjom Rimpoche is a married sage, father of a family, and lives at Kalimpong. Thanks to Sonam Kazi, who is his disciple, I have had several conversations with him about Tantrism, which threw clear light on a number of points which I found obscure before. But what I chiefly remember about him was that there was in him, at one and the same time, a total simplicity and a more than human nobility. His look has sometimes a depth which is beyond description. Another world, a fourth dimension, is revealed and becomes manifest in that look. And this man, so modest and natural when he is talking to a visitor, takes on, when he officiates at one of those complicated and elaborate Tibetan tantric rituals, a quality of nobility which can only be compared with that evinced by some of the most perfect works of art produced by man. I remember an initiation ritual or *abisheka*. Even though my participation in it was incomplete, I felt myself to be at the very heart and centre of the Tibetan Tradition, and not the Tradition of the sensational accounts, the macabre stories, the photographs of degenerate lamas prowling around Katmandu or Darjeeling, but the real Tradition. Every *mudra*, every gesture, every posture assumed its full meaning and involved the whole being of the guru. I felt, indeed I could not do otherwise, that these gestures and incantations, these *mantras*, not only had a profound symbolic meaning,



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but that the power they had was making itself felt far beyond the immediate physical and corporeal world.

Through the *Nyingma-pa* Order is handed on the teaching which seems to me to be one of the most precious elements of Tibetan wisdom, that which is called *zog-chen*, one of the inner yogas which has kept some of the imprint of Chinese Ch'an, and often reminded me of what I had heard about Japanese Zen. *Zog-chen* teaching prevails in Sikkim too, and it seems to me one particularly suitable for Western people. It leads to the highest perfection possible for man, the Self-Realisation of the Hindus, the realisation by man of his own nature, which is nothing other than Buddhahood; *zog-chen* is a particularly effective, and above all swift, method of reaching it. But I shall have occasion to return to this subject in greater detail.

The second Order to make its appearance in history, after the *Nyingma-pa*, is that of the *Sakya-pa*, who are also Red Hats; it was founded in the eleventh century by Konchog Gyalpo, who also founded the great Sakya monastery.

In India today its head is the Sakya lama, Dagti Rimpoche, a smiling young man whose clean-shaven face is again framed in long braided hair, and who wears earrings, jewellery which has nothing effeminate about it in the Tibetan context.

All the tantric techniques are to be found among the *Sakya-pa*, even those which Western minds would find the most baffling, and they have the reputation in particular of having developed those famous parapsychological powers which foreign observers have been so astonished to find in certain lamas. But the great gurus unanimously insist that such powers are merely accessory to the genuinely spiritual life and to real wisdom, and that the search for them is not, and cannot be, the true aim of ascetic disciplines.

I have had much less contact with *Sakya-pa* monks than with *Nyingma-pa* or *Kargyud-pa* gurus, and I am not in a position to judge those powers for myself. But I can testify that I often experienced certain of them with Masters of the other two Red Hats sects.

Exactly what powers, however? That, for example, of knowing about events which have taken place, but about which the master *could not possibly have been in any way informed*; or that of being able, *without being asked it, and without any such question even being raised*, to give the answer to, and detailed comments upon, some problem which was exactly one which I had had in mind for days; or above all that of being able to bring about in someone visiting them, solely by a wordless



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influence and a searching look, without making passes, without ritual, without the use of any drug, inward stirrings and altered states of consciousness altogether transcending ordinary experience.

The *Kargyud-pa*, the sect in which yoga is of the greatest importance, hold in trust the teachings of Milarepa (1040-1123), a disciple of Marpa (1012-1096), who was the successor in the line of gurus of the Indians, Tilopa and Naropa. The story of Marpa, as Milarepa tells it, illustrates the intensity of his search for Truth, his indomitable courage, and the amount not only of energy and effort, but also of money, which was poured out in order to find Enlightenment in India. The *Kargyud-pa* Order is divided into the *Dug-pa-kargyud* and the *Karma-kargyud* sects.

I became personally convinced of the exceptional greatness of several of the *Kargyud-pa* gurus of repute who had taken refuge in India: Khempo Kaloo, a man with emaciated face and impressive glance, whom I met in the monastery of Bhutya Busty, near Darjeeling; Dukpa Thuksey Rimpoche, likewise near Darjeeling; Abo Rimpoche (a disciple of Kamtrul Rimpoche) at Dalhousie, a very old yogi who agreed to show me a certain number of yogi exercises, and whose aged body preserved an extraordinary degree of youthfulness; and last a man who inspired in me immediately both veneration and love, a Bhutani, likewise an old man, living not far from Kurseong, by name Lupon Sonam Zangpo. But the *Kargyud-pa* Order is not the only one in which one finds yogis. There are also *Nyingma-pa* yogis, such as No No Rimpoche, a Lhadhaki who lived for a long time in Tibet and now lives at Kurseong too.

The *Karmapa* were founded in the twelfth century by Dusum Khyenpa. They are subdivided into the Black Hats—and it was with them that the idea of a system of successive reincarnations originated, which was later to be put into effect with the Dalai Lamas and so many other dignitaries and abbots—and, since the fourteenth century, into Red Hats.

The head of the *Karma-kargyud*, Gyalwa Karmapa, is himself a *tulku*, successor to the great Karmapas whose influence has always predominated in Tibet, and whose spiritual importance was almost comparable to the Dalai Lama's. The present Karmapa has taken refuge in the monastery at Rumtek, near Gangtok in Sikkim.

But the Tibetan church best known to foreigners is certainly that of the Yellow Hats or *Geluk-pa*, founded in the fifteenth century by Tsong Khapa. Among the many abbots and high dignitaries who distinguish it, three are the objects of peculiar respect: Tiwo Kyorpon

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Rimpoche, a hermit sage living near Dalhousie, and the two masters or tutors who teach the Dalai Lama.

I had the honour of meeting these latter when they were staying at the *gompa* which the Tibetans have built at Buddh' Gaya.

The junior tutor, Teijang Rimpoche, is a lama of quite exceptional learning, distinction and intelligence. Since I do not understand Tibetan, I was allowed to remain in his room although he was receiving a monk, already advanced in his studies, who had come to consult him (so I was told) on an important problem of his spiritual life. The first thing that struck me was the ceremonial air and the exquisite etiquette (Chinese, rather than Tibetan, however) which characterised their meeting. I am not speaking only of the series of prostrations exchanged. The visitor dared not so much as raise his eyes to his illustrious host's face. I understood how it is possible to describe the attitude of humble Tibetans before the princes of their churches as servility. I, on the other hand was free to look into the eyes of the master. They were looking with love upon the bowed monk; they seemed to hold and to be weighing in their regard the man's spiritual destiny; and they overflowed with that compassion peculiar to Mahayana Buddhists, whose religious lives begin with 'the Boddhisattva's vow' never to separate their own Salvation, or more exactly Deliverance, from the Liberation of all human creatures imprisoned in the illusion of births and deaths and bound in the chains of self-regard and individualism. The master had some tea brought at the beginning of the interview, and the two men drank it together in silence. Then they talked. I could see clearly that of these two, face to face with each other, one was still stumbling in darkness while the other was fully awake. I saw too that, in spite of all the light within him and all his compassion, the tutor could do none of this monk's work for him, who yet seemed so unhappy, and doubtless had many difficulties before him. I understood neither the questions asked nor the answers given, but never for a moment did I cease to be deeply moved or to marvel at what passed. It seemed to me that I could follow what was said, could see the tutor seeking and finding the chinks in his visitor's armour of error and blindness, could see him reach into his very heart, help him to centre his consciousness at the very seat of his being, to root his search where his own life was rooted, to become genuine, unified, capable of looking at himself without fear, and of accepting what was false in himself. Those who have themselves been in the position of the disciple, the pupil, have received from their masters not only the most enlightening answers to the most vital questions, but a

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transmitted force, an energy, which cannot be compared with any other experience known to them. They alone know that the disciple's fervour is neither fear nor obsequiousness, but love and gratitude. They know too that every gesture made in the master's presence is a ritual gesture, that all meat or drink shared with him is a sacrament, that every silence entered into with his master is communion with the truth, with That Which Is.

The Dalai Lama's senior tutor, Lingsang Rimpoche, is the supreme example of those great *Geluk-pa* dialecticians and metaphysicians whom perfect mastery of the teachings of the *Prajnaparamita* and various tantras has slowly led to the heights of meditation, meditation without form, non-dual, beyond all formulation, which in Tibetan is called *uma*.

That slow preparation, extending step by step through long years, is peculiar to the *Geluk-pa*. Tsong Khapa's enormous literary works fall in effect into two parts, the *lam-rim* and the *ngags-rim*. The second deals with the technique of meditation founded upon directed imagination (in the sense of the word which means the creation of images), and the creation and subsequent dissolution of tantric divinities springing from the mind of the meditator. But even if the huge *Geluk-pa* monasteries, such as Ganden, included tantric faculties, many monks would not be able to join them until they had been awarded the university degree of *gesche*, or doctor. Formerly they were obliged to make their way to it by ridding themselves of obstacles due to concepts, to opinions, to thought as it arises from the sense of the self, the separate individuality conditioned, limited, defined by a name and a physical shape. *Lam-rim* is a long course of study, based on book-learning, logic and dialectics, and leading to the transformation of the conceptual way of thinking.

The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama belong to this church of the Yellow Hats. Exiled from his country and from the Potala at Lhasa, His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama, who is thirty-two years old, lives nowadays at Dharamsala, in northern Punjab, in a large bungalow which the numerous Tibetan refugees in the neighbourhood somewhat inappropriately call 'the Palace', since there is nothing sumptuous about it, unless it is the beauty of the surrounding countryside.

This Dalai Lama bears a title which books and magazines had made famous long before he became, by fleeing to India in 1959, accessible to admirers, the merely curious, journalists and Tibetologists.

Long ago recognised by a Mongolian emperor as the political head of Tibet, believed to be the manifestation on earth of the Boddhisattva

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Avalokiteshvara, or, in Tibetan, of Chenrezi (while the Panchen Lama is the incarnation of Amithaba\*), described as a living god by the reporters, the Dalai Lama symbolises Tibet for the world at large; and for the refugees the fourteenth Dalai Lama symbolises their country lost and their religion saved. When he 'gives his *darshan*', when he shows himself and says a few words to some hundreds of the faithful gathered outside his bungalow, the emotion shown by these unfortunate people, often living in poverty which borders on destitution, is extraordinary: their faces light up with joy, and they can truly be said to be in contemplation. And when their beloved leader has gone, many of them fall on their knees to gather up the dust trodden by his sacred feet.

Yet this exiled Head of State, more famous than many Prime Ministers of great powers, is neither a king, nor an emperor, neither a dictator nor the president of a republic, nor the leader of a political party in power.

He is a monk.

He is a Buddhist monk who is subject to all the monastic rules of the *vinaya sutras*, beginning with celibacy and chastity, and who regularly takes part in the offices and the *pujas*, or forms of worship. I have been present at several ceremonies over which he presided, and the fact that I do not understand Tibetan permitted me to be the exception and attend as a spectator at the confession of breaches of the Rule of the Order. During the first part of this ceremony, the Dalai Lama is only a monk among other monks, and he too prostrates himself before the throne which he will presently occupy as Avalokiteshvara. There could be no doubt of his sincerity, humility and ardour.

But if the Dalai Lama is a monk, and though the fifth, the thirteenth, and today the fourteenth Dalai Lamas have shown themselves to be highly instructed and intelligent monks, it is not required of a Dalai Lama to be a teacher and the initiator of a few chosen disciples. That is a mistake made by many foreigners who come to see him, thinking that they have to do with the greatest and most impressive of the tantric gurus. For Tibetans the Dalai Lama is something other, and perhaps something more, the precious protector of the Tibetan people, Chenrezi, the Buddha of Compassion, who has come among men to comfort and serve them. His concern is not only for other monks, but also for the laity, for parents, children, orphans; and in spite of the measures to protect his person which devolve upon the Indian Government, always

\* To speak more exactly, every Dalai Lama (like every *tulku*) is the incarnation of his historical predecessor, not the direct incarnation of Avalokiteshvara.

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concerned lest he be kidnapped or assassinated, he often makes long journeys across India, visiting the various rehabilitation camps in which the most deprived of the refugees are gathered. Everywhere he goes he arouses the same fervent joy and sincere feeling. So his behaviour, unlike that of the traditional teacher, has always to be adapted to circumstances. In the course of my different conversations with His Holiness, he sometimes took up positions which would make those who hold to the idea of tradition and counter-tradition (as, for instance, René Guénon propounds them) shudder: he told me, for example, apropos his recent proclamation of a democratic constitution, that a republican régime of the Western type was altogether better than the ancient Tibetan theocracy. Here is our conversation more or less word for word.

‘I am glad’, he said, ‘that it should be you, of all Europeans, who have given a year of your life to the making of a film about what remains of the Tibetan *dharma*, because you are a Frenchman, and because it was France which, in its great revolution of 1789, gave democracy to the world.’ ‘Does your Holiness mean to say’, I asked, ‘that you consider modern democratic government to be better than the traditional religious hierarchy of ancient Tibet?’

The conversation was carried on in English, and the interpreter (who was not Sonam on this occasion) was no longer taking part in it. His Holiness replied, as briefly as could be, with the words, ‘Of course’. In speaking like this the Dalai Lama was in fact speaking as a Buddhist, who unreservedly accepts impermanence and instability, and adapts himself wholly to the present without regret for the past.

I have no doubt that the Dalai Lama’s serene dignity and extraordinary maturity, his youth notwithstanding, have struck everyone who has come in contact with him. In April 1963 I was staying in a Hindu ashram and had no thought of dissipating my efforts by entering into relations with Buddhist teachers. But one of my Indian friends, Navnit Parekh, a disciple of Ramdas and Ma Anandamayi, who had been to Tibet in the past, persuaded me to go with him to meet the Dalai Lama, who was coming to Mussoorie, to Mrs Taring’s Tibetan Home Foundation, to inaugurate a little dispensary which Navnit had built.

Outside the biggest tourist hotel in Mussoorie we waited for the official procession. Since November 1962 the Government of India had given up trying to humour China, and the monk-king was to be accorded military honours. A number of Indian and Tibetan notables were present, reporters, uniformed police, and police in plain clothes who were just as recognisably police, a detachment of soldiers, and Navnit

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and I. The scene as a whole made me think rather of the Elysée or Matignon than of *gompas* and the Land of the Snows. Preceded by a roar of motorcycles, the long black limousine entered the courtyard. I was taking part in one of the usual ceremonies associated with the comings and goings of Heads of State, whether white, black or yellow, which news-reels and television have shown us again and again. The soldiers presented arms, the chauffeur dashed to open the door of the car, and I was already seeing in my mind's eye the official smile, the salutes to this side and that of the important personage, who would then be swallowed up in the vast hall of the palace. But this classic scenario was very suddenly departed from: there appeared out of the motor-car a quite unsophisticated looking young man of about thirty, wearing glasses, dressed in the yellow and dark red monastic robe, with one arm and shoulder bare. It was as if time suddenly came to a stop. The young man remained unusually still, looking round him with great attention, studying the faces of those surrounding him, and seeming to be carrying on with each one of these people a silent interchange of extraordinary intensity. I had only rarely seen so young a man so fully and wholly himself. Here, in this situation which was far more accidental than Tibetan, we were at the heart of Truth. For two days I observed continually this much attended, honoured, venerated, and adored young man. Never for a moment was that impression of authenticity belied. When, the next evening, Navnit and I entered an immense ill-lighted hall where His Holiness was waiting for me, accompanied by an interpreter who seemed as young as himself, my mind was made up. I would put into effect a suggestion made by several of my Hindu friends: to give the time, the trouble, the loneliness, discomfort and cold, the disappointment and courage required for a documentary film about Tibetan Buddhism, about which at that time (I ought to point out) I knew nothing but what I had read, which is to say very little that had anything to do with what I was to discover eighteen months later. Besides an immediate sympathy with and attraction to the interpreter, I felt that evening a respect, a love for the Dalai Lama which has never altered. I had often had occasion to discuss film projects with 'important people'. The Dalai Lama failed at no point to show himself as someone radically different. At the end of the interview I felt I must abandon the tone, the formalities usual in such cases, and tell him that I could not enter on the proceedings necessary for a film involving a public service like French Television, and the Indian Foreign Secretary, without certain assurances from him; I pointed out that a superficial piece of

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work would be of no service to the cause of *dharma* (on the contrary), and that it would be necessary to show in the film only the greatest of the gurus, only rituals perfectly carried out, and at least something of what is regarded as esoteric, secret, and most carefully hidden from the general public. I ended by asking His Holiness to give me a clear answer, yes or no, on these points. About this request, on which hung so much for the future, a request put by an unknown foreigner who was not a Buddhist, the Dalai Lama asked not a single question. He looked me straight in the eyes, and for a moment we remained there in silent communion, man to man, being to being, while I sought only to be truthful with him (as truthful, that is, as it is ever possible for me to be). Then he withdrew into himself, remaining quite still for some minutes. There we were, all four of us, all alike self-recollected: the most famous and the most revered of Tibetans, a Sikkimese whose life is divided between the mysterious Orient and the Ministries of New Delhi, a wealthy Hindu who was consecrating his life and his money to the service of his fellow men, and a French Christian seeking only to live a life of truth rather than one of illusion. I have no idea how long that silence lasted. Then His Holiness looked me once more in the eyes, and simply said, 'Yes'. The interview was over.

In November 1964, accompanied by another friend of the Dalai Lama's, Maurice Frydman (or Bharatananda), an Indian citizen of Polish extraction, a helper of Ghandi's in the past and a disciple of Ramana Maharshi, I saw His Holiness again, this time in his bungalow at Dharamsala. Before starting on my slow discovery of tantric Buddhism I wanted to show him a short and more or less amateur film, lasting only ten minutes or so, which I had made in one of the Cistercian Abbeys of France. For some weeks nothing had been heard of the interpreter I had met at Mussoorie, whose name was Sonam Topgey Kazi, whom I had so much wanted to see again. But a few minutes before the showing of the film began, he came in. He had just that moment come back, without telling anyone that he was going to, and this 'chance' turned out to be full of consequences. In the silence the film began. Those pictures of Trappist monks at work, in the refectory, and above all at prayer in the monastery chapel, were a revelation to the Dalai Lama and the other Tibetans who were there, and afterwards, late into the night, I had to answer, or try to answer, their many and persistent questions. Thus in this modern world, unknown, frightening, in which these lamas have nowadays to live, there were not only factories, aeroplanes, restaurants and cinemas, and there were not only mission-

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aries who are often unjust and convinced of the falsity of the *dharma*; there were monks even there, men seeking to transform themselves, seeking really to be, men following the way, the Path. That 'message from Christian contemplatives' was probably my entrée to many *gompas* and hermitages.

Finally, let me add a last feature to this portrait of the Dalai Lama. While I was at Sikkim (and about two thousand kilometers from Dharamsala) I was told that it was rumoured (I say nothing of the rumour's origin, and it is of little importance) that my purpose in making this film was to distort and adversely criticise Tantric Buddhism, and that, since France had resumed diplomatic relations with Communist China, my intention could only be to ridicule the Tibetan lamas. It seems that the Dalai Lama, informed of the uneasiness of some of them, replied, 'Really? So neither I, nor my teachers, nor any of the great gurus or yogis, whether *Geluk-pa* or Red Hats, was aware of his treachery or guessed his intentions, in spite of their claims to clairvoyance and their reputation for wisdom? So this European has managed with no difficulty at all to deceive every one of us? Well, in that case Tibetan Buddhism deserves all the evil that he can say of it!' And when I saw him again three months later, and had prostrated myself at his feet, he took me by the arm in the friendliest way, and we strolled in silence up and down the verandah of his bungalow.

Because of the recognised authority of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama the *Geluk-pa* church had acquired in Tibet a clear pre-eminence over the Red Hat Orders. It is the same today in India. For the Government of India, as for foreigners and the various refugee aid associations, the Tibetans are the Dalai Lama, and it is the Yellow Hats, educated, civilised people and diplomats, with whom it is possible to speak. What is more, all sorts of books published throughout the world have so often presented the Red Hats, the 'unreformed' church, as off-putting ascetics, and even as frankly suspect, that this discredit still lies heavily on them, while their gurus are helped in their exile only by the Sikkimese, the Bhutanis, the sherpas and the Mongolian populations of Darjeeling and Kalimpong.

The Dalai Lama himself is free from any partiality and he is sincerely loved and venerated by all the Red Hats, and is in constant contact with their highest representatives. One could perhaps compare the relations which exist between the Yellow Hats and the Red Hats today with those which at the time of the Œcumenical Council united the Protestants and



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the Catholics of France: there is a real exchange of respect, a sincere desire for reconciliation, there are meetings and discussions; but there are certain profound differences, and there is the memory of past conflicts. Whereas the differences existing between the three other sects are rather reminiscent of those existing between the great Catholic Orders, the Benedictines, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, a clear sense of belonging to the same Church, but at the same time a particular attachment to a tradition and to its founder. The Red Hats all have in common their veneration for the true source of Tibetan Buddhism, Guru Padmasambhava (who was in fact an Indian), but some have occasional reservations about Tsong Khapa.

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What then was the situation, in India in 1966, for a seeker after Enlightenment or Wisdom who had the opportunity to make contact with the different groups of refugee Tibetan lamas?

While the lay refugees are grouped in labour camps scattered over more or less the whole of India right down to the south (Mysore), the monks, yogis and lamas have come together in two quite distinct Himalayan areas, one of which was always under Tibetan influence, the other being purely Hindu. This latter, situated to the north of Delhi, comprises the four centres of Dharamsala, Dalhousie, Mussoorie and Rajpur, near Dehra-Dun. There the Tibetans are unequivocally refugees, and one finds there neither *gompas* nor those characteristic Buddhist monuments, large or small, the *stupas* or *chörten*. But a small temple has been built there, all the same, by Mrs Taring, the moving spirit of The Tibetan Home Foundation, and decorated in the pure traditional style by some noteworthy refugee artists from the Amdo province.

At Rajpur lives a great *Nyingma-pa* guru, Polo Khen Rimpoche. At Dalhousie there are a group of *Kargyud-pa* yogis and two monasteries, pretty much restored, where some of the flower of older *Geluk-pa* monks practice and teach tantric meditation. At Mussoorie the school of young *tulkus* inspired by Mrs Freda Bedi, besides some *Kargyud-pa* nuns, a few *Nyingma-pa*, and some *Sakya-pa*, who are adherents of Dagti Rimpoche, have found asylum. Lastly, at Dharamsala are installed those who are left of the Dalai Lama's own monastery at the Potala, where both the *Nyingma-pa* and the *Geluk-pa* teachings had their place, and also the vestiges of a medical school, about which I must say a word or two.

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In Tibet the great *Geluk-pa* monasteries of several thousands of monks were constituted very much as universities; they were divided into colleges in which philosophy and tantrism were studied, and there were also schools of medicine and astrology. At Dharamsala two medical lamas were trying to preserve and hand down traditional Tibetan medicine. I was told that it takes nine years to train a doctor and twelve to produce a first-class one. Since the medical studies require, in the first place, the learning by heart of thousands of pages, infancy is not too early to begin them, and among the students one finds young monks no more than twelve or thirteen years old.

Tibetan medicine is a combination of secular Tibetan techniques, of Chinese acupuncture, and of Hindu ayurvedic medical practice. Based essentially on the healing properties of medicaments derived from plants, it is concerned with several hundred different preparations made up, so Tibetan pharmacists claim, from upwards of a thousand botanical species. Since by no means all of these grew in the soil of their own country, the Tibetans used to send expeditions into neighbouring ones, particularly the Indian slopes of the Himalayas.

Tibetans readily recognise the achievements of modern medical science, and when it was suspected that the elder sister of the Dalai Lama was suffering from cancer, she was treated in a Calcutta clinic. But a young Swiss doctor, Francis Rohner, a doctor at the Tibetan Nursery, told me that he was convinced of the value of certain of the medical practices of the lamas, and he set himself to study Tibetan in order to be able to talk with his colleagues from Lhasa. No doubt a gulf exists between our exact pharmaceutical practice and the approximate weights and measures of Tibetan chemists, mixing their simples and other plants in the pans of a primitive balance. But this Swiss doctor told me that after a year of observation he had no doubt about the cures they effected. What then is one to think? In any case the Tibetans doctors' ideas about which pills to prescribe, out of the hundreds made, for a particular malady, and especially for a particular patient, are extremely precise; for in the course of my conversations with the lama doctor at Dharamsala it came to me that what he set out to cure was a human being, the human being as a whole, rather than the symptoms of disease, even when the disorder was an organic one.

Diagnosis always includes a long and careful examination of the eye, the taking of the pulse, the observation of the behaviour of the urine when stirred with a rod and of the slow or fast appearance and disappearance of the froth thus formed. Besides these things the doctors carry out,

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likewise with a rod, all sorts of measurements of the patient. It was pointed out to me that this was not a question of locating the points for acupuncture, but of finding out precisely what are the symmetries, asymmetries and dissymmetries of the patient's body by comparison with an ideal organism. As is often the case in European hospitals, the medical superintendent and his assistants are surrounded during the consultation by students. But white overalls are not worn, and as I watched these men in red robes, in many ways so different from their European counterparts, as they bent over a supine and motionless body, I could not help thinking of Rembrandt's great 'Anatomy Lesson'. As to Tibetan ignipuncture, altogether extraordinary results are attributed to it, but these I had no opportunity of verifying.

But let us leave Dharamsala for the far side of Nepal, for Kurseong, Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Sikkim. All that part of the Himalayas, Tibetan, Sikkimese, British or Indian, according to the fortunes of history, is a land of ancient Buddhist-Lamaist culture. The refugees live there in fraternal surroundings, in a countryside where flags carrying sacred inscriptions fly on all sides, where *gompas* used to be numerous and stupas arose everywhere. These stupas or *chörten* are the most representative monuments of Buddhism as a whole. They are built to house the relics of a sage, or texts bearing the words of Gautama Buddha, and their five-storey architecture is a metaphysical treatise for any who can to read; they represent the five *dhyani* Buddhas or Buddhas of prime importance, aspects of the Absolute. The five initiations correspond to the five families of mankind, the five emotions which it is possible to transform, the five wisdoms, the five aspects of the human being (*rupa, vedana, samjna, samskara* and *vijnana*). This five-fold division is to be found everywhere in Mahayana. But the simple folk of these mountains, who would never be able to put even the elements of wisdom into words, pass in procession round these *stupas*, led by their lamas. Circling thus, always from left to right, round a central point, they symbolise the relation of motion with stillness, of manifestation with the absolute. They do not understand anything, yet they experience something; they know in their depths that there is a meaning, a direction, in life, and they take comfort in the promise of salvation at the last for all creatures. They say over and over again the prayer which century by century has inspired the Tibetans, and is to be seen carved or painted on the rocks throughout this region: *om mani padme hum* (Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus). The lamas of the Red Hat sects have found a congenial and profoundly Buddhist milieu at Darjeeling and in

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Sikkim. The building of the *gompa* of Gyalwa Karmapa at Rumtek has been a work of faith; hundreds of mountain dwellers worked on it voluntarily, and among them, fraternally labouring side by side, were Tibetans, Bhutanis and Sikkimese and Nepalis.

But near Kalimpong the sherpas and other friends of the famous Tensing, conqueror of Everest, over-estimated not their strength, but their financial backing; and for lack of means, the *gompa* they began to build is unfinished, looks like a ruin—a symbol of their broken but ineradicable hopes. Grouped round their lamas, Dudjom Rimpoche or Mindoling Rimpoche, these heroic mountaineers have no need of knowing how to read or write in order to understand and love what they understand. They alone carry, on the shoulders which have borne the alpinist sahibs' baggage towards the Himalayan summits, the weight of safeguarding a wisdom which has great value for all humankind.

Many gurus, and particularly the Red Hats, know that one of their chief hopes of saving their culture and the form of Buddhism which was preserved by them is to arouse the interest of foreigners, who, once they are personally persuaded of the importance of these ideas, could help them even with money. But although they may warrant our interest as worthwhile people, the Tibetan refugee monks evince considerable reserve. Begging is repugnant to them, and even more repugnant is the idea of selling themselves and their spiritual heritage by letting people witness, as it were from behind the scenes, yogic exercises, *mantras* (aural symbols) and *mandalas* (visual symbols), in order that money may be forthcoming from those who believe themselves to be, and indeed proclaim themselves, their disciples. Apart from the sacred works of art which they brought with them into exile, and with which they would part only in the last extremity, their wealth is inward and spiritual: their level of being, their inward radiance, their knowledge of the mysterious bond which unites the appearances of the phenomenal world, or *samsara*, with the timeless absolute of the Void, or *shunyata*. But are their reserve, their demands, their earnestness reasons for abandoning these people and allowing the source of true life which they represent to vanish with them? Are these things not rather guarantees of the authenticity and the value of their heritage? This is the question, the answer to which will not depend only on them: are the Tibetan Tradition and Buddhism condemned to die under the bored or absent-minded eyes of men belonging to a world where money is freely forthcoming when it is a question of amusing oneself or of perfecting the means of destruction?

## **PART THREE**

# **HINAYANA, MAHAYANA, TANTRAYANA**

THAT ASPECT OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM WHICH FOREIGNERS CALL LAMAISM is part of Mahayana, the Buddhism of the Great Vehicle, also called Northern Buddhism. Nowadays, the Tibetans call it *Vajrayana*, *Mantrayana*, or, more often, *Tantrayana*, the tantric vehicle. But this word vehicle, generally accepted in the west, does not in fact translate the Sanscrit word *yana* very well; *yana* primarily means 'that to which the greatest importance is given'. In fact, though many foreigners and Buddhists other than Tibetan ones consider *Tantrayana* as a third vehicle, the Tibetans themselves think of it (as I have suggested) as part of Mahayana; they make only an inner distinction between the *sutras* and the *tantras* of Mahayana. The Tibetan Tradition offers aspirants to wisdom every known kind of ascetic discipline and all the possible techniques for personal transformation. It is perhaps a mark of the peculiar genius of the Tibetans that they should have made use of every means to that end. Just as one may have recourse to surgery, to classical allopathic medicine, to homoeopathy, to herbal treatment, and to psychiatry to the single end of achieving a cure, in the same way the Tibetans have gathered together and perfected—with a truly scientific approach—all the methods which can lead a man, according to his individual temperament and degree of maturity, to free himself from his self-centred or individual view of things and to break through his limitations and conditioning.

Though we commonly speak of certain things as peculiar to the Tibetans, and insist that they are specialities of theirs, in fact they have every conceivable form of spiritual life in their heritage. For example, someone of a devotional temperament, who would be moved to follow

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what the Hindus call the way of *bhakti*, would find among the Tibetans an inheritance as rich and satisfying to him as that of the dualistic religions founded, in contra-distinction to Buddhism, on the relationship of the creature with his Creator. I think particularly of the fervent adoration of the Boddhisattva Chenrezi (Avalokiteshvara) and of his earthly incarnation, the Dalai Lama. That devotion to a saviour does not exist in Hinayana; yet it gives meaning to the lives of millions of people not yet qualified for the ascetic life and for the Way, not even for what is called the Slow Way.

The ascetic life, the way to *nirvana*, is, since the time of Gautama himself, the business of the monk. But the Tibetan people, peasants and shepherds who led a hard life, but were of a happy disposition, were nonetheless deeply religious. One can see this in the humblest of the refugees. These simple people turn their prayer-wheels or set in motion those which are fixed all along the outside walls of the temples; they offer scarves to the statues in the *gompas*, they prostrate themselves before wise men, they process around *stupas* (*pradakshina*) reciting the mantra *om mani padme hum*. They have faith, and because of their faith, they too travel the road to the effacement of the ego and of individuality.

As for the monks, yogis and lamas, their heritage resembles as it were a pyramid, whose base is the monastic life, lived according to the rules set down in the texts called *sutras*, which are common to all forms of Buddhism from Ceylon, through Mongolia to Japan, while its summit is that formless meditation in which is revealed the oneness of all things, the impermanence of each element which makes up the universe, and the eternity of the Absolute, the supreme Reality, the Void. Although the Mahayanist ideal is that of the Boddhisattva, who makes no distinction between his own Liberation and that of the Manifest (or, as we should say, creation), and not that of the individual salvation of the *arhat*, the Tibetans speak no less commonly than do the Hindus of Realisation, and of Buddhahood, of the State-of-Being-Buddha or an Awakened One; and Sonam Kazi readily used the Hindu expression, *jivan mukta*, meaning he who has attained the All, who is without limitation even in this life, he who has really become 'perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect', equally perfect with God himself. Between the monastic starting-point, common to all those who have a vocation, and that perfection reserved only for the chosen few, lies the whole edifice of tantrism (including all those psycho-physiological practices known as yoga), an edifice so bewildering to the foreign observer, with its





Gyalwa Karmapa (Hat wearing ceremony)





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pantheon of divinities, often of terrifying aspects, and its sexual symbolism.

Because of the fame of the titles, Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, the church of the Yellow Hats is the best known. But that does not mean that it is necessarily the most interesting from our point of view. Among the Red Hats, whose situation in India today is often a difficult one, there are some very extraordinary Masters, who come nearer to what we expect of Tibet from what we have read and heard.

For the foreigner who wishes to learn from the Tibetan sages what is the nature of true being, the most immediately apparent difference between the Yellow Hats and the Red Hats is as follows.

The *Geluk-pa* accord a much greater importance to theoretical studies, to intellectual studies. A monk must often spend twenty or thirty years at these studies, which involve the learning by heart of volumes upon volumes before he can begin the practical work of direct experimentation, and particularly the tantric disciplines which are the very essence of Tibetan Buddhism. And these studies comprise not only examinations, taken before boards of examiners, to obtain university degrees, but also a peculiarly Tibetan form of the exchange of ideas on the great questions: debates which bring together some hundreds of monks, paired face to face, one sitting the other standing. Though these debates are not unknown among the Red Hats, they are especially characteristic of the *Geluk-pa*.

I was present at one of these controversies at the Buxa Dwar camp a few kilometers from the Bhutan frontier.

After the morning office and the singing of the choir of those remarkably deep bass voices which are characteristic of the Tibetans, there followed a long moment of general silence; then in a few seconds some monks had left, others had arrived, all present had taken their places in what appeared to be total disorder, and at once cries broke out, the din became deafening, and the market in metaphysical ideas was open.

It was an astounding sight. Each of the standing monks, with his rosary wound round his left arm, was questioning his *vis-à-vis* seated at his feet. Jumping up and down, letting out piercing cries and clapping his hands at every question asked, each interrogator tried his hardest to put off his adversary and make him lose his ability to concentrate in this fairground-cum-battleground atmosphere where there were plenty of other distractions besides. These competitive tournaments or jousts (one almost said these matches) are survivals of the heroic age in which

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Buddhists, trained in Indian tantrism, were under the necessity of confronting on Tibetan soil the upholders of the old indigeneous black *Bön-po* cult, of Chinese Buddhism and even of Islam or Nestorian or Chaldean Christianity. These debates were battles then, sometimes combats in the use of miraculous powers. Nowadays, these arguments, dealing with the One and the many, noumenon and phenomenon, time and eternity, impermanence, insubstantiality, and perpetual change, represent a pedagogic method in which the answers more often take the form of quotations than of original formulations. But it is difficult to imagine training-college students disputing about Hegel's dialectic while bawling in this way, or Trappist monks questioning one another about dogma or theological definitions while leaping about in their seats and noisily clapping their hands.

The other schools, on the contrary, are much less given to book-learning. Some outstanding yogis, the famous Gyalwa Karmapa among them, to whom I put certain questions on fundamental but theoretical points, simply said, 'I do not know anything about that'; or, 'That does not interest me'; or even, 'That is interesting. Sonam, see if you can look up the appropriate reference, and tell me what the answer is.' These were, to be precise, dialectical questions about doctrine; it was much as if I had asked a Catholic monk about the Trinity. On the other hand, practical work, exercises, immediate experience, are much more widely developed, and are attacked much earlier among these Red Hat sects.

What does this amount to for us who are visitors? Deeply serious conversations on metaphysical and philosophical subjects are more easily had with the *Geluk-pa* lamas than with the Red Hats. But it is almost impossible for them to teach anything concrete, anything actually lived, to people like ourselves, who have not undergone the necessary twenty or thirty years preparation. Yet representatives of the Red Hat sects, in spite of their distaste for vulgarisation, amateurism and syncretism, cannot resist, moved as they are by compassion, giving to those who come to them with a real thirst the living water which would quench it. This is what the *Nyingma-pa* Dudjom Rimpoche, Khentse Rimpoche, Kangyur Rimpoche, No No Rimpoche and Chatral Rimpoche, and the *Kargyud-pa* Abo Rimpoche, Lopon Sonam Zangpo Rimpoche, Khempo Kaloo Rimpoche, Dhukpa Thuksay Rimpoche and Gyalwa Karmapa did for me.

But all Tibetan lamas are agreed in repudiating the term 'lamaism' if it is taken to mean 'an original religion, fusion of the old *Bön-po* cult and

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a tantric Buddhism already degenerate and questionable'. That reputation is derived not only from works by foreign experts, notably Christian ones, but also from Buddhists, as much Western as Asiatic, trained in the Hinayana Buddhism of Ceylon or Burma, whose disciplines closed rather than opened their minds to an understanding of the baffling Tibetan Buddhism.

What has not been said, written and otherwise set forth about this 'lamaism'! One thing strikes me very clearly now that I have returned to Europe. I have looked through many books published on the subject in both French and English, and when I see their illustrations I wonder where on earth these photographs can have been taken, these pictures of bizarre, brutish, unhealthy and hallucinated faces which are offered to us as those of yogis or 'tantric lamas'. Such things have very little to do with the surroundings in which I have twice passed several months. Not one face among them resembles those of the twenty-six or twenty-seven well known gurus of every sect to whom Sonam introduced me, whose faces were so noble, majestic, serene and kindly. Those photographs remind me, though distantly, of the non-Buddhist sorcerers whom I met.

The Tibetans' claim to be orthodox Buddhists rests upon the fact that one can find among them everything which has come out of Buddhism since it began.

There are monks who follow all the ethical rules of the *vinaya sutras*, which is to say the disciplines of the religious of the south, of Ceylon. One can climb a mountain by the path which winds upwards through fields, or one can climb straight up its steepest face. The slow and gradual way is less dangerous than the quick but precipitous one. Even among the *Nyingma-pa*, who throughout history have numbered the highest count of hermits exempt from all rules, one also meets celibate monks faithful to the strict asceticisms which are more generally associated with the Yellow Hats; and these strict monks, even where they are Red Hats, devote themselves, besides taking their part in the offices and the choir, to metaphysical studies. All, whatever their sect, are familiar with the ceremony of collective confession for breaches of the rule of their order. Among the remains of the Red Hat monasteries, often living in derelict bungalows unwanted by anyone else, the abbots struggle to keep alive and to instruct a handful of poverty-stricken monks, adults and children. The Red Hats do not disregard completely the book-learning aspect of knowledge; in the course of the centuries

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they have translated almost as many texts and written as many, if not more, commentaries as the *Geluk-pa*. Among the *Kargyud-pa* the magnificent poems of the great yogi Milarepa are never read or heard without a profound emotional response.

In this observance of the monastic disciplines and in this theoretical study of wisdom there is nothing very secret or very dangerous. But the steep way up the mountain, beset with dangers, is to be found mostly among the Red Hat sects. It is the most inclusive and the quickest way, confusing to the habits of mind of the West because on it one finds men who are indisputably mystics, wearing the monastic habit, yet fully experienced in ordinary human life; married, fathers of families, they are prepared to drink alcohol and to do many other things which appear to be incompatible with the monkish or saintly life. But there is in fact a heroic, playful, adventurous side to the Tibetan religious which surprises all who observe it. They do nothing by halves and take whatever risks there may be. That urge to break records which drives Europeans to perish from the cold on Alpine heights, or kill themselves on the race-track at Le Mans, or die of a coronary thrombosis in the effort to double their company's capital, all of them gloriously yielding up their lives in mid-career without giving themselves time to live, is channelled by the Tibetans towards the only aim which is real, that of self-knowledge and the conquest of death.

Everything which goes to make up *Hinayana* is to be found in Tibetan Buddhism; but one finds also everything that properly belongs to the Mahayana and also the special teaching of the tantras or tantrism. I remember a long conversation I had with Dudjom Rimpoche in his house at Kalimpong. Dudjom Rimpoche seems to be recognised by all the *Nyingma-pa* as the greatest of their gurus. As a *tulku* he was already a teacher at the age of eight. Every time I saw him he gave me the same impression of living on two levels at once: in *samadhi* (the immediate consciousness of Reality, beyond time and space, which seems to be a complete contradiction of all our ordinary experience), and at the same time in our everyday world. His looks, different from those of other men, are their own evidence of his enlightenment.

I said: 'Directly one enters upon the search for Truth and Liberation—and I am sure it must be the same for Christian mystics, as it is for the Hindus among whom I have lived—directly one discovers that another life, another state of being, is possible, and begins to move towards it, one sees that one is not free, that there are obstacles in one's way;

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obstacles which one feels to be in opposition to one's aim. I speak so because I have experienced these obstacles. Anyone who tries to meditate comes up against the incessant flow, so hard to control, of associated thoughts and images. Anyone who seeks unity within himself will immediately be confronted by the forces of dispersal and inner contradictions. Anyone who wants to move not only towards unity in himself, but towards total unity, union with everything which exists, meets within himself the forces of distinction, of the separation of this from that, which bind him to his *atma* (his ego), to his individuality, and prevent his access to the Universal, to Totality. I am thinking of the desire for wealth or for power, for sex, for all the many kinds of attachment, for all the things which limit and condition a man.'

Drawing an analogy which I was often to meet again later, Dudjom Rimpoche answered: 'All these obstacles—call them sins if you like—can be thought of in three ways. Think of them, for example, as a poisonous plant. There are three possible attitudes to adopt before a poisonous plant.

'First of all, fear and caution. That is a poison: I shall not touch it, I shall not even look at it; I shall turn away from it. This,' Dudjom Rimpoche went on, 'is the attitude of Hinayana, with its rules and its monastic disciplines: chattering is a stone of stumbling, so I keep silence; money is a stone of stumbling, so I say no to it, I refuse to touch it; sex is a stone of stumbling, so I have nothing to do with women, I do not even look at them. (A stone of stumbling, exactly speaking, is an occasion for desire, therefore for attachment, and so, inversely, for fear and pain.)

'The second attitude,' Dudjom Rimpoche said, 'is that of Mahayana, of the *madhyamika* teaching of Nagarjuna: I can approach this poisonous plant, and even eat the fruit of it, because I know the antidote. The antidote is experience of unreality, of the Void. The Mahayanist knows how to wipe out *karma* (and *karma* is the dead weight of our actions, the law of cause and effect as it applies to inward growth), how to make it disappear by one's experience of the non-reality, the insubstantiality of everything; for this can dissolve everything "like snowflakes falling into boiling water". Whatever comes, nothing comes. Whatever happens, nothing happens.

'And then', Dudjom Rimpoche told me, 'there is a third attitude, that of Tantrayana, founded on the total absence of fear, which consists in deliberately eating the fruit of the poisonous plant, because one knows how to digest it without its doing the slightest harm, because one knows

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how to transform it, assimilate it, eliminate it. Where the Way is concerned, it is this idea of transformation which is fundamental.'

This comparison with nourishment, the digestion of food, made me think of the Sanscrit aphorism, one as important as, though much less well known than, *sarvam Brahman*, 'Everything is Brahman': 'Everything is food', *sarvam annam*. Everything can nourish us, not only vegetables and fruit, but every feeling, every experience, every sense-impression, Everything is food, so nothing is poison; what matters is the way in which one takes it; and the *sadhaka*, the seeker of Truth, should fear nothing, should deny nothing, refuse nothing, but on the contrary should accept everything fearlessly, and exercise his skill upon it to the limits of his need. But beyond those limits mere enjoyment begins, that pleasure which is unworthy of man, and is the key which locks the door of his prison.

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I had many other conversations about this matter of transformation, and I shall have occasion to return to it at length. For the moment I want to be rather more precise about what are Hinayana, Mahayana and Tantrayana.

Hinayana is Buddhism in its common form. While Hinayanists refuse to accept things which are peculiar to Mahayana, Mahayanists recognise as valid and orthodox almost all the Hinayanist tenets, to which they have added important metaphysical and even theological developments.

I shall begin by opening my mouth extremely wide and shocking all Hinayanists by saying that there is no real difference between Buddhism and Vedanta, which is to say Hinduism, and that all the complicated squabbles which have been going on for two thousand years are no more than misunderstandings about the meanings of words. There is only one Truth. The Indian *rishis* understood this, and expressed it in the Upanishads. Gautama understood it, and expressed it in his own words, deliberately chosen to run counter to the brahminic terminology, which had ceased to be a means to self-liberation, and had become on the contrary occasion for dependent attachment to notional and theoretic concepts.

The simplest definition of Buddhism is that *it is an answer to a question, the solution of a problem: How does man cease to suffer?* Everyone who does not tell himself lies knows that he has only one aim in life, which is to be happy, whether that end is pursued by egoistic or by

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altruistic means. I do not wish, or I no longer wish, to suffer. I have the feeling that I could be happy; within myself is an aspiration towards happiness; yet it is thwarted at every turn. None of my moments of great happiness lasts. And even if I could by some unbelievable reorganisation of my circumstances have everything I desire, avoid everything that I do not desire, and be completely happy, then the sight of the suffering all around me would once more ruin that happiness.

The young Prince Gautama had everything to make him happy, a father who dearly loved him, a beautiful wife, a son whom he dearly loved in turn, and he lived surrounded with pleasures, both within the palace and in the royal gardens without. The King, his Father, had ordered that he should have only the beautiful and the young in his retinue. If a flower began to fade, servants removed it during the night. For the prince there was nothing but the joy of living, yesterday, today, tomorrow. But on three occasions Gautama demanded to be allowed to see what was beyond the walls of the royal park; and on those three occasions he saw the world as it is, subject to old age, sickness and death. So youth, he saw, lasts only for a time, health does not last for ever, and man's life is not eternal. A happiness whose other face is that of suffering could satisfy Gautama no longer. He gave up everything; the throne, his wife, his child, and began the search for an eternal bliss, absolute, with no other and negative face, transcending both happiness and unhappiness, both good and evil, both life and death. And the secret of this Buddha discovered and taught: if man suffers, that is because he wishes to suffer; if he wishes to suffer no longer, he can cease to suffer.

Everyone is responsible for his own suffering. It is his own fault if he is unhappy, since his true condition, the condition natural to him, is Peace. He suffers because he lacks what he wants, what he desires; he suffers because life presents him with what he does not want, what he rejects and fears. Yet in what does his responsibility lie? *In that he identifies himself with something* (his ego, *atma*, *ahamkara*) *which is not his real self, and which concentrates and sustains his suffering.* Each one of us takes himself to be a creature whom certain eventualities can overtake, lessen, frustrate, mutilate, and whom certain other eventualities can increase, enrich, satisfy, cause to flower. Self-knowledge is knowledge of the real nature of man, something quite other than this concentration-point of fear and desire, attraction and repulsion, 'I like' and 'I dislike', which is therefore a concentration-point of suffering. The Buddhist, who has recognised the fact that he is not this, has awakened from the nightmare of egotism. He has been cured of a mental illness which consists not in the delusion

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that he is Napoleon, but the delusion that he is the individual whose name and date of birth are to be found in his birth certificate.

*Sarvam dukham, sarvam anityam, sarvam anatma*; or, in Pali, *dukkha, anicca, anatta*: All things are suffering, all things are fugitive, all things are without substance (there are no entities); and again, *sarvam shunyam*: all things are empty.

Very well; but what does this mean?

It is not a matter of believing it and repeating one's belief as dogma or articles of faith, but of verifying it and reaching a certainty of one's own. Gautama always refused to give specific explanations where matters of theology or metaphysics were concerned: 'Such answers serve no purpose. If you believe something because I tell you it is so, what is the use of that?' He always brought the questioners back to their own experience, to attention, self-watchfulness, humility, effort, intentional suffering, to what he called the Way. This description of the truth in terms of psychology has a scientific and non-religious aspect which has appealed to many contemporary Westerners. Buddhism was suddenly discovered in the nineteenth century by atheist and materialist Europe, and some people were astonished to find it 'a religion which makes no demand for blind faith, a religion which is against obscurantism and on the side of reason', while it was also said to be 'a much more satisfying religion than Christianity'; all this rather as if the purpose of a religion were to minister to our individual preferences, to flatter and please us.

But Buddhism is not psycho-therapy, neither is it profane humanism having no concern with 'the super-natural'. When one lives among Buddhist monks, one is at once aware, and all the time aware, that Buddhism has a further dimension which goes beyond psychology in every direction. But what is sacred in it is the fruit of knowledge, not of belief.

For the Buddhist it is ignorance which is sin. What kind of ignorance? Man's ignorance of his own real nature, and of the real nature of the universe which lies behind those appearances revealed to us by our five senses and which are conditioned by the categories in which we think (time and space). What contemporary science has to say about the constitution of matter, about similarities of the molecules and atoms which make up the most dissimilar phenomena, about the transformation of atoms into energy, confirms in its way what the Buddha says about experience: that all is impermanence, that everything changes, that everything transforms itself ceaselessly, and that nothing exists in its own right, any more than does the author of this book, his friend



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Sonam Kazi or the fourteenth Dalai Lama. The apparent identity of each one of us is conceived of as a superficial, and therefore a false, view of things. It is perfectly possible to know by experiment, *for certain and beyond all doubt*, that one is not what one is so sure that one is. But each of us is free to chose blindness, untruth, illusion and ignorance; to say nothing of suffering.

For the Tibetan the world is *samsara*, usually defined as 'the grievous chain of rebirth', or 'the cycle of deaths and births'. But that is only one aspect of *samsara*, and the word's primary meaning is 'everlasting becoming'. This corresponds for the Buddhist to the Judeo-Christian Creation and Fall of Man, and to the Hindu Manifestation, at once *maya*, or appearance mistaken for what it is not, and *lila*, the game played by God, taken for what it is. Thus *samsara* is all that is impermanent, unstable, changeful, in which nothing is a self-existent entity. Meanwhile 'reincarnation' is a fundamental aspect of this everlasting becoming of all existent things.

All Buddhists are quite definite about this: there is no such thing as an entity, an immutable essential being, an ego, an individual soul, in this life of ours; and neither therefore is there anything which can 'pass from one life to another'. But this statement of the Buddha's has been variously interpreted in the course of history, and some interpretations appear to contradict it openly, in that they recognise the persistence of a consciousness, and all Mahayanists claim that Gautama himself was able to remember his previous lives perfectly, and that other sages have come to be able to do likewise. But again, if under the direction of a guru one makes one's own experiments in this field, in this case the field of self-knowledge, these contradictions emerge simply as different, but not irreconcilable, points of view.

The illusory nature of the ego becomes apparent if one examines it with sufficiently sharp and patient discrimination (and it is *buddhi* that I am translating here by this word). At every moment there is a change; that is, the death of what was and the birth of what now comes to be. A contemporary scientist would not gainsay the Buddha. Everything changes ceaselessly, everything ceaselessly dies, everything ceaselessly comes to birth. Whatever has a beginning must have an end. The poet's rose dies, the biologist's cell dies, and the physicist's atom dies. The baby I used to be is no more, and I who am at this moment writing these words shall disappear, giving place to an old man. (Since I never drive a car at the weekend, the chances are that I shall survive that long.) Even

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at this moment, even as I write it down, I am disappearing and reappearing again. Everything in us changes, everything is replaced by something else. Women obsessed by the aging of their skins, that were once unwrinkled, certainly have some idea of what I mean. The life of a man, his body, his thoughts, his feelings, is an endless game of birth, death, birth, death, whether measured on the scale of its phases (childhood, puberty, adolescence, youth, maturity, old age), on the scale of a single one of its days, or on the scale of the smallest possible duration of time. The study of one's self shows that, like everything else in the world, that self is nothing but change, and therefore that it is of little use to look for that independent self (the *atma* in Buddhist, if not in Hindu, parlance), since it is nowhere to be found, no more in the psychic than in the physical, no more in the moment of conception than in the hour of birth or that of death. All that we called 'life' was only birth, death, birth, death.

Yet this ceaseless becoming which is a human life, and this impossibility of finding an immutable self do not preclude the impression of a continuity which, say the Tibetans, does not in fact exist. A cinema-film is projected discontinuously, one picture after another and twenty-four pictures a second, with a break between each picture, and it is the optical illusion, the persistence of the retinal image, which makes us see it as a continuity. In much the same way, according to Tibetan Buddhists, that relative reality which we ordinarily call reality is discontinuous too, like a series of discharges within a void. A similar illusion makes us attribute continuity to it. And just as there is between two pictures thrown on a cinema-screen an instant of darkness which can produce a flicker if the projector is not working properly, so there are in our lives moments of interruption which we do not recognise, and allow to escape our notice. This is what is indicated by the word *bardo*. The *Bardo-thodol*, the famous Tibetan 'Book of the Dead', is as much about the living as it is about the dead. The word *bardo* does not only signify the intermediate state between death and the next rebirth, as is generally understood; the translation of it which was always made plain to me is 'in between' any and all intermediate states. There is a *bardo* every moment.

Further, this unintermitted and unresting changefulness does not happen arbitrarily and in a disorderly fashion; everything which appears only to disappear again does so because something else which has died makes room for it. While there are in truth neither persistence nor continuity, there are, on the other hand, succession and causality. It is this orderliness inherent in *samsara* which is called *karma*.

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The death of the physical body brings forth a birth, and cannot do otherwise; it brings forth something which is an effect consequent upon a cause. Neither can this birth, the beginning of an individual life (whether one identifies it with the fertilisation of the ovum or with the embryo's growth into the foetus), be anything but *the other side of a death*, a disappearance with which that birth is in causal relationship, and therefore part of *karma*. 'Matter cannot be created and cannot be destroyed', I was taught at school; and the Buddha adds that this is true *on every level*, biological, psychic, emotional, mental, spiritual, any you like to name; and everything is always 'the result of'. That is 'reincarnation'.

Tracing back the chain of effects and causes may not only be a matter of finding again in oneself, on a psychoanalyst's couch, those traumatic experiences of early childhood which have been buried, under the ban of the censor, in the subconscious; it may also be a matter of finding again in oneself in the hermitage of a Himalayan guru the impress of moments long predating the birth of this immediate body. This *samsara* exists only in Time because, if there were no change of any kind, however small, Time would stop (as Goethe makes Faust ask that it should), and do so in Space, taking the form not only of duality (I and not-I), but also of the multiple proliferation of innumerable elements, all of them different, which go to make up the vastness of the universe. This is imperatively ordained (it is 'fate') by the causality, the determinism, of *karma*. To put it in Gospel language, man reaps what he has sown.

In Time, Space and Causality, which are where life as we know it has its place, there is reincarnation or transmigration. But in reality they do not exist, since, like *samsara* as a whole, they are illusion; for time and space are only ways in which we think, and have no objective, essential and intrinsic reality. For millions of Hindu or Tibetan ascetics and yogis this has been, and still is, something vouched for by experience, not merely a dogma or a theory.

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'Aha!', says the Christian, 'I see what you are doing: you are denying the Creation.' This idea of creation is the great barrier between the Buddhist and the Christian. 'This', the Christian goes on, 'is the point beyond which we absolutely cannot follow you.' But what if we were to try to go a step or two beyond mere words, the familiar expressions and phrases to which handbooks accustom us? When one listens to Buddhists

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speaking of the supposed Hindu conception of the reality of the separate individual *atma*, which the Upanishads directly contradict, one wonders whether one is not dreaming. And it has been going on for two and a half thousand years! Must we all, monotheistic Jews, Christians and Muslims, and Hindus and Buddhists too, believe that each of us is the only sect which has lived for two or three thousand years according to the truth, and that the other sects have all lived according to empty formulas which mean nothing, and which no one can understand? Must the coming together of religions, and the dialogues between them, consist only in setting over against the translation into modern French of a Greek word used two thousand years ago, the translation of a Sanscrit word likewise used two thousand years ago, and so of concluding: We do not agree?

What, for the best of those who have founded their lives upon them, is the real meaning of those Buddhist or Hindu statements which seem so bewildering, arbitrary and unacceptable? For such men are neither imbeciles nor fools. If wise and eminent Asians have lived by that religion for thousands of years, then it must be the case that there is something underlying their beliefs which, *a priori*, Christians and humanists do not share in, and above all do not understand.

What then is there that is true, and truly living, behind the words and formulas? Buddhists 'deny the Creation'. What does this mean? *And is whatever it does mean true or untrue?* Science denies the Creation too; while no Tibetan denies that fire heats and water boils. Buddhists have studied the Creation, or *samsara*, for two thousand years, to the end of freeing themselves from it, while taking note of its laws, indeed while making use of those laws. And when Catholic scholastic theology makes a distinction between Being-in-itself and being-by-another, saying that Being-in-itself is an attribute of God alone, and that the Creation has no Being-in-itself, but only being-by-another, is that not a way of denying it an independent reality? Two thousand years ago Gautama said that men wrongly attribute to themselves Being-in-itself. Anything that changes is not the self. We cannot find an entity, a being, in ourselves; only successive moments of consciousness. The false impression which we have of a continuity of consciousness is called *vijnana*. But if we go to the root of things, below changefulness, what we find is an impersonal absolute, empty, without limitation, universal, omnipresent, and above all neither to be defined nor described. The Buddha himself said precisely: *'There is, O monks, a not-born, a not-become, not-made, not-compounded. If, O monks, there were not this not-born, not-become, not-*

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*made, not-compounded, there would not here be an escape from the born, the become, made, compounded.'*

And *nirvana*, what is that?

It is a Sanscrit word, translated *nibbana* in Pali, the language of Hinayana, and in English as 'extinction' or 'annihilation'. Wherefore Buddhism (as we are so often told in the West) is essentially anti-Christian and anti-humanist, a despairing nihilism: 'Life is suffering, therefore to end suffering life must be ended; therefore one must die, commit suicide. Yet even that will not put things to rights, for there is this accursed reincarnation, and I shall have to start suffering all over again. Fortunately, there is the Buddha, with his *nirvana*; death with no possibility of rebirth, complete naught at last. What a relief! Buddha, for this relief much thanks.'

So it is that the ideal of millions of people for two thousand five hundred years comes to be thought of as a hopeless search for total extinction, while Christ on the other hand promised us eternal life. I have read and heard this sort of thing a hundred times. I remember how astonished I was, how dismayed and full of innocent pity on behalf of these wretched Asiatic millions, when in my adolescent years I read, and believed, this sublimely unshakable description of their religion. I was quite upset to think that such a rejection of life and such a desire for total self-destruction could inspire so many millions of people like myself. I could not pass an Asiatic in the street without having the painful impression that I was face to face with an incomprehensible kind of man, a man without hope.

But on the contrary, *nirvana* is eternal life because it is the extinction of the illusion of birth and death. Everything changes ceaselessly. Everything is born and everything dies ceaselessly. Whatever has a beginning must have an end. Whatever comes to birth comes to death; and whatever comes to death comes to birth. There are births and there are deaths; billions of millions and millions of billions of births which are deaths and deaths which are births. Yet in truth and in reality there is neither birth nor death. What is, is, timelessly. It is. I am. The extinction, the annihilation which is *nirvana*, is the extinction of that illusion, cause and maintenance of suffering of every kind, that illusion which brings it about that we take ourselves for individual beings, separate, stable, permanent, and that we rigidify and limit ourselves. We have this rigid conception of ourselves, but time passes, and whether we like it or not, we change, we grow old and perish. We have this limited conception of ourselves, and space shows us the measure of our insigni-

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ficant smallness, who are one among three billion other living humans. But neither space nor time can bind a Buddha, a *jivan mukta*. Outside time there is neither birth nor death; outside space there is no separateness. When the morning succeeded the night of Buddh' Gaya, all that Gautama said was, 'Now, I am awake'.

And in the deer park at Benares, he declared: 'I have gained knowledge of the Middle Path which leads to insight, to Wisdom, which conduces to calm, to Knowledge, to supreme Enlightenment, to *Nirvana*. What now, O monks, is the first noble truth? Suffering is everywhere. What, O monks, is the second noble Truth? There is a cause of suffering. It is craving (that is, the illusion of individual selfhood). What, O monks, is the third noble Truth? There is a way to the cessation of suffering by liberation from craving (that is, the illusion of individual selfhood). What, O monks, is the fourth noble Truth? It is the eightfold path, eight activities which are free from desire, from "I want", "I like", free from fear, "I do not want", "I do not like". That eightfold path consists in: right views (attitudes of mind and feeling), right intent, right speech, right conduct, right means of livelihood, right endeavour, right mindfulness, right meditation.'

Then the Buddha drew the Wheel of Life, whose centre is Eternal Life, and whose four quarters are the phases of ceaseless change according to the laws of cause and effect, of dependence upon *karma*.

He had set forth the Way. Now it was for men to follow it. Gautama, who was born a king's son and brought up to ascend a throne, organised instead a kingdom of monks, the *sangha* whom he enjoined to follow the rules he laid down. But the Buddha has also been called the Great Physician, and Tibetans sometimes represent him as holding in his hands a phial of medicines. The *sangha* is the hospital where one is cured of the disease of having an ego; and the teaching of the Buddha is like the regimen prescribed by a doctor.

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In Europe *Mahayana* is known chiefly on account of the famous Japanese *Zen*; *Zen*'s Indian origins are however not in doubt.

While the chief ideas of *Hinayana* are few and simple, those of *Mahayana* are many and complex. Metaphysics burst forth from Buddhism with a richness of expression which I shall not try to describe here. The *dhyambuddhas* appear with their three levels of reality, *dharmakaya*

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on the level of Origins; *sambhoghakaya* on the level of Principles; *nirmanakaya* on the level of Manifestation; and the idea of an *Adibuddha*, an Absolute of which the *dhyānibuddhas* are a kind of splitting up, like that of light when it is refracted through a prism. Philosophy is of primary importance for two principal schools, that of the *yogacara* of Asanga and Vasubandhu, and that of the *madhyamika* of Nagarjuna.

I shall stick to essentials and deal only with the basic text which is the inspiration of all Tibetan spirituality: The *Prajnaparamita*\* which is taken to be the actual words spoken by the Buddha on the Vulture Peak at Rajgir, and intended to have been kept hidden (by the *nagas*, water goddesses, legend says), until they could be passed on to Nagarjuna, who gave them to the world. *Prajna* means Knowledge or Wisdom or Unlimited Consciousness, and *paramita* has the sense of perfect or extreme and, at the same time, the Tibetans say, of 'going beyond'; beyond the six perfections of charity, morality, gentleness, energy, meditation and *prajna*, or wisdom itself, since these six perfections still arise from intentional action, and therefore from duality. So long as there is someone who has some action to perform, ignorance must persist. The Mahayanist sage has finished, accomplished, perfected his work; he has done what he had to do, given what he had to give, and so has 'gone beyond', to a level of absolute Truth, on which no duality could exist, a level which is wholly inexpressible and indescribable, because it cannot be conceived of in terms of opinions and ideas, a level towards which the disciple can be led only by paradoxes, illogicalities, contradictions, even by what appears to be completely nonsensical. That Truth is 'the Void'.

For the *Prajnaparamita* is essentially teaching about a fundamental metaphysical reality: *shunyata*, or in Tibetan *tong-pa-gnid*, the Void, mere theory to students of Indian and Tibetan culture, but real experience to Tibetan ascetics and yogis.

If the Hinayanists already accepted more or less the idea of *shunya* (Void) as a negative quality, the Mahayanists emphasised that of *shunyata* (emptiness, the condition of being void) as an Absolute, wholly unconditioned, to which none of our Ways of thinking can be applied.

Void of what, then? Void of everything which limits, everything which separates, everything which conditions, everything which determines. Void means devoid of, emptied of. *Shunyata* is sometimes translated as nothingness, no-thing-ness, having no thing, no form, no

\* So written, but pronounced *Pragniaparamita*.

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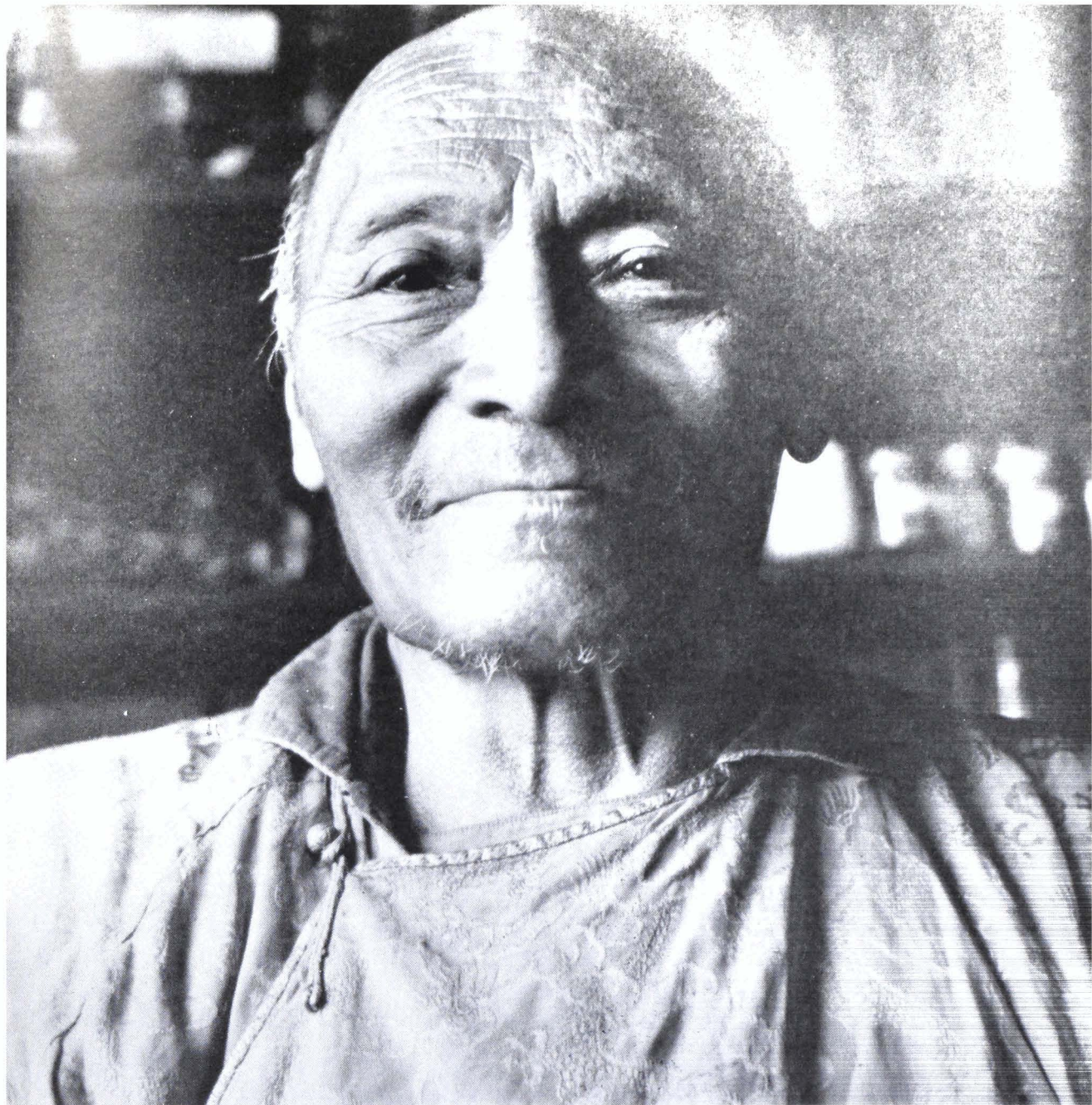
name, no element of multiplicity. The way which leads to it is that of the elimination of all those ideas, opinions, concepts and so forth which are characteristic productions of our mental processes.

To talk about *shunyata* with a Tibetan sage is the same as to talk about *Brahman* with a Hindu sage. This Void is not naught, it is Fullness, even beyond being, in so far as being can be defined as the contrary of a possible non-being. *Shunyata* is what does not change, in which difference no longer exists; it is the blank screen on which a cinema-film is projected. This comparison is exact, for Tibetans speak of *bardo*, the 'in-between', which is there at every moment of this life. For Tibetan masters experience of the 'Clear Light' described in the *Bardo-tho-dol* as intervening immediately after death, can be, and indeed should be, experienced during life. Indeed it is possible for us to experience it all the time, because the 'in-between' is always there; between two breaths, between two thoughts, between two sense-impressions, we all have the possibility of perceiving that which does not change, and of prolonging, little by little, the duration of those intervals.

In this connection a *Nyingma-pa* gave me an exercise which is very much to the point. It requires very concentrated attention, but one of the effects of working under a master is precisely that it allows a concentration, and also a gathering up of energies, almost impossible to achieve in ordinary circumstances. This *Nyingma-pa* said to me, 'Now look: visualise a square.' Doing exercises at this level, one is still on the plane of effort, effort which disappears altogether on higher levels of meditation. Using all the attention and image-making that I could muster, I inwardly saw a square. 'Now visualise a circle.' I did so. 'See a square; see a circle; a square again; again a circle.' Then suddenly, as if issuing an order that there could be no question of disobeying, he shot at me: 'Visualise a square which is at the same time a circle.' Now it is well known that it is impossible to do this; but the effort I put into this hopeless attempt produced a moment of seeing which was devoid of concepts or images, such as it is afterwards possible to find again in normal, not deliberately induced, conditions.

If Mahayana is the doctrine of *shunyata*, it is also, to mention only what strikes one at first, that ideal of the *Boddhisattva* with which the Tibetan soul is so deeply impregnated. Lamas do not only seek their own deliverance, but that of all men—of course including the Chinese. The Buddhist Mahayanist who enters upon 'the way of the *Boddhisattva*' begins his religious life with this vow: 'I take upon myself the burden of the whole world's suffering; it is my intention to bear it. I shall not turn





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away from it; I shall neither flee from it nor tremble before it; I am not afraid, I shall not fail under it, and I do not hesitate. Why? Because my vow is to free all creatures. I work for the establishment for all men of the incomparable Kingdom of True Knowledge. I am not concerned only with my own salvation.'

The theory, as it is so often set forth by the Tibetans, is that the Bodhisattva, having attained Enlightenment and Liberation, 'renounces' them again, in order to live among men and help them. Though this idea is celebrated, and wide-spread, it means nothing when it is stated in this way. No one who is awakened can renounce wakefulness; no one who has attained Knowledge can renounce what he knows; and he who has seen cannot not have seen. But the sage who is liberated from suffering and who is no longer deceived by appearances can, whilst utterly free, continue to act, completely impersonally and objectively, in order to help those who still remain in darkness, in unreality and lies. And he can continue to be born on earth in the body of a man or a woman, instead of dwelling in the unmanifest.

The Tibetan world is deeply imbued with this idea of service and of love for one's neighbour (*karuna*). I know that certain journalists have reported belligerent statements supposed to have been made by Tibetans, but for my own part I can affirm that I have never once, during those seven months passed among them, heard a lama speak of the Chinese with hatred or contempt. I will go further and say that the Tibetan refugees, whether poor people or monks, do not even feel called upon to 'forgive' the Chinese, since they are not aware of any offence requiring it. What then is the nature of the drama which they are playing out? It is impermanence, *karma*, the effects of causes. For them any place, whether here or there, is simply a place to be, whether a tent, a hut, or a tumble-down hovel. An American journalist interviewing the Dalai Lama asked him point-blank, 'What is your opinion of Mao Tse Tung?' which was tantamount to asking a Jew in 1942 his opinion of Hitler. The Dalai Lama simply said, 'He too will reach the state of Buddhahood one day.'

This aspect of the Tibetan tradition, that of compassion and love, is often neglected in the books which are written about lamaism. I understand well enough that observers have had their curiosity whetted regarding esoteric and occult ideas, magical powers and mysterious happenings, and that this has been to the detriment of their interest in simple goodness. But while sharing the life of Tibetans, working with them, asking for their help, I have marvelled at their disinterestedness

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and love for their neighbours, the active expression of their idea of universal love.

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Lastly, Tibetan Buddhism includes a third Vehicle—Tantrayana or Tantrism. Tantrism can also be found in Hinduism, but in Buddhism—apart from several centres in Japan—in China also in times gone by—Tibetans have made it particularly their own. For this Tantrayana has been preserved in Tibet in all its purity.

When I asked the Dalai Lama if he could suggest a title for the film I had made—for which he assumed responsibility and on which gurus from all the various sects collaborated—he replied, in English: ‘*Tibetan Tradition and Tantric Buddhism*’. And yet in books or chapters of books on Tibet, one finds only the most passing references to the matter, and somewhat as follows: ‘There are also certain distorted forms of Buddhism known as Tantrism (or even “certain disgusting forms”), which have no connection with the original teaching.’ Even in Alexandra David-Neel’s book, *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*—surprising as it may seem—there is a small footnote on page 17 of the 1965 American edition, which reads: ‘Padmasambhava belonged to the degenerate sect of tantric Buddhism. Yet, nothing proves he was naturally intemperate, as some of his followers wish to make us believe, to justify their drunkenness.’\*

So it would seem that even Madame David-Neel, who lived and studied in Tibet for many years, and who knew many gurus, did not attach much importance to Tantrayana. And yet she is one of the authors writing of Tibet whose books are considered by English speaking lamas as representative and in which they can recognise their own country.

Tantrism is the teaching contained in books called *tantras*. When a senior lama reads a *tantra* to young monks, the nature of the text is explained by the ritual objects placed in front of the reader. These *tantras* are esoteric books which are quite incomprehensible without explanations and commentaries. They comprise both metaphysical or theological treatises and manuals of ascetic practices. It is only after initiation into a particular *tantra*, and having heard it read aloud by his guru, that a disciple is permitted to undertake its study on his own.

The very word *tantra* conveys the idea that everything is held in Manifestation, that everything is interconnected, that everything reacts on everything else, that everything is woven together like the warp and

\* *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* by Alexandra David-Neel (Souvenir Press Ltd)

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woof of a tissue. Consequently, action on any one point or level produces innumerable results of which we have not the slightest idea. What is the effect, both on the subtle and gross, spiritual and material, planes produced by a sound, produced by a gesture or an image? Tantrism makes use of *mantras*, words, formulas—both Sanscrit and Tibetan—exerting a very real power, *mudras*, gestures of the hands which correspond to attitudes involving the whole being, to ‘visualisation’ or imagination (in the sense of creation of images) of symbolic forms; for example, the divinities with all their attributes or those maps of the spiritual world called *mandalas* or sometimes the iconography of syllables (in which sound and image are united). This is never treated in a static manner but is always dynamic, moving, evolving. For Tantrism is based on the notion of transformation, of change. And because of this, tantrism, so far from being a degeneration or a heterogenous offshoot, is deeply rooted in original Buddhism.

The word ‘tantric’ is constantly on the lips of Tibetans and Sikkimese; tantric meditation, tantric ritual, an old tantric lama, a nice tantric yogi, tantric *abisheka* (initiation), tantric deity, tantric this and tantric that—everything is tantric and tantrism. Tantrism is a truly protean system for its symbolism, *matras*, *mudras*, iconography of the tantric deities, *mandalas*, rituals, ‘tantric meditation’, vary according to each *tantra*, sect, school and master. The hierarchical classification which was taught me differentiates between *kryatantra*, *upayatantra* and *yogatantra*, which again is subdivided into *mahayoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga* (*zog-pa*). To the enquiring foreigner, Tibetan Tantrayana is a bewildering subject, in which details, that seem trivial to our Western eyes, appear to be as important as the philosophical thought or the most convincing knowledge of psycho-physiology.

It is quite clear. In the tantras there is something of everything and a list of what is not contained in them would be shorter than one of what is. One reads the names of divinities, what should be eaten, how to sit, the reasons for circumambulating a building in a clockwise direction, the correct wording of invocations, descriptions of lamps, cereals, flowers and models made of cake to be offered to such and such a divinity, the retention of sperm in the sexual act, the strict order in which gestures must be performed, apparently senseless ‘magic formulas’, how to wash oneself, auspicious and inauspicious times and signs. They contain whole passages which are quite meaningless without a commentary and this is always given by word of mouth. Furthermore a large part of these writings do not mean what they appear to mean and can only mislead

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those who take them literally. The incomprehensibility of the tantras at first glance is not only intended to conceal what should not be taught to the profane but also, on the contrary, to reveal truths and realities which cannot be understood by the means of ordinary thought and language and which can only be transmitted in the form of symbol and allegory.

We are confronted by a world—the lamas call it a science—as difficult to understand for us as the nuclear reactor was for the Dalai Lama. Each sentence is a matter for question and every reply raises further questions. Now the lamas are no more disposed to explain and teach tantrism to all interested comers than a hospital surgeon would be inclined to teach brain surgery to enthusiastic amateurs. And I took this example of a brain operation on purpose, because Tantrism is essentially 'operative'. It is never a case of attractive theories or interesting ideas, but always of action and intervention in the current of universal Manifestation. This intervention is the application of a science, not the same as our science, but also based on an understanding of laws. The fact that we Westerners have got flying machines off the ground, which are heavier than air, does not in any way contradict the law of gravity. Tantric operations are also based on the understanding of natural laws.

To attempt a real understanding of the Tantrayana, how it works and why, requires of us as much effort as for a Tibetan to try and understand electronics—the effort to adapt to a new discipline and way of thinking. 'My friend, you will have to work for a long time if you wish to become a doctor', the Professor will say to our enthusiastic amateur, 'first as a student at the university, then in hospitals. And above all, begin at the beginning.' The tantric guru requires just as much work from his pupils, work which is not only concerned with the accumulation of facts or knowledge but which requires a total transformation of all the aspects of one's being.

Until the present day, the Tibetans have preserved a great wealth of precise knowledge covering all forms of existence, from the level of everyday life to the summits of metaphysics and spiritual achievement. If one goes straight to the final conclusions, everything seems simple. I spoke to a Tibetan sage—I refer to a conversation I had with Khempo Kaloo,—and he replied, as a hindu guru, a *gnanin*, might: 'You live in illusion and in the appearance of things. There is a Reality. You are the Reality. But you do not know it. If you wake up to that Reality, you will know that you are nothing and, being nothing, that you are everything. That's all!'



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But when one undertakes the study of the Tantrayana, one cannot help but see that the way which leads from separateness and suffering to unity and the feeling of achievement (the only real happiness) is difficult for those who are still in the world of multiplicity.

The way is hard, the methods complicated, requiring much time to master. It is a specialist undertaking, pursued with all the attention to detail that one would find in a European laboratory or research centre. And research it is! In this connection I particularly remember one of the most original of the *Nyingma-pa* masters, Sherpa Tensing's guru, Chatral Rimpoche. He lives in a tiny *gompa* above Ghoom, a part of the Himalayas where cold, mist and bad weather persist throughout the winter, and I have already reported his tolerant pronouncements on the relation of Buddhism to other traditions. Chatral Rimpoche is deeply respected and revered. In fact the first person from whom I heard about him was a *Geluk-pa*. But he was not a *tulku*. What he found, he found with his own hands. Sonam told me about his years of wandering through Tibet, refusing all invitations to settle, all offers of help, living in extreme poverty, but always followed by two mules bearing his treasure—his books! All his life, he sought. Then he found. And he left his mules and his books. His appearance is not prepossessing. This wonderful man has neither the beauty nor the impassivity of an Asiatic sage. He even declined an invitation from the Dalai Lama in person to perform a certain ritual. But I know from personal experience the trouble and inconvenience to which he will put himself for the sake of a person who is nothing to him. I have often shared his meagre repast of *tsampa*, a kind of flour which is eaten slightly moistened with tea. When I met him he was working with several Tibetan volunteers on the construction of eight little cells, intended for eight candidates for Enlightenment. After having sought so long, the time had come for him to pass on his understanding. 'Give me eight heroic men, for three years, three months and three days, and one of them at least will attain Buddhahood.' Tibetans produce sages as we in our universities turn out doctors, engineers and scientists. The spiritual quest is organised methodically, scientifically, according to knowledge which has been well tested, and nothing is left to chance.

This work, these tantric studies lead not only to Liberation—the only true goal—but also to all kinds of possibilities or even to 'powers'. It is generally necessary to devote several years of one's life wholly and exclusively to spiritual search, in conditions which prohibit all worldly pursuits. If not years, or months or weeks, then certainly entire days and

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nights will be devoted to the practice of certain exercises, such as visualisation of tantric deities and the mandalas. But this is not the only way offered by the Tantrayana and we shall see that, up to a point, this way can be compatible with contemporary life. But most Tibetan tantric adepts are religious men, who found in the social organisation of their country the necessary conditions for a life of spiritual search, just as our chemists and physicists have the possibility to devote themselves to scientific research. And all the refugee gurus I met are aware that the situation has changed; that what was once generally possible is now only the exception, and that the Tantrayana itself must change outwardly, whilst remaining in principle the same. This time the science of transformation may itself undergo a change.

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During the past few years, the word tantrism has become known in Europe, following in the train of the word yoga and the word zen. And because a very limited meaning is attached to it, it is not properly understood. I don't think I am far wrong in saying that for most western people the term tantrism suggests the introduction of sex into the spiritual and ascetic life—a kind of mystical eroticism. 'Sexual yoga', the term *maithuna* which simply means copulation, but in Sanscrit sounds better, photographs of so-called 'sacred' erotic painting and sculpture, whether Hindu or Tibetan, these are the things which attract new subscribers to certain magazines and which greatly interest a certain number of European 'disciples'.

It is generally an excuse or a cover for all sorts of confusion, and lies, but it is also a source of error and blind alleys. Tantrism is a very different matter, even though it is true that besides the purely symbolic character of sexual language in the tantras, there is also in this immense heritage a place for the conscious use of sex for spiritual progress. Tantrism is the art of making use of everything for the ultimate aim and that aim is Freedom, Liberation, Realisation of the Absolute, Perfection, Redemption, whether you call it *shunyata*, *nirvana*, *boddhicitta*, Buddhahood or simply the Kingdom of Heaven.

'But it's there in cold print!' the man who was questioning me one evening kept repeating. Certainly it is, though one must distinguish between Hindu and Buddhist tantras. The debauchery enjoined upon devotees, which is considered to be characteristic of tantrism, is generally found in secondary tantras followed by minority sects in Bengal and



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Assam, almost in secrecy and generally disapproved of by official Hinduism. In Tibet, on the contrary, tantrism is respectable. It can be called by its name and declare itself for what it is. Whether practised as a real physical contact or symbolically in the form of the union in oneself of the male and female principles (dynamic and static), sexuality or polarity inspires and sustains all Tibetan Buddhism.

If this appears immoral, blasphemous, satanic to certain people, let us take it a little further.

Even if we confine our approach to the scandalous and uncanny aspect of tantrism, we must still take a somewhat broader view of the problem. It is not only as regards sex that the tantras question the ethics and rules of conduct of 'righteous' men and high-thinking persons. Amoral, that is to say non-compliance with the values of conventional morality (and not immorality), is set up as an ascetic practice, as also the violation (always ritual and strictly controlled) of the most revered conventions, religious prescriptions and of all tabus. Nevertheless, tantrism is a way of the spirit and makes severe demands on its followers.

No one will deny that it is a dangerous way. And anyone who resorted to tantric practices, who was not first and foremost an ardent spiritual seeker after truth and perfection, would simply be a debauchee and not a disciple, a *sadhaka*. But for the man who would escape from the narrow limitations of his ego and the triviality of his habitual world, his pretensions, false certainties, inhibitions and pharisaism, tantrism is a true and stimulating discipline.

Tantrism tries to free the disciple from subjection to the notion of good and evil which colours and distorts his entire approach to reality—both of himself and others. What the psychoanalysts call the censor prevents him from taking a calm and fearless look into his own depths, where desires of theft, incest, murder and suicide lie hidden. It was the eating of the forbidden fruit of 'the knowledge of good and evil', which exiled Adam and Eve from Paradise.

And Tantrism tries to free the *sadhaka* from the impossibility of not judging. Christ said, 'Judge not . . .'. This he said, and carried it out in all the acts of his life, substituting for judgement that love and understanding which is based on the realisation of oneness with one's neighbour. When Christ attacked the Pharisees, openly defied the law and respect for the Sabbath, ate with ladies of easy virtue, accepted an erring woman as his disciple, had dealings with publicans and 'collaborators' of the time, and allowed his feet to be annointed with precious unguent which could have been used to help the needy, this was done with a view

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to freeing people, just as in tantrism. And he died of it on the Cross. And his example has been almost entirely forgotten, Christian upbringing being based on morality rather than on conscience and love, on a hard and fast distinction between good and evil and on judgement. How can a man who does not know himself, to whom his own motives are a mystery, who is under the influence of his unconscious and of innumerable undigested ideas received from his parents and teachers—how can such a man, who is not himself, have infallible knowledge of right and wrong? By what objective criterion can he judge when he himself is all prejudice—and doesn't even know it?

To the extent that psychoanalysts and depth psychology have unveiled a certain number of lies and torn off a few masks, they have prepared the ground for a better understanding of tantrism. But tantrism does not aim simply at adapting a man to his environment and to the conditions of his life, or to return him to normal by freeing him from some complex. For tantrism the ego itself is the complex to be eradicated and the *sadhaka* is concerned only with that absolute perfection beyond which nothing further can be conceived. It would be very wrong to think that tantrism is only concerned with momentary ecstatic (or in-static) states.

The tantric disciple has understood that he is nothing but a walking lie, wholly imprisoned in his personal world of values and that, even if he still remains the slave of these value judgements, he can no longer regard them as objective and universal. 'That is done, that is not done. That is good, that is bad. This is honourable, that is shameful. This is wonderful, this is frightful. This is respectable, this is disgusting. Ah, how fine! Oh, how horrible!' These are the pillars which sustain *maya*, *samsara* and suffering. In such values, attraction and repulsion, desire and fear and self affirmation find their justification. To judging and arbitrarily qualifying everything as good or evil—which is the real sin—values confer an air of dignity, good form, morality, virtue and wisdom.

Rather than be the prisoner of his values, the tantrist prefers Truth which gives freedom, Love which unites, and the Peace which passes all understanding. And he prefers to base his behaviour with others on that truth, that love and that freedom, whence spring impartiality, understanding and effective action, thus giving true expression to the whole of his integrated and enlightened self, rather than on blind reactions determined by extraneous values.

This is why tantric *sadhana* ('path') scandalises the prudes, the faint hearted and the pharisees, in whom nevertheless an element of the

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Buddha nature exists and who also are called to lay down their burden, to be free and to love.

The tantric *sadhana* is realistic, scientific. It is practised with the outlook of a worker in a laboratory, who does not judge whether the thing he is studying is good or bad but only if it is or if it is not. The tantric *sadhaka* deals only in facts. He makes experiments. He sees, he transforms. Theory makes sense to him only in so far as it is practical and can be put to use. He accepts what he is, and what is in him—all that is in him, both the best and the worst. And since he does not judge himself, he does not judge others. He sees and accepts them such as they are, knowing that one day they too will attain to the state of Buddhahood. It is only that he is rather more eager than the others to reach this state. He wants to attain it in this very life. He is no longer content to pull off the leaves one by one, he wants to root up the tree and be done with it once and for all, for *nirvana* also means ending, ending of psychological slavery, ending of dependence on unintegrated values, ending of fear and suffering. In order to advance quickly, he will take account of all that is within him and will use obstacles as springboards to liberation. Tantrism signifies what has been called the 'steep' way. It is the way for men of courage and realists. And, just as is reported of the tantras, these courageous men face up to the fact that there is something in them which is called sex.

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I propose to deal with the question of sex in tantrism right away, so that it will not be necessary to return to it. To make everything—all that we are at this moment—serve the Goal, must, to begin with, imply the existence of a Goal—'Realisation', Perfection, Completion, Wisdom, Ego-less state, Eternal Life, Knowledge of Reality, Liberation—what you will—but a Goal. For those who have a Goal, who are personally involved in a spiritual search and who have felt the necessity of struggling desperately with certain apparently insurmountable aspects of themselves, this new vision—which makes one realise that nothing can be an obstacle and everything can be a help—constitutes a first great liberation. But it is the concern of each of us individually and of our goal. Like psychoanalysis, tantrism looks at sex squarely. When Westerners read certain tantric descriptions of sex and the sexual act, or discuss this with a lama, it is their own attitude to this fundamental problem of sex,

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made up of their fears and lies, which is touched and from which they react. And it is the desire for the other sex which replies. For Tibetans following the tantric path the situation is the reverse: every sexual impulse or manifestation immediately establishes a connection in them with the advance towards Awakening and the search for Truth. And above all, there is no question of the pleasure of being more and more attached; the aspiration is to become more and more detached. And to put the thing simply, who would not prefer, given the choice, to have his bonds loosened rather than to see them tighten and become increasingly strengthened?

I was fortunate enough to discuss these questions openly and at great depth with a *Nyingma-pa* who had personal experience of this notorious mystical eroticism. I can assure you that we were very far from a certain atmosphere of sensuality which would certainly have had nothing to do with the true spiritual life. I felt myself at the very heart of the holy. And I asked myself if this was not the meaning—almost totally lost because the Goal itself is no longer understood—of the marriage sacrament. The union of the partners, who are totally committed to the spiritual path, the religious way, is celebrated as a true ritual (with invocations, repetition of *mantras*, offerings to the deity, etc.). I understood how sex, which involves not only the physical body, but all the other increasingly subtle aspects of a human being, can be an experience which almost all Europeans, even in our age of sexual freedom where sex seems to be so important, have never even approached. One can have made love every day of one's life without once encountering the transcendent experience which is possible and known to the Tibetans. I will not go into details as to what was told and explained to me. I would only say that for the male partner the task is not to allow the emission of sperm. The actual union lasts a great many hours and the orgasm, both for the man and the woman, is prolonged indefinitely, inducing a state in which time and all the functions seem suspended.

The first lesson of sexual tantrism is that in order to free oneself from desire or attachment, the right way is neither to deny it nor to repress it—what modern psychologists have very well described as inhibition—but to give it effect, to satisfy it in a way that is so perfect and so *conscious* that, because the experience has been so totally lived through—even though only once—we shall be free. But 'not to repress' and 'not to control' are two different things. It is not a question of denying sex but of disciplining it—like a dam which takes full account of the strength of the water but can transform it into useful energy destined for a specific

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purpose. We are far removed from licence and abandonment and closer to the monastery than the brothel.

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But whilst sexual practices have only minor importance in tantrism as a whole (and many lamas who follow the Tantrayana way live the life of monks, that is to say of chastity and continence), sexual symbolism, the symbolism of the sexual act, is basic.

It is a symbolism which has caused much ink to flow and unleashed considerable indignation. And it is a fact: all the temples, all the monasteries and hermitages, are full of sculpture and painting representing the sexual act, copulations, coition, physical union. This is a source of delight to various collectors of erotic *thankas* and was a matter for indignation to nearly all European observers of the last century and the beginning of this one, especially the Christian missionaries who were in contact with Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim and around Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Personally I do not understand—in all honesty and sincerity—how anyone, even just one visitor, could have thought—even on one occasion—that the statues and paintings in question were of a depraved or pornographic nature, at least within the temples. I have seen these paintings and sculptures in the *gompas* of the Himalayas built before the arrival of the refugees and I have seen them in the pathetic monasteries, which the refugees made for themselves in tumbledown bungalows which nobody wanted, and I never once experienced any emotion other than one would feel upon entering a temple or a church—a feeling of something sacred. I must also point out that the Old Testament of the Jews and Christians is full of descriptions of dubious copulations and appalling orgies, without even mentioning the love symbols of the Song of Songs. The authentic use of sexual images in sacred matters only shocks the person whose personal situation, in a world divided into two sexes, is neither intentional nor conscious nor free. There is not one iota of pornography in Tibetan tantrism.

I would say further that it is in the West that disguised pornography has crept into every page of magazine advertising, into film publicity, into fashion, in the most plushy reviews, into conversation. So that whilst true sex, which frees instead of enslaving, is nowhere to be found, false sex, that of thought cut from reality, of unspoken feelings and frustrated sensations, is to be found everywhere.

Why this symbolism of the union of the sexes, what the Tibetans call

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*yab-yum*? Several works identify the Tibetan concept with the Hindu *shakti*. And certainly the Hindu images of sexual intercourse, which are equally numerous and equally sacred, represent the union of the God with his *shakti*, the god being considered as passive, non-acting and his *shakti* being his power of manifestation, thus active and acting, although feminine. *But the Tibetans never use either the word or the idea of shakti* and although the identification of Hindu with Buddhist tantrism may be justified at a pretty deep level of understanding, that is not the case at the level of outward formulation. For example, *in Tibetan Buddhism, contrary to Hinduism, it is the masculine principle which is active and dynamic and the feminine principle which is passive and static*. The best word to translate *yum* would be spouse. And it is obvious that the purpose of this symbolism is to represent the union of a married couple in the sexual act.

Why choose this? This is the very heart of both Vedantist and Mahayana metaphysics. When Hindus speak of Reality, of Unity ('There is no place in the Universe for Two'), they never use the word monism but the term non-dualism, *advaita*. It is an attempt at the impossible; to describe what is indescribable, supreme Reality. This Reality (for Buddhists, as well as Hindus and Western science, teach that we live in a world of deceptive appearances and not in the real world) is everywhere, and in everything. It alone is. But it cannot be conceived. One cannot even say: It is. Because this would imply non-being and these are still concepts of relative truth. Reality is indefinable and throughout the ages all attempts to define it have been at the source of all disputes, disagreements, of all heresies. But sages are in agreement that it is non-dualistic. If one says: both two and one, it is false; if one says: neither two nor one, it is inaccurate. And yet it is this unity of two, of two which are no longer two but one, this *a-dvaita*, which is symbolised by these statues, mural paintings, *thankas* representing tantric divinities in sexual intercourse with their spouses. This non-dualism is the union of *prajna* with *upaya*. *Prajna*, wisdom, infinite consciousness, is feminine, passive, non-manifest. *Upaya*, activity, is masculine, dynamic, manifest. It is compassion, the heart, united to wisdom, the head.

This non-dualism is also expressed in another fundamental idea of Mahayanist Buddhism. The Tibetans will never speak of Reality as being beyond appearances, of *shunyata* beyond *samsara*. No. Reality and appearance are one and the same thing, 'the two sides of a coin'. Unity in diversity, diversity in unity, this is the great experience, Realisation as Tibetans like to describe it. And it is for this reason that we all ex-

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perience such a deep and special emotion when looking at a snow covered landscape in winter. The diversity is infinite, in the chalets, the trees, the lie of the land; no two pine trees, no two branches, are the same. But the same snow, white, stainless and always identical with itself, blots out and at the same time unifies the landscape, which appears as a silent and infinite whole. A wintry mountain landscape can suggest to us this oneness to which man aspires all the time and which is always beyond his grasp.

Another meaning of the sexual symbolism of the tantras is that in every man and woman there exists a masculine and feminine principle. And often when the tantras speak of the union of man and woman, it is this union of the two natures in ourselves which must be understood. The feminine deity is the woman in us; the masculine deity is the man. And this polarity is transcended in perfect integration.

Lastly—and this is perhaps the most important part of tantrism as a method of personal evolution, and makes clear why it is possible to make use of all activity on the way to Liberation—in every man it is the uniting of being, pure being, with the functions. There is no contradiction or irreducible difference between pure infinite consciousness and the functions, the fermentation of thought, the instability of emotions, the restlessness of the body, sexual desire. There are not two (two planes, two levels, two worlds), but one, two which are one.

A man moves towards unity, reunion, 'religion', from the day of his birth, from the moment of separation from his mother; even from the moment of his conception. Once an ovum and a spermatozoon have amalgamated, an embryo appears which is the centre of an individual life, separated from the All, defined, limited, enclosed. From then on the human being will not rest until, blindly or consciously, stupidly or cleverly, he has wiped out this separation, this isolation, this cutting off from the All, this subjection to Time and to space—until he has escaped his ego—*ahamkara* as the Hindus say, *atma* according to the Buddhists (they are all in agreement that the ego belongs to illusion and not to that omnipresent and all pervading Reality which alone is). Some will strive for more and more money and power, others for more and more mistresses, others will drive cars faster and faster. Some will 'commune with nature', others will 'lose themselves in the vastness of deserts or oceans', others will travel to more and more distant countries. The human being will never rest until he has attained the Infinite and the Eternal. If he does not attain to this, he will never know joy or perfect happiness. He will always feel that he could be still more happy.

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But when the Infinite, the Eternal, the Limitless, the All have been 'realised', how can there be any question of 'more'?

Until that 'realisation' a man is separate from everything around him; this leads to the possibility of being helped or threatened, *hence fear, hence need to remove this separateness, hence desire for relationship, contact, union, by whatever means and with no matter whom or what*: friends, lovers, mistresses, business associates, works of art, beauty in all its guises, landscapes, things, everything that can be seen, heard or touched. So long as separateness is experienced, there will be desire for the experience of union, there will be sex in the widest or symbolical meaning of the term.

The sexual symbolism of tantrism is true, exact and useful. Its teaching is as limitless as human dissatisfaction. If some collectors derive 'artistic' pleasure from surrounding themselves with pictures of couples copulating, they are free to do so. If there are some men and women who wish to understand, understand themselves and understand others, to learn to see not what they think exists but what is, *to cease from having no rest*, the tantric Buddhism of the refugee Tibetan lamas—one of the many forms of ultimate Truth—can offer them treasures of knowledge and wisdom.



## PART FOUR

# THE TIBETANS AND OURSELVES

TIBETAN TANTRISM IS A WHOLE WORLD WITH ITS HUNDREDS OF TEXTS, symbols and exercises. But to find one's way through this tangle one must never lose sight of the fact that it is a coherent aspect of Buddhism, of the way taught by Gautama Buddha. And the essence of Buddhist 'realisation' can only be 'realisation': to see the relative reality of what we consider to be absolute reality (separation, change, suffering, death) and the absolute reality of that which now escapes us (non-time, non-space, non-birth, non-becoming, the non-conditioned, immortality).

Each *tantra* is associated with a certain tantric deity; these deities are as numerous and various as the sects, and they have a fundamental part to play in Tantric meditation.

These deities are as upsetting for Christians and humanists soaked in graeco-latin mythology as for strictly Hinayanist Buddhists. The Mahayana had already introduced the *bodhisattvas* and the *dhyani-buddhas* who were unknown in the first Hinayanic sutras. Tantrism overflows with male and female deities, both mild and terrifying, endlessly reproduced on *thankas*, paintings on silk which can be rolled up and unrolled and are used more as books than as pictures.

All the Tibetans speak of their favourite deity or *vidam* as of an absolutely real being. But at the same time they will speak of it as illusory, non-existent, a production of the mind, of their own consciousness.

What then are these tantric deities? They are symbols, seen by sages in the course of their meditation, of the fundamental energies which 'weave' the Universe, and with it human life, and which are in our own mind. They appear more particularly in two characteristic types of

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*tantrayana* meditation, that of creation and dissolution, *utpannakrama* and *nishpannakrama*, and of the mandala. These two meditations are linked with a whole series of Tibetan exercises intended to convince the seeker of the unreal and illusory—or, more exactly, only relatively real—character of the phenomenal world (of all that we know of ourselves and of the world around us), and to free him from his fears.

The first meditation is for activating visions or visualisations or controlled imagination (which of course has nothing whatsoever to do with associative day dreams). The creation of images is one of the essential aspects of Tibetan yoga. But it is not considered either the most profound or the highest. I wish to say that on several occasions I have heard gurus insist that these visions must be produced without the aid of hallucinogenic drugs. I did not raise the question of LSD or mescaline with them, and do not know whether they had heard of their present day vogue and wished to allude to it. I simply mention their insistence on this point, although I asked no questions about it.

This ancient science of visualisation of a tantric deity with all his symbolic attributes and surrounded by his acolytes is certainly a far cry from our habits of thought. Nevertheless its theory and practice are confirmed by the latest findings of contemporary depth psychology and psychoanalysis. It is at one and the same time a means of self knowledge and reintegration, of unifying and of acquiring of energies and knowledge of the archetypes at work in our unconscious. But above all it is of direct help in the search for Liberation, for the Buddhist nirvana.

This briefly is the method. In order to understand that everything is the product of his own mind, the monk, voluntarily, consciously, starting from nothing, creates little by little in his imagination a given deity, to whom, by the strength of his concentrated thought and feeling, he gives as much reality and life as the world around him. Not only does he not allow his imagination to wander; he creates this symbolic world according to extremely precise rules, where nothing is left to chance and where every detail—appearance, expression, proportions, colours, attributes, etc.—is strictly laid down and fixed once and for all. Generally he recites aloud the iconographic details at the same time as he visualises them. This creation may last not only hours but days in silence, motionlessness and shadow. These visualisations are symbolic in as much as they represent, make tangible, something (a principle, an energy, a force), which truly exists beyond form. Without that form this reality escapes the monk and he cannot know it or make it his own. In this form it becomes matter for experience, knowable, graspable. The





Sonam Topgey Kazi, Mrs Sonam, Jetsun Pema



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monk will then identify himself with the deity to whom he has given a reality outside of himself.

But the very fact that this apparently real world has been created by the disciple himself, gives him the power to dissolve it again, to reabsorb it. This image built up from nothing can be made by the monk to vanish from his mind, just as it came; he brings it back to the point of departure, *shunyata*, the absolute, the white screen on to which phantasmagoria are projected by a magic lantern. And one fine day, as a result of this exercise and other complementary ones, in particular yogic practices, the disciple will be able to see how our everyday world, which seems so certain and so compulsive, is also the creation of his own mind and by the same token can be dissolved. Then he can directly verify the teaching of the Buddha: the Creation is no more real in itself than all the other visions of his imagination. It is not enough for the tantric monk to understand intellectually. He wants the living experience that nothing which seems real to him in his visualisation exercises, nothing which seems real in what we call the waking state, possesses that reality in which we believe and which we perceive wrongly: it is only a form, an expression, an appearance and the sole reality is *shunyata*. Or more precisely, *shunyata* and *samsara*, noumenon and phenomenon, the one and the many, are one and the same thing. In this sense, this aspect of tantrism is truly a development of the Mahayana such as it was expounded to the world at Rajgir and taught at Nalanda.

The mandala rests on the same principle. I was able to assist at the preparation and setting up of two mandalas, one at Ghoom in January 1964, and the other at the Dalai Lama's monastery at Dharamsala in June when the *Kalachakrapuja* ceremony (the cult of the Wheel of Time) was performed.

At Ghoom, near Darjeeling, there is an old *Sakya-pa gompa*, much less known and visited than the famous monastery of the picture postcards where tourist agencies make advance bookings for the 'lamas' dances', so that tourists may carry home an 'esoteric thrill' from the Roof of the World. The arrival of the Tibetan refugees has given a new lease of life to this little *gompa*, where I was received with a friendliness, a warmth and an understanding which I shall never forget. I was given a certain number of indications about a mandala of the Kingdom presided over by E-Vajra, the chief deity of the *Sakya-pa*.

The setting up of a mandala is a ritual in itself. On a flat square, dark green in colour, one and a half metres square, four monks work together chalking out the plan of the domain of E-Vajra. Starting from the



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centre, which follows the order of Manifestation itself, these monks work steadily and surely, without any notes or models to copy from. To work together in this way at a common task is already a means of broadening one's own individual consciousness, a way to become more than one, to become four who are as one, and it is a first step towards that infinite expansion which is the real death of the ego.

The making of a mandala, even a simple one like this, will require two full days for which the monks have prepared themselves long in advance by fasting and prayer. All this while the life of the monastery pursues its course. Standing behind those who draw, several motionless monks follow the progress of the work attentively. Others study, make the daily offerings, work, saw wood, engage in all those activities which the world over fill the days of monks between the hours of prayer.

Every detail is foreseen in the way the lines and regions are disposed around the centre—this point which signifies the All. Then, once the drawing is finished, the lamas give the mandala its colours, placing in the different regions powders of the five symbolic colours: green, yellow, blue, red and white. Five colours but also five directions: north, south, east, west and centre. This fivefold division is found everywhere in Mahayanist Buddhism: five components in the architecture of the *stupas*, five *dhyani-buddhas*, aspects of the same Absolute or supreme Buddha, five subtle centres or *chakras* in a man's body, which body also constitutes a mandala. But above the body, above the mandala, vertical to all the symbols of initiation, there is a sixth point, outside time, outside space, which is known as Eternal Life.

And the practice and meditation of the mandala can help a man on the Way to this Eternal Life.

Like the symbolism of the deities, the mandalas are born of the visions of sages of the past and in their turn become guides for the meditation of those who seek. The symbolism is both cosmological and psychological. It expresses the relationship between the Light and the forces of darkness (the forces of the individual and collective unconscious), the Absolute and man, Eternity and time, the One and multiplicity. This geographical and spatial symbolism is essentially dynamic. It is that of a progress, of a quest threatened at every turn, meeting innumerable obstacles, which like the monsters in fairy stories tend to evaporate when one looks them in the eye or defies them. This symbolism takes the seeker from the periphery to the Centre, from multiplicity to Unity and, in that way, from illusion and death to Reality and to Life. The mandala is a map, the map of the kingdom of a divinity, in the middle of which

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will be found his palace (or his temple) and his throne. And since Tibetans are not polytheistically minded at all, quite the contrary, and since any divinity born of emptiness and returning to emptiness is itself a gateway to knowledge of the ultimate Reality, one may say that the mandala is a map of the Kingdom of Heaven and of the cosmic and psychic order corresponding to it. In it time and space are brought together.

There are very many types of mandalas but they nearly all consist of a square contained within a circle. The square has an opening or gate on all four sides and represents the precincts of the Temple or Palace. The circle is composed of several belts, one of them the flame belt which destroys ignorance, egotism and attachment to appearances. The disciple will cross the barrier of fire. And the disciple will enter through the gates.

When finished, the mandala is placed inside the gompa. And there in the gloom characteristic of Tibetan sanctuaries the meditation—which although an entirely inner ritual is extraordinarily tangible—will take place. For the real mandala is not that which is drawn and seen by the eyes of the flesh but that which is visualised inwardly. Each participant will live the liturgy of the mandala through its various phases and by the power of his attention he will himself take the path which leads from the outer darkness to the light of the Kingdom and to that darkness which is above even the Light, that of the Uncreate, the Ineffable. For the centre of the mandala is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the chaos whence the world emerged and the consummation of Ages. It is the centre of the Universe. And it is also the centre of every man and the Kingdom of Heaven which is within us, me, you, and which is also without. The lips murmur the formulas or mantras, symbols of sound corresponding to the visual symbols as the Word corresponds to the Light. And each syllable of each mantra, being the germ of a spiritual reality, is seen as clearly as it is heard.

Once the ritual is over, the mandala is destroyed, just as every created thing is destroyed at each moment. And the powders of which it was composed are taken away in procession to the sound of horns and cymbals to a mountain torrent, into which they will be thrown and will dissolve, just as happens at every moment to any element of any created thing. It is rare to find mandalas painted on stuff and preserved, and it is doubtful whether before long many monks will be left to carry out such complicated and esoteric works.

A much larger and more elaborate mandala was set up 2,000 kilometres

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from Ghoom upon the occasion of the *Kalachakrapuja*. Also made out of coloured powders, it measured two by two metres and the least one can say of it is that it made a work of art of amazing beauty.

I was allowed by the Dalai Lama (for which permission I shall always be deeply grateful) to witness the ritual of the consecration of the site of the mandala, where the monks will visualise and experience the inner mandala. After prayers, invocations, purifications and dedication to the Three Refuges and to the Tibetans' own special refuge, which is the line of gurus, the monks perform a kind of dance accompanied by the chanting of the mantras in a loud voice (that incredibly deep and grave voice of the Tibetans). Mudras are performed with the ritual objects proper to every correctly initiated tantric lama; the *dorje* or sceptre, held in the right hand and the *tilbu* or bell held in the left hand. Taken together they are symbolic of the whole Tantric philosophy. The *dorje* is the active masculine symbol, *upaya*. The bell is the passive, feminine symbol—*prajna*, Wisdom, infinite Consciousness. And the most meaningful mudra is that which consists in crossing the two arms, or even in inserting the *dorje* into the bell, which signifies the indissoluble union not only of *prajna* and *upaya* but also of *nirvana* and *samsara*.

If it had been in Tibet, in a big *gompa*, this mandala would have been placed in the centre of the temple and the ritual would have been performed four times, before each of the four walls, to the four points of the compass. But in view of the humble quarters with which the monks—who once served in the Potala at Lhasa—content themselves, it was necessary to site the mandala against the wall of the room and the consecration of the four quarters is carried out in one place. This preparation represents a decision—to carry out the ritual; a prayer—to get the suitable site; an exorcism—to drive out those evil spirits and hostile forces of the psychic or subtle world which could defile this place dedicated solely to the Spirit; finally, a consecration—a seal marked out by the feet of the monks and affixed to the chosen site.

The carrying out of Tibetan rituals—meditation, mandala or simply offices and *pujas*, worship and offerings, often requires several days, involving long hours of daily attendance at the temple. This is why food and tea are distributed along the rows of monks—Tibetan tea which is buttered and salted and of which one cup—I can vouch for it—gives as much energy as a plate of food.

There are other tantric rituals which will seem extremely surprising to those brought up and educated far from Tibetan or Sikkimese surroundings. They take the form of a drama intensely experienced by



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those who take part. As in the Catholic Mass, the officiating monk is aided by assistants. A weird Tibetan music of horns, trumpets and cymbals replaces the organ. And the audience, far from remaining mere spectators, endeavours to take a real part in the celebration.

As far as the Tibetan lamas are concerned, there is no possible doubt: these rituals are of a scientific character and productive of results. For those foreigners who have been fortunate enough to observe them or hear them spoken of, there is also no doubt—but of a contrary nature: here we have a form of primitive magic inherited from the black *Bön-Po*, and, as one knows, magic is worthless and useless and these Tibetans must be playing games, either deceiving themselves like the African sorcerers or extracting money from poor simple folk. Certainly, these rituals are most disturbing with their statues of angry deities and effigies of victims, which are solemnly burnt or knifed. It would be quite all right if one could give them an entirely symbolic meaning: the death of the old and the resurrection of the new, the sacrifice of egotism and attachment to our individuality. But the lamas are quite definite: there is no symbolism, but real action on a plane inaccessible to man's ordinary five senses (in just the same way as Hertzian waves cannot be perceived). The ritual, performed on the gross, physical, material plane, produces an effect on the subtle, psychic plane. Thus it would seem that there is a kind of 'magic' which plays absolutely no part in our existence (only perhaps in the rite of exorcism recognised by the Catholic church) and which is of great importance for the Tibetans and Sikkimese. Ignorance, superstition, trickery, masquerade? Can we be certain?

There is one objection. And that objection is the impression—nay, the certainty—of the intelligence, nobility, dignity, learning, love of one's neighbour—in a word, of wisdom which one gets from the gurus carrying out these so called 'masquerades'.

I attended a consecutive series of tantric rituals performed by the *Nyingma-pa* Khentse Rimpoche and a *Hom* ritual celebrated by the *Kargyud-pa* Dhukpa Thuksey Rimpoche. Now I had already spent many hours in both their rooms; I had observed them in the ordinary course of life, receiving visitors. I had on several occasions talked with them at length, had meditated in silence in their company. And as far as I was concerned, there were no doubts in my mind as to their personal worth. I had no difficulty in understanding why they were so well known and in recognising them for myself as masters.

Of course, we are very far removed from original Hinayanic Buddhism which was so against all ritual, far removed from Ramana Maharshi

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from Zen, from Krishnamurti. But just because of Khentse Rimpoche I could not dismiss these things as 'vestiges of black *Bön-po* sorcery'. And all these rituals, however unacceptable they may appear to the unprepared observer, have as their object to bring about that liberation from all attachment which is the basis of the most orthodox Buddhism—whether the call is to the participants or whether the rituals are performed in order to free a malevolent and unhappy spirit—what Sonam called a soul in the state of purgatory.

The preparations for these rituals are laid down in great detail in the scriptures—icon of a deity specially modelled for the occasion, human effigies in chains, sacrificial altar. Generally the purpose is to cut (*drakwa*) the bonds which prevent the evolving of a *ruta* or evil spirit, that is to say of an ego, an individuality as real as the evidence of our senses, but without a physical body. Consequently, there can be no question of killing, which would be contrary to all Buddhism and all tantrism, but of freeing, cutting, separating, ruthlessly separating the forces of disintegration from the forces of reintegration, the forces of death from the forces of life. Because the Buddha nature is also present in the *ruta*. For this frightening psychic surgery, an appropriately dramatic setting must be prepared. I attended a succession of rituals performed by Khentse Rimpoche, including a *yagna* or sacrifice of burnt offerings and the destruction of two effigies. A figure with a tortured, terrified face had been fashioned out of earth upon the ground and then painted to look like a devil. This was to remind one and all that there can be no resurrection without death. And for those who cling to life, however illusory, because they know nothing else, death when it is not understood is always frightening.

There are three actors in the drama. First of all the victim, a little statuette of human form, modelled out of butter mixed with flour, and painted red. The Tibetan monks are extraordinarily clever at giving to the faces of these statuettes an expression of mediocrity and ugliness. In addition to its part in the ritual, this statuette is regarded as a symbol of that attachment to the ego which blinds us to our eternal reality. Then on a leopard skin Mahakala (*gomboi shethor*) is raised, the great destroyer, he who destroys only what must in any case be destroyed, the Terrible, the Well Beloved, he who arouses Conscience, Mahakala who devours and consumes, who kills Death in order to give Life beyond birth and death. Although the *thankas* of Mahakala, with their dark blue deity aureoled by orange flames, may seem impressive and beautiful to Westerners, nevertheless these sculptures with their 'terrifying' visages

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and gaping mouths, overburdened with a weight of detail, have little in common with European aesthetics!

Lastly, the officiating monk, the tantric lama Khentse Rimpoche, is considered in India to be one of the greatest *Nyingma-pa* gurus. He is a Master, married, and father of a daughter between twenty and twenty-five. He is exceptionally tall, even amongst the Tibetans who are mostly big men; he has great presence. And his look is not that of an ordinary human being. Wearing the black robe and the broad brimmed black hat of the tantric monk, he impresses by his tremendous force and mastery. Each one of his movements is meaningful and makes one realise what the dance and the theatre must have been when they were still forms of sacred art. His weapons are the bell and the *dorje*, the mantras and the mudras (gestures and positions of the fingers which involve not only the hands but the whole of the being, and which have their repercussions well beyond the physical or material world). The reading of scriptures, mantras, mudras, music, ringing of the bell, proceed up to the moment when the spirit is summoned to appear and be present in the statuette which represents it. The trumpets roar and wail. The smoke of incense rises. Three times the guru waves a piece of black stuff before him. The mantras, mudras and chanting begin again. Then Khentse Rimpoche takes up a *phurpa* (a bayonet-like instrument) and slowly, solemnly, with a gesture of great beauty and dignity, he transfixes the heart of the statuette, which he then cuts into several pieces with a dagger. And the pieces of the dimembered body are offered to Mahakala as food.

Khentse Rimpoche passes in procession to the other side of the temple, where a kind of straw house has been built in which a monk places another statuette. Again the guru waves his black cloth three times. The music becomes heart-rending, inhuman. An acolyte sets light to the straw. With a crackle it goes up in flames and smoke. And Mahakala, 'transformed into a weapon more terrifying than the final weapon', is flung into the fire in which the man-like effigy has almost burnt away. Finally, the remains of the spirit are symbolically buried and the tomb is sealed with the copper plate which held the icon of Mahakala.

Khentse Rimpoche then performed a ritual common both to Tibetans and Hindus, known as *yagna* or the sacrificial offering to fire in which various kinds of food are thrown into the flames. The fire is the mouth by which the Absolute devours what itself has brought forth, devours multiplicity and separateness in order to return all created things to the unity beyond time and space. The fire consumes illusion, lies, ego-tism, ignorance, consumes suffering and death and gives us Eternal

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Life through the understanding of That which we are in reality.

And on that day Khentse Rimpoche also carried out the *hom* ritual which I also saw performed by the yogic monks of Thuksey Rimpoche. A paper image, about one square metre in size, representing a man in chains, is hung above a stove on which a pot of lamp oil is heating. After the injunctions to the spirit to enter the effigy, a monk using a kind of ladle of which the handle is at least one metre fifty long, pours methylated spirit into the boiling liquid. A jet of flame explodes noisily which generally destroys the paper in its frame at one stroke.

These statuettes or effigies represent the perverted ego. But the small sculpted mannikin is also used in a ritual, in which it represents the body of the monks themselves, our body which was created to become a temple, but which our individualism has made a prison shutting us in upon ourselves and cutting us off from the universal and the infinite. This is the *tchöd* ritual, as I saw it performed by the Tibetan and Bhutanese *Nyingma-pa* at the monastery of Mindoling. It is very moving and its meaning is easy to grasp: it is the offering, by each one, of his own body, cause of attachment, to all beings in remission of all his sins. The chanting is extraordinarily beautiful. And I cannot forget the statue-like immobility of the monks, of their torso, shoulders, face, whilst rhythmically shaking the *tilbu*, the bell, with their left hand and with the right the *damaru*; this is a small tambourine, each side of which is struck by a small ball at the end of a string. They also use a trumpet made of human bone. They chant: 'To all those who wish me well, I give my body, to all those who wish me ill I give my body.' And when the statuette has been stabbed through the heart and cut in pieces, a piece of the sacrificed body is given to the guru, Mindoling Rimpoche, to eat.

Once a year, in the most important monasteries, the ritual of the destruction of an effigy is celebrated with special magnificence and dances are performed by masked dancers. There is always in front of the *gompas* a large platform made of trampled earth with a flagpole in the middle, specially provided for this purpose. The Tibetans are better known for these 'lamas' dances' than anything else, although they have often said to me that the English word 'dance' is quite unsuitable to express the part played by the human body in a form of worship. But as the expression 'sacred dances', which can mean anything, is in current use, I will retain it. Thus the Tantrayana has preserved these dances, which were known both to the Greeks and Hebrews, and which have gradually disappeared from most other religions. But the Tibetan dances

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cannot be compared with, for instance, those of the Muslim Mohammedan dervishes. They are not physical exercises for daily or weekly use, intended to bring about a reorganisation of psycho-physiological functions and the attainment of a higher state of consciousness. They are always part of a ritual, which is both a liturgy and a drama. And the monks train for this all through the year, under the direction of their guru, just as actors and dancers rehearse their parts. But sharing in this drama, freeing oneself from the limitations of one's ego in order to lose oneself in a role, generally that of a tantric deity or of one of its acolytes, produces a profound psychological and spiritual effect. I watched these dances for two whole days at the monastery of the great abbot and yogi, Gyalwa Karmapa, at Rumtek in Sikkim.

The first day can be regarded as the final rehearsal. The dancers wear their ceremonial monastic robes. Each member of the audience is able to identify those who the following day will wear the black robe and broad brimmed conical hat or the costumes and masks of the deities, characteristic of these 'lamas' dances'. When the four guardians of the gates of the universal *mandala* have performed their part, the monks, in long lines, or turning in a circle, continue for hours leaping from one foot to the other, alternately slowing down and speeding up their movement. And, at the end of the day, they consecrate the site by forming with the pattern of their steps an immense *dorje*, symbol of the power of action indissolubly linked with perfect wisdom.

The following morning everything is in readiness for the most spectacular ritual in the life of the monastery. The ferocious head of Mahakala has been sculpted; the statuette which is to receive the spirit to be liberated, in this case the Tibetans, Bhutanis and Sikkimese who are present, waits in readiness. Up on a balcony, on the first floor of the temple, the impressive Karmapa, surrounded by several young tulkus, of whom the smallest cannot be more than five years old, presides over the ritual which is performed by his nephew, a young aristocratic-looking lama.

The music, the processions, the beauty of the richly embroidered and brilliantly coloured vestments, the splendid trappings and ritual objects contrast strangely with the poverty of the monks' daily life. Whenever religion is concerned, the Tibetans display a taste for pomp and splendour.

The ceremonies follow the same pattern as those performed by Khentse Rimpoche. But this time the solemnity and gravity of the proceedings are contrasted against an extraordinary burlesque commentary provided by the buffooneries of two young monks in carnival masks,

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disguised as clowns or jesters. Nothing is sacred to them and each actor, each part of the ritual is a pretext for jokes. Everything is ridiculed. How wonderful the Tibetans are, with their capacity for seeing the wholeness of life and of bringing opposites together, and what an unforgettable lesson in inner freedom in face of all established values!

Khentse Rimpoche performed the ritual seated. Today the officiating lama will remain standing in the square, face to face with the spirit. First he consecrates the statue of Mahakala, sprinkling it with water and asking the divinity to be truly present in the image which represents him, and to carry out the rite himself, through the person of the tantric lama as he performs the sacrifice.

The spirit is solemnly summoned to appear and take his place in the effigy. Then four acrobatic dancers, masked and in the costume of skeletons, make their appearance, to remind the audience of the inevitability of death, forcing the beholder to interrogate himself as to the real meaning of that death. Then come the guardians of the four gates, wearing terrible, frightening, grimacing masks. They defend the threshold of the sacred mystery of palingenesis, the rebirth which follows a consciously accepted death. These masks, which are intended to be as impressive as possible, have been frequently described as horrible and terrifying. But these are fundamental symbols. And far from being the expression of gross superstition, they are the product of a spiritual science and of a highly developed psychological knowledge, and in particular, of the necessity of attacking the enemy with his own weapons and of confronting the monsters with an appearance even more terrifying than their own.

Now the officiating monk is left alone. He dances slowly round the statuette. Taking up, one after another, various instruments—ropes, manacles, weapons, gradually he prepares the spirit for the sacrifice. I was reminded of the *corrida* and wondered if that too were not some remnant of a sacred rite. After the play with the cape, the lances and the *banderillas*, then comes the *muleta*. Finally the death thrust. In ceremonial robes, the acolytes of the officiating lama enter slowly, to the sound of trumpet and cymbal. Dancing, still dancing, the lama plunges his dagger into the heart of the little red effigy.

Then black Mahakala appears in the form of a masked dancer, in the company of equally terrifying-looking acolytes. Mahakala will himself strike the final blow at the malevolent spirit and each of his attendants will do likewise, one with an axe, one with an arrow, one with a spear and one with a knife. And at the end of all these ritual dances, a dancer

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masked as a deer always comes to cut up the remains of the corpse and offer them to be eaten.

I can understand that European Christians and missionaries who witnessed these tantric rituals and dances never thought to ask themselves whether real Wisdom could be found in them, much less whether they expressed a Way, a Truth and a Life. Nothing seemed further from our Western notions and needs than this multiform tantrism. And yet at the very heart of this tantrism lies a conception of life possibly more suited than any of the other traditional forms to the modern man who really wants to know himself, both in his conscious and unconscious states, and wants to understand 'where he comes from and where he is going' and what is his relationship to the Universe. I myself am now going to play the lama by prophesying the future and stating without fear of being proved wrong that the word tantrism—unknown to the general public a few years ago—will soon be as fashionable as are Zen and Yoga. When I left for India in 1964, French and English books on this subject were not easy to find in Paris. I predict that in two years' time there will be some fifteen or so on the specialist shelves of book-shops: 'Tantrism for all', 'Tantrism in twelve lessons', 'The Handbook of the Perfect Tantrist', and inevitably a 'Christian Tantrism' with the *imprimatur*.



No Tibetan would think of suggesting that these picturesque rituals, rich and elaborate though they may be, are the final word on the spirituality of the lamas. In the hermitages of the Himalayan jungles, in Bhutan and Sikkim and in India, as in times gone by on the high plateaux of Tibet, masters and their disciples follow self-disciplines less spectacular but certainly belonging to a more advanced stage. I am thinking in particular of yoga.

There are *Nyingma-pa* yogis. But yoga—in the sense of physical exercises and the awakening of latent energies—is above all the province of the *Kargyud-pa*, who are in the line of the famous Marpa and Milarepa and of the 'six teachings of Naropa', amongst which are the *tum-mo* (generation of heat) and transfer of the spirit (*pho-ba*). Sonam enabled me to meet three *Kargyud-pa* yogis, who are regarded as masters—the Tibetans, Abo Rimpoche and Dhukpa Thuksey Rimpoche and the Bhutanese, Lupon Sonam Zangpo.

I have wonderful memories of Lupon Sonam Zangpo. It was at the

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beginning of our journey. After spending some time at Rajgir, at Nalanda (where we spent hours discussing Hinayana and Mahayana with Indian scholars teaching at the new university), at Buddh' Gaya (where we continued these conversations at the Tibetan *gompa* and with Thai monks), and at Buxa Camp (where I discovered the noisy arguments, the chanting of lengthy offices and the aristocratic dignity of the great *Geluk-pa* Rimpoches), it was time for me to get to the heart of the matter by entering the restricted zone of the Himalayas.

During the course of my various visits to India, I had never had occasion to go to Darjeeling. This time I had three permits in my pocket—one month in Sikkim, one month in Darjeeling and one month in Kalimpong. I was going to discover a fresh aspect of Asia of which I expected a great deal. Thanks to Sonam, the great adventure was about to commence. At that time, the deep friendship which exists between us now was only in its beginning, and we were both extremely reserved. I drove the Landrover on the road which climbs above Silguri, and plays hide and seek, twisting and turning, with the celebrated broken-winded and rather pathetic, little train; little, that is, in regard to the size of the carriages, large in regard to the amount of black, unbreathable smoke belched out at every turn of the tiny railroad. Neither Sonam nor I spoke a word. From time to time I looked at a photograph of Ma Anandamayi—the most extraordinary living personage in Hinduism—stuck above the windscreen and to which Sonam had touchingly affixed a small rose. My fidelity to Christianity and my attachment to the Hindu sages with whom I had lived for so many months during the last five years, still separated me from Sonam, who is a pure product of tantric Buddhism. Night fell, the mists came up, the Landrover climbed. I could feel that Sonam was concerned at the thought of introducing me—a stranger—to those whom he greatly revered, the Red Hat masters about whom there are so many misunderstandings amongst Europeans; his concern on the eve of opening up to me his private, almost secret preserve, the world of the tantric gurus. I too, was moved. What would I find up there? What could I hope for? I remember saying suddenly to Sonam: 'Sonam, will I meet a *jivan mukta*?'\* At that moment, the rose, which was not very firmly secured, fell on my knee. Sonam replied softly, 'See, Ma Anandamayi has answered, yes'.

Ma cannot lie. That night we reached Kurseong. The next day we left the Landrover at the end of a bad road and climbed on foot to a small

\* *Jivan mukta*: One who achieves liberation whilst still in the body, the highest state possible to man, the perfect Sage.



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dwelling constructed of roughly hewn blocks of stone, lost amongst the woods and the meadows. An aged man was just emerging. He wore a patched yellow coat and walked slowly, his energy quietly collected within himself; there was something extremely majestic and at the same time very simple about him, conveying at one and the same time an irresistible impression of contained power and of love and kindness. The people round him wear the national dress of Bhutan—short tunics and bare legs for the men, long beautifully embroidered dresses for the women. They have all come to pay homage at a *stupa* in course of construction. Two young men, wearing the red robe of a monk, are working at the top of it. The lama says a few words which he illustrates by precise, meaningful gestures. Then he laughs, and his laughter is that of a child of two years old in whose eyes lie the maturity and experience of a Sage. For this is not just the serenity of old age. He is a yogi, a very great yogi.

I stayed with him longer than I have stayed with any other and it cost me dear to leave him. Sonam Zangpo is a married lama to whom no aspect of life is unknown. His wife lives in a separate part of the little dwelling and I shall always remember her with much gratitude. She is a perfect incarnation of the mother. She is mother for the Master's three disciples. There are only three; they were chosen to be his disciples and receive initiation from him only after emerging victorious from a number of severe trials. She was a mother to me, asking Sonam to explain to me that if I decided to stay amongst them she would look after me 'as my own mother would have done, far away in my own country'. She is mother too for the passing visitor. For although at times a notice-board—as is the Tibetan custom—states that the guru must not on any account be disturbed (one cannot trifle with some tantric disciplines), at other times Lupon Zangpo's retreat is open to all.

More than any other Tibetan guru, Lupon Zangpo was an incarnation of that unity, that meeting of the manifest with the unmanifest, of action and stillness, of speech and of silence, of *samsara* and *nirvana*, which is required of the Mahayanist of the 'Short way'. Experiences which only give understanding of the unborn, unbecome and unconditioned are incomplete. And however secret the science of yoga, however heroic the ascetic practices of the yogis, however extraordinary—even miraculous—the results achieved, the yogis who reach the end of the way are sages who live in complete harmony with that which makes up the life of other men. At our first meeting, Lupon Zangpo offered me a drink of some Bhutanese spirit (it was not very good). It was impressive to see how

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'normally' this man could behave, while at every moment one realised that there was nothing of what we call ordinary about him. I thought of a comment I had often heard: 'These yogis live in a world of their own.' It is just the contrary. If there are beings who have ceased to live in 'their world' in order to live in 'the world', the real world and not the world as they imagine or would like it to be, it is the sages who have awoken from their dream and see people and things as they are.

One day when I was staying there, Lopon Zangpo received a visit from a *Nyingma-pa* yogi with whom I had often passed an evening in Kurseong, the always smiling No No Rimpoche, a Ladhaki whom Sonam had known very well in Tibet and who, even in Lhasa, was renowned. When a yogi from Ladhak meets a yogi from Bhutan, what do they talk about? Everything except yogi talk. Of course I did not understand a word of their merry conversation, of which Sonam only translated the gist to me later. Consequently I was free to observe these two remarkable men attentively, to try and see them as they really were and not through the glass of my own reactions, to try and commune with them because I saw that they were *one*. For these two human beings, who can see through the veil of appearances, know that they are one, just as reality is one. They play their parts perfectly, spontaneously, freely, entirely in the present moment, overflowing with serenity, joy, kindness and compassion. The past leaves no mark on them, conscious or unconscious; they are free from the slightest care about the future.

At Sonam Zangpo's request, one of the disciples brought in a magnificent *dorje*, carefully wrapped in old silk, and which, Sonam told me, had been held in the hands of Milarepa himself. One after the other, these three men, the Bhutani, the Ladhaki and the Sikkimese, touched their foreheads respectfully with the *dorje*; I was invited to do likewise and to join in common respect for this Tibetan Tradition which I was in process of discovering. The guru explained the symbolism of the *dorje* and the *vajra* to me. 'This is the rod of Power', Sonam told me. Its two symmetrical parts are composed of five elements, five pointed flames, which correspond to the five *dhyani-buddhas* with their five spouses. The *vajra* is pure diamond, hard, transparent. It represents seven positive permanent characteristics: stability, certainty, invincibility, indestructibility, unchangeableness, indivisibility and indissolubility. And this diamond sceptre symbolises the highest power, an irresistible power.

I watched Lopon Zangpo whilst Sonam was translating, and I thought: first, power over oneself. And I saw how in him and in No No Rimpoche,

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as with all true tantric sages, that this power is always allied to love. Not a love based on emotional impulse and sentimental preference, a love which can turn into its opposite and give rise to egotism, jealousy and hatred and despair, but a love which is rooted in the realisation of the oneness of all beings. Completely dead to his egotism and to belief in his own individuality as separate from others, the yogi understands: because I am no longer, I am each one, each thing.

Several men and women with their children came to see the sage to receive *darshan*, to have his blessing and to open themselves to his emanations. They were Nepalese—no doubt about it, the whole Himalayan region is brought together here! One after another they bowed to the guru. Then, filled with grace, they departed. But some ask much more. They want to know, to understand, to be able to act. They want to be different from what they are today. Maybe a Tibetan. Maybe a Sikkimese. Perhaps me—perhaps you. To him who thirsts for understanding, the Master will reply. Little by little he opens the gates of the Kingdom; but on what terms?

By watching certain yogic exercises carried out by the three disciples of Lupon Zangpo in the presence of their master, observing how they served and obeyed him, how they strove to *be* in his presence, I learnt a great deal about the fundamental importance of the guru, the lama in the true meaning of the word. Certainly the guru is the one who guides, who encourages, who corrects, who teaches, who opens the eyes and confers sight on the blind. But above all, it is he who gives birth, who gives initiation, *diksha* for the Hindus, *abisheka* (baptism of water) for the Tibetans. Initiation means beginning, entering upon the way. And also ordination, which is the indispensable transmission of spiritual influence, of a power which the disciple will put to work, by means of all the techniques and all the exercises of yogic discipline, in order to bring to maturity the seed which has been sown in him. Initiation is a direct transmission, through the centuries, from guru to guru, and goes back to a deity, thus establishing its super-human origin. And yet the guru is above all deities. It is he who chooses the *yidam* of the disciple (*ishta* for the Hindus) according to his character and temperament. The guru gives birth to the disciple, gives birth to him in a world which is in this world, but which is not of this world, out of time, infinite, limitless, happy, indescribable, with a stillness more potent than all activity and a silence more vibrant than all speech. It is only if one knows this, by experience, that one can understand how the disciple gives himself wholly to the Master, which is a principle for the Tibetans.

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Lopon Zangpo got his pupils to show me some very little-known physical exercises, and he explained to me all about the *chakras*—explanations which *can* be found in a number of books in European language. Two other *Kargyud-pa* yogis, Abo Rimpoche and Dugpa Thuksey, also showed me these 'secret' exercises. I say 'secret', because to accept in principle to reveal even the simplest and most elementary of them represents a revolutionary change of attitude for the Tibetans. Only a few years ago, in Tibet itself, no one, not even a non-yogi monk, would have been allowed to witness the postures, movements and physical exercises of yoga. And any unlawful spectator would have been ruthlessly punished.

This Tibetan physical yoga has taken a very different form from Hindu hatha-yoga, of which the postures and elementary breathing exercises have been broadcast and are displayed in the show windows of all the bookshops. The greater part of the Hindu postures (*asana*) and in particular *shirshana* (the posture of standing on one's head), which is so important in India, are not practised by the Tibetans. Dugpa Thuksey even asked me to give him a demonstration of the principal Hindu *asanas*! He found it impossible to believe that these postures are described in books and taught everywhere. And I must warn enthusiasts that the yoga of the Tibetan refugees is very far from allowing itself to be sold in the world markets of orientalist snobbery and fashionable crazes.

At the present time, Abo Rimpoche is the most revered of all Tibetan yogis who have managed to escape to India. Towards the end of my stay, he had gone to Dalhousie to join the *tulku* lama at the head of his sect, Kamtrul Rimpoche. Seven months earlier, when I first met him, he was existing wretchedly with a handful of refugees near Palampur, not very far from Dharamsala and Kangra. He has forgotten how old he is, but it is thought that he must be eighty or ninety years old, yet his body is of astonishing youthfulness. He was wearing a loin cloth when he showed me a certain number of exercises, and I could see for myself how vigorous this old man was.

Compared with Hindu hatha-yoga, which is all stillness, each posture being taken up slowly and held for a long time, Tibetan yoga is all movement and often violent movement. For example, standing upright the yogi performs a certain number of gestures with his arms, then suddenly lifts both legs, crossing them in the *padmasana* position

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(posture of the Buddha statues) as he falls, and hitting the ground pretty hard already in the attitude of meditation, in which he continues, motionless. This exercise is repeated several times. Or again, seated in the cross-legged position, he leaps into the air, reaching heights of one metre or even one and a half metres from the ground. Other exercises consist in contraction and relaxation to make the spine and the lumbar region supple. Lastly, there are others which consist in following with the fingers the outline of the lines of circulation of energy. The whole of this physical yoga, which looks like a form of gymnastics, is based on a paradox: that of transcending the body, of going beyond its limits. For yoga is an aspect of tantrism, and in tantrism absolutely nothing may be refused, denied or avoided. Everything must be accepted, integrated, transformed. It is not the body which is the obstacle but consciousness limited to the body or by the body. The yogi transforms his finite and limited body into a universal body. The centre of each man, the heart of each body, the grain of mustard seed of the Gospel is also a tree, so great that its branches can shelter all the birds of the air, the All, the Absolute, the Ultimate Reality. And this revelation is accomplished within the temple of the body.

Sonam Zangpo summarised for me the basis of this transmutation. First of all he explained to me the use of the meditation sash which yogis always wear over their shoulders. Some meditations lasts for several hours, even several days. The yogi wedges his folded leg against his stomach by means of the sash and in this way it is possible for the body to hold a comfortable position without any useless muscular contraction, totally relaxed and motionless.

The *Kargyud-pa* do not close their eyes in meditation. They look straight ahead slightly above the horizon or else the eyes are half closed, fixed on the tip of the nose. The yogi's own body is the mandala. The Tibetans differentiate between five *chakras* (wheels or centres) in the organism (whilst the Hindus recognise seven): the root centre, corresponding to the libido of Western psychologists, the umbilical centre, that of transformation, the heart or breath centre, the throat centre and the head centre, called the thousand-petalled lotus. The body opens to the higher worlds through the fontanel, above which—outside of the body itself—there is a sixth centre which is beyond space and time.

The *Kargyud-pa* yogis also know the conduits through which energy flows, the *nadis*. The two main ones are around the spinal column, one issuing at the left nostril and the other at the right. Through these subtle channels flows the energy, or *prana*, which animates the universe

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and which, amongst other sources, reaches us through the air which we breathe. This is why the various breathing exercises are so important, particularly those of breathing alternately through the nostrils and, still more, conscious attention to this process which starts with the first breath of the child and the last breath of the dying man. Eating is a function of life. Breathing is life itself.

The *ida nadi* (*kyan-ma* in Tibetan) which issues at the left nostril, is feminine. It corresponds to *prajna* and to the moon. The *pingala nadi* (*roma* in Tibetan), issuing at the right nostril, is masculine. It corresponds to *upaya* and to the sun. Inside himself, the yogi will realise the union (*yuganaddha*) of masculine and feminine, of man and woman, *yab* and *yum*, as it is symbolised by the erotic statues. And this blending is accomplished through the central *nadi*, *sushumna* (*dbuma* in Tibetan), at the base of which the other two nadis meet.

I shall not go any further into this question of *nadis*, *chakras* and *pranayama* for two reasons: first, because a number of specialist works exist on the subject and secondly because it is useless to speak of them except in the company of a qualified master. Although it is possible, as all Tibetans allow, to attain Liberation without having practised yoga, it is also possible to practice yoga and achieve all sorts of indubitable physical and psychic results, all kinds of experiences and inner revelations, without progressing one step towards Liberation. The essential remains untouched; true self-knowledge has not been begun. And in between unusual states of consciousness—which are never permanent—being itself remains unchanged, rootless. Moreover, work on the *chakras* is accompanied by the visualisation of forms, colours, syllables, tantric deities, which no amateur could possibly practice. Of course, since Milarepa's yoga connects with reality, by trying to practise it one will always get results: there is an awakening, a movement, current is switched on. Let loose a chimpanzee in a chemical laboratory and things will happen! Liquids will change colour, sparks will fly, vapours will be given off and warning lamps light up. Milarepa's yoga is for specialists, for disciples spending several years with a perfectly qualified teacher. Or for scholars, scrupulously gathering their material, texts, terminology, symbols, relationships and connections between the sects or schools and submitting them to critical analysis. Apart from these two clearly defined attitudes, there is only curiosity and more often lying.

One aspect of Tibetan yoga is of immediate interest and that is its insistence on release and relaxation. No exercise must ever be carried out in a state of tension or constraint. By his self-discipline the yogi frees

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himself from subjection to the primitive forces of the unconscious and passes to the freedom of fully integrated and illuminated consciousness. It is a process of liberation, of expansion and blossoming and not of constraint. Dudjom Rimpoche was showing me various meditation postures one day. 'And now, the most important thing of all,' he remarked, lolling back amongst his cushions with complete unconcern. Lopon Zangpo asked me: 'How do you, recognise a true yogi?' and he gave the answer himself: 'By his laugh', and thereupon roared with laughter.

When we were actually staying in Darjeeling, Thuksey Rimpoche invited me to come every evening to him after my visits and the day's activity, and despite the language difficulty, he made me understand and experience a good deal about relaxation. 'The first step', he said, 'is to loosen your belt. Relaxation of the abdominal muscles is the basis of correct posture. The spine must be straight but the belly perfectly free and relaxed. How can one find one's place and communicate freely with the surrounding universe in a rigid and constrained attitude? Only the man who has found his physical centre can give and take freely with the universe, of which he is part.' The Tibetans place this centre of gravity in the abdomen. Thuksey Rimpoche made me touch his belly, put his hand on mine, showed me how to breathe at the same rhythm as himself and made me feel very distinctly—without the necessity of words—this root, this basis in the abdomen and its psychological importance, how it provides a foundation for thought and feeling. His teaching was very close to that which Professor von Durkheim describes in his remarkable work *Hara, the Vital Centre in Man*. And we know, of course, that the Japanese, who are also Mahayanist Buddhists, when they wish to kill themselves, neither put a bullet in their head nor a knife-thrust through their heart, but commit hara-kiri, by transfixing this vital point in the abdomen, the *hara*. In order to grow and to open oneself to that infinite called by all religions Heaven, one must first be firmly rooted on the earth plane. Otherwise the entire spiritual life finds itself off centre and builds up over the years without the disciple ever having been put in question. It may take all his days and nights but it does not concern him.

Dugpa Thuksey Rimpoche also taught me the meditation posture of the *Kargyud-pa*: the legs are crossed in the lotus seat (*padmasana*) but the arms are straight and extended with the palms upwards, the top of the wrists resting on the thighs. The shoulders are pushed up but the rigid structure of the two arms holds the spinal column upright and although extremely uncomfortable at first, this posture soon enables one

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to relax completely without any slumping of the back and gives unimpeded breathing with movement of the abdomen. Simple! But we had to discover it.

\* \* \*

Meditation makes sense of all the exercises of Tibetan ascetic Buddhism, of all the tantric rites, of all the yoga practices; it is the fulfilment of them all. Everywhere I heard the words—spoken in English—‘meditation’ and ‘deep meditation’, with the *Geluk-pa* as among the Red Hats. But this same word can mean so many different things; from arduous mental gymnastics, given to disciples only to convince them of their own inability, to meditation without form and contemplation of the Void (*shunya*), passing through the various stages of visualisation of symbolic images. All advanced monks and all yogis ‘meditate’. In India amongst the refugees, as also in Tibet round the big monasteries, small, isolated cells are erected, to which a monk can withdraw for days, weeks, months or even years, during which he will see no one and will receive his food through an opening in the wall. And there, the ascetic ‘meditates’.

I can think of no word which has produced more confusion in people’s minds than ‘meditation’. All the various attempts, exercises and efforts which can be classed under this heading require the guidance of a guru, personal guidance suited to the disciple and his spiritual development. Meditation exercises found in books, however faithfully translated from Tibetan precepts, are no more use to the reader than electrical appliances without current and knowledge of the method of use. I will give but one example, culled from my first meeting with Abo Rimpoche at Palampur. Somebody asked: ‘When one is meditating, how can one fight against associations of ideas, thoughts that continually enter the mind?’ ‘Let them come, let them go. If they come, they will go. What comes, goes.’ ‘But I have read descriptions of meditations which consist in struggling to suppress thoughts, in order to still the mind.’—‘The purpose is to convince the disciple that it is impossible. If the source is there, the thoughts must come. Deal with the source. Not the thoughts.’ This was the first conversation Sonam translated for me. We were both at Dharamsala and I was by no means certain that the Dalai Lama and the Indian Minister for Foreign Affairs would give him permission to spend several months of his life with me. But he often returned to this conversation. ‘How lucky you have been,’ he said, ‘to have got down to the heart of the matter right from your very first day.’



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The guru must have seen in you how much you had “meditated” for years past, that is why he has given you such explanations.’ ‘Deal with the source, not with the thoughts.’ In other words, deal with the cause, not with the results, with the root not with the symptoms. It is possible for someone, who really wishes to, to go from the result to the cause. And it is possible to go from any aspect of the phenomenal world to a corresponding aspect of the Principle, to a tantric divinity, to a *dhyani-buddha*.

That is the secret of tantrism.

And of meditation.

\* \* \*

Meditation means the conquest of fear.

The person who really fears death is fortunate. Really fortunate. Because he is facing the real problem, for which all the others are only substitutes. Death is the only certainty. But most human beings manage to slur over that certainty and to live without thinking about it, as if, in their own case, death could be avoided. That is not wisdom. Fear of death is thrust out of sight and, never being confronted, reappears in the form of endless fears and worries, elusive and constantly changing according to the heredity, temperament, character and personal history of each individual—a history which according to the Tibetans goes back before birth, even before conception. Like the Hindus, they cannot conceive of birth without death, death without birth. Ask any Westerner point blank: ‘What is the contrary of death?’ He will certainly reply: ‘Life.’ Put the same question to a Tibetan and he will say without hesitation, ‘Birth.’ Life is the perpetual interplay of death and birth. The Tibetans have a series of meditations based on cemeteries, corpses, bones, etc., which have always horrified our modest and sensitive Europeans, the purpose of which is the realisation that at the root of all fear will be found the fear of death. It is a matter of good taste never to face up to really important realities such as sexuality, the wish to do away with all those who make us aware of our limitations (whether our marriage partner, our parents or our children), and the certainty that all beautiful, young, and well loved bodies and all thinking brains will finish in due course in stinking, worm-eaten putrefaction. For earth is populated by future corpses with a few decades’ respite. Even psychoanalysis, which dared to bring our incestuous and murderous urges into the light of day, has not gone right to the source of life: the fear that inevitably one will become a corpse and then a skeleton.

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All the meditations, rituals and symbolism of the ferocious, blood-thirsty deities are connected with this idea of death. But death for the Tibetans has two meanings. There is the death of the body which terrifies the ego. And there is the death or the dissolution of that ego, which is the promise of resurrection beyond *samsara*. So long as a man has not experienced the certainty of his immortality, he cannot escape fear of the death of his physical body. The comforting promises of religion may satisfy his thoughts and feelings superficially. But in his depths is always that egocentric fear defined as 'body consciousness'. The 'death' of the ego (extinguishing or disappearing of individuality) also terrifies that ego. But this is what frees man from fear of his physical death. It is the supreme blessing. Because of this, those terrible divinities, armed with knives, crowned with skulls, dripping with blood, also possess a serene, welcoming and benevolent aspect. Each divinity has two faces, the one wrathful and the other benign. One and the same principle can be either threatening and destructive or peaceful and positive, according to the way in which we look at it.

Tantrism is the conquest of fear. Because fear is at the same time the product of the illusion of self and its deepest root. The sage who has reached the end of the Way, and whose limitations have been resolved, knows that Reality is one, ultimate and eternal. He can say with full cognisance: 'I am that', or again, 'I abide in you and you in me', 'I am everything.' And 'There is neither past nor future, I neither was nor will be. I simply am.' ('Before Abraham was, I am.') This is *boddhicitta*, Buddhahood, Liberation. But a man who only knows *samsara*, 'the creation', that is to say multiplicity and change, has an obscure yearning for 'One-ness and Eternity' (or immortality). And disregarding manifest reality, he tries desperately to imitate the supreme Truth. His whole behaviour will be a travesty or caricature of Realisation, like the negative and positive in photography. The limited, finite ego, conditioned and always changing, tries to experience: 'I am everything, there is nothing but me' (one-ness, non-dualism) and 'I am' (I am a permanent and stable entity). If there were only me, if all were in me and I in everything, there would be no more fear. I am not frightened of my hand or my foot. They cannot turn against me and do me harm because I am in my hand and my hand is in me. Unfortunately for the sham self (what the Buddhists call the illusion of *atma*) the rest of the world is not within. As long as a man feels himself separate and individual, he is under the threat of death and condemned to die and it cannot be otherwise. Then we must live day after day, minute after minute, with fear and our unconscious

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compensatory mechanisms. It is liberation not only from fears but from *fear* which is the key to the exercises and techniques of Tibetan self-discipline.

Some of the Tibetan meditations consist in undergoing voluntarily such and such a form of fear and are accompanied by cries, choking, shuddering and convulsions. I am thinking in particular of the *tchöd* in its 'terrifying aspect'. The disciple fights with the monsters and terrors which he hides within himself and which are at last brought up to the conscious level. He sees them, defies them, tears off their mask and discovers that they can do no more against him. And this leads to freedom from all repulsion and horror, starting with the horror inspired by so-called perverted or criminal thoughts. Since these 'monsters' are part of us, let us face the fact.

This is why tantrism can help us under contemporary conditions of life, far from the 'peace of the cloister', in the midst of tumult and noise, among fears and desires. Every man, every woman, dreams of stillness, serenity, silence ('Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, luxe, calme et volupté'). Some may experience this inner 'peace' by the lakeside or at sea, others on the mountain-tops or in the snowfields. Many seek it in sexual union, some find it in the noise and excitement of the dance hall, or even in face of danger, fighting or under bombardment: then they cease to feel this dull, indefinable anguish. Those who practice meditation know that they can find a 'provisional' peace after fifteen minutes or perhaps an hour of controlled thought or breathing exercises. It is found too in the marvellous experience of retreat into a monastery. *But this serenity never lasts.* Rebellion, anger, anguish, irresistible desire, doubts, contradictions all tear us away from that 'entering in upon oneself' and that 'silence' which too often are the exclusive and desperate ambition of disciples and *sadhakas*. Tantrism on the contrary teaches us to make use of obstacles, of the emotions and impulses which 'take' us and 'carry us off'. It is when one is most violently involved, apparently as far as possible from peace or stillness, that a complete reversal is possible. For these violent emotions halt the functioning of discursive thought and concentrate dispersed energy. Sometimes they are deliberately provoked by the gurus.

The use of the right technique at the right moment makes it possible to see oneself and to understand. The true friends of the seeker of wisdom are those angers, despairs, violence, enthusiasms, excitement, passions, impulses and aversions to which we are all subject. Tantrism warns us against the most dangerous temptation of the spiritual seeker:

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to leave on one side one's rages and reactions; to refuse to take them into account and to construct outside of them a régime of self-discipline; to carry out exercises, to experience meditation, concentration, sublime ecstasies and high enlightenment in which, quite simply, the real being takes no part. How then can one cherish the slightest hope for the slightest deliverance from fear and for the slightest peace?

★ ★ ★

I shall now attempt to summarise the teaching of the Tibetan gurus from the point of view of making sense for a non-Buddhist European, whether atheist or Christian. These conclusions are based on what I have understood of the *zog-chen* of the *Nyingma-pa*, considered to be the heart, summit and centre of the Way. Truly, it was amongst the *Nyingma-pa*, against whom other Tibetans, other Buddhists and many Westerners have brought so many accusations of immorality, sorcery and black magic, that I found some of the gurus who most utterly convinced me.

But I must first of all make clear a distinction as fundamental amongst the Tibetans as the distinction between absolute and relative Truth. That is the difference between the Way of Emancipation and the Way of Powers. Both these ways are considered legitimate in human society but they can never be placed on the same plane. The Way of Powers also makes use of tantric science, and some specialise in this direction, study with a Master after initiation and then acquire disciples themselves. But all the results obtained, whether good or bad, remain in *samsara*, in the world of time, space, and causality, even where the laws thereof appear to have been miraculously violated. As far as powers are concerned, since the eighteenth century no Westerner need fear competition; and no tantric magician has taken colour photographs of the moon, or has it in his power to destroy in a few minutes the whole of the United States and Russia. As regards freedom or peace, that is to say total absence of fear of any kind, let us look around us—need one say more?

The men who control American and Russian atomic power certainly have such 'powers' as were never dreamt of. Do they live in peace? Or in fear? The yogi or lama who can read the thoughts of others and impose his will upon them, who can make rain or prevent rain, cure and make ill, who can appear in two places at once, who can predict the future, etc.—has he found Emancipation and Peace? No. He has studied and mastered one aspect of *samsara*, or multiplicity and change. And

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that is all. He himself is not free. The Sage, the Awakened One, the Delivered One has found the everlasting peace which passeth all understanding, deliverance from all desire and therefore from all fear. *Samsara* has no further hold on him, in any form. He is, in the omnipresent and eternal here and now. He is 'without a second', without another, he exists in everything and everything exists in him. And what does he do? He loves. He loves his neighbour as himself. And he gives expression to that love as long as he is in the physical body. He has neither goal nor task to accomplish. But a task is accomplished through him and sometimes a tremendous task which changes part of the face of the globe for several centuries.

Since some Tibetan gurus do have 'powers' (they sought first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness and the 'powers' were added unto them), their establishment in egolessness, in love, in peace and victory over fear is all the more significant. These supermen, compared with whom the heroes of our world—the James Bonds and the Tarzans, the mighty shark von Something or other, the all powerful magnate, John D. Something Else—cut a poor figure, are content to be and to love.

That is why in this book about the Tibetan lamas there is so little concerning the gaining of 'powers'—not only over others but over oneself. Powerful or not, ego is always ego, separated and therefore threatened, subject to time and to destruction. Salvation is in reconciliation and one-ness with all and everyone, and in the knowledge that what changes is only an aspect of what is there eternally. Everything changes but the acceptance of change. This is what the *zog-chen* teaches. *Zog-chen*, which in some way resembles *zen*, is utterly simple. And yet it is considered by the *Nyingma-pa* to be the summit of the pyramid, available only to those who have passed through the other initiations and forms of self-discipline; or to those who are especially eager, decided and determined. *Zog-chen* is a way of being. It is easy to describe but difficult to put into practice. The guru asks: 'Be present. Be yourself. You are here, objects are here. The others are here. They are here for you only because you see them.' It is so simple; there is so little mystery about it that those who have not sought for long, tried, experimented, achieved, lost and achieved again and lost again, must find this highest teaching very elementary. 'If that is all it is, your Tibetans have not come up with anything very new.' And yet. . . .

When considering Tibetan techniques as a whole, one must make allowance for relative levels of truth. The same mathematics are not

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taught in the primary school as at the university. In the same way, a guru will speak a certain language and teach certain exercises to some disciples. Later, or to other disciples, he will speak a different language, and exercises, which seemed once so important, will lose all interest. This is something which always upsets the logical mind of the European. 'Either it is important or it is not important. For a certain time an exercise has to be taken seriously, then, suddenly, you say it is worthless, meaningless. What does this mean?'

In fact, on the Way, of self discipline there are only special cases. Every moment of every disciple is a special case. No question, however indifferent and objective it might seem to be, is *a* question. It is always *my* question. Sex does not exist; it is *my* sex. *The* problem of death does not exist, it is *my* death which raises the problem. In this sense it is quite false and anti-Tibetan to write, as I do here, for an anonymous public, whereas everyone at every moment represents a question in themselves, and the only true reply is to *that* question. To write in a general way about the Path is a betrayal. Having said which, I will now return to *zog-chen*.

In contrast to the so-called subordinate tantras, which are based on means such as visualisation of divinities, and on their cults, *zog-chen* is fundamentally non-dualistic. It leads to the cessation of all concepts, ideas and images, of all 'opinions' arising from dualism, and likewise all language. Only Stillness is real, noise and turmoil are illusion. Stillness is. Noise is not. *Shunyata* is, and non-being cannot enter. Like all tantrism, *zog-chen* is founded on the idea of transmutation, just as in alchemical language lead was transmuted into gold. This transmutation is possible because the Element of Buddha Nature is in all living beings. The essence of Buddhahood is in us and that is what makes this transmutation possible. Transmutation as opposed to all that is refusal, inhibition and repression. This discipline must take everything into account because everything is the expression of the same single drive of the limited towards the limitless, of the conditioned towards the unconditioned. To reject or deny anything is to run the risk of a violent reaction, or to become involved in a terribly long journey. Tibetans make frequent use of a classic comparison: to pick the leaves off a tree one by one instead of digging it up by the roots. The tree is taken to be the ego in the sense given to the word by the Buddhists: consciousness of separation and of time, due to the illusion of self perceived as an entity, the limiting of the being to the process of growth, decline and death. The *zog-chen* masters often speak of a state beyond time, which Sonam

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translated as timeless time. The Hindus speak of the Eternal Present. And according to *zog-chen* the means of reaching this state are to live totally and perfectly in the thoughtless instant, at each moment, without reference to the notions of past, present or future. But we are enslaved to the future, that is, to the fears and apprehensions which prevent us from being 'as little children' or being *jivan mukta* (living in the present) because of our attachment to the past. But for the Tibetans, that which is in the unconscious goes back much further than the early years or days or even the foetal period, to an indefinitely distant past over which, because it has left its marks, the very experienced ascetic may have some control. The unconscious is sometimes described as 'latent tendencies', that is to say 'hidden' tendencies. How to overcome a hidden adversary? It must be compelled to appear. One must get back to the origin of the symptoms, emotions and reactions. One example: association of ideas, which is the number one enemy of fervent meditators, number one friend of the *zog-chen* disciples, because it is the thread that connects us with our 'latent tendency'. If the thought process ceases, enslavement is at an end, the Tibetans are quite definite about this. How often I have heard them say: 'It is the thought process which chains us to *samsara*'. And also: 'Challenge thoughts!' But as long as the tree is there, the leaves will grow again. The thoughts which disturb meditation will continue to disturb it after twenty years of effort to put the attention on to something else—they will only stop if the cause, that is to say a repressed unsatisfied desire or a secret fear, no longer exists in the depths.

*Zog-chen* is life lived in the present moment and attention to that which is. Dudjom Rimpoche, and then Sonam, taught me to look at any object in the room in which we found ourselves without judging or comparing *but always taking into account the idea of shunyata, of the void and the relationship with the beholder, who constructs what he sees, who by means of intermittent energy* (of which each flash is separated by a *bardo*), sees something, *which exists as he conceives it.*

Simple awareness is the heart of the Way. But it is difficult because we carry inside us the burden of the past, which shuts us out of timelessness. Many people have attempted it for years without success. For this reason mandalas, mantras, visualisation with its symbolism, and yoga, which bring to the surface, into consciousness, the forces and principles (personal or common to all humanity) hidden in the depths of our being, are brought into play. But there are other methods which can achieve this. Each man and each woman is an infinitely rich and complex

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world. The analogy of Man and the Universe is also a fundamental idea of the Tibetans. One cannot find out about oneself in a day. Even the Short Way with its swift enlightenment accepts the necessity of a subsequent ordering of this physical world in the light of revealed Truth.

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I would like to stress that Dudjom Rinpoche and all the other gurus mentioned in this account were quite definite as to the inanity of a personal quest which fosters instead of dissipates the illusion of self. *How do lamas reconcile the essential Buddhist idea of the disappearance of the ego and of desire with the equally essential tantric principle that nothing which this ego expresses may be refused or denied? By the principle of transmutation.* The baby is transformed into an adult, the caterpillar into a butterfly, the flower into fruit, the acorn into an oak and the illusion of self into the Buddha Nature. What 'illusion of self'? Let us deal with it simply: the one who replies: 'Yes, it's me' when someone calls up on the phone, 'Hallo, is that you?' Me, me, me, to me, mine; yes, yes, I want; no, no, I don't want. That is the seed from which the Buddha will grow, Man in the image of God.

In *zog-chen* tantrism, there is no question of destroying by force this egotistical, sinful and miserable self, nor of getting rid of it by mutilating or repressing it; lust, hatred, cupidity, discouragement, laziness, heaviness, all contrary to the Buddha's sutras, the horror of seeing oneself as one is, this is the lead which becomes gold. At present it seems that this ego, this me, is an obstacle to liberation, to transcendent consciousness (boddhicitta). Must I kill it out today, since the limited ego must in any case die before the limitless Absolute is revealed? Can one make a fruit by killing or mutilating a flower, or an adult of a child by mutilating or killing it psychologically? Is it by spiritual mutilation or killing that a Buddha, a *jivan-mukta*, can be made out of an adult? Tantrism affirms that transmutation can never be denial or destruction and Buddhahood is potentially present in the human being. The whole of creation will one day attain to Buddhahood. The five poisonous desires have not to be denied but used as a method for the realisation of Buddhahood. And the tantrist says: Do not be afraid of the five poisons which you take to be your enemies. Realise the non-existence of the ego. And do not make this process impossible by clinging to what no longer exists and refusing to grow, refusing the process of death—birth, death—birth.

It is a very subtle attitude. The lamas also speak of refraining from



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struggle and of spontaneity. Does this mean that one must live in the lowest possible way, allowing oneself complete licence, just letting oneself be carried away by the current? No, because such licence always leads to the rejection of evolution, of transmutation and realisation. The disciple must give up his habitual ways, his desire to continue tomorrow what was experienced today. But the beginner should not suppress his impulses prematurely, before he has the experience of *shunyata*. *Zog-chen* is rooted in manifestation. It does not only reach to the sky, it rests also on the ground. Because it knows that *samsara* and *nirvana* are one and the same. *Nothing is more realistic than this teaching which speaks all the time of illusion and the illusory; no method takes more account of what is than this one, which proves that nothing exists outside the mind of the disciple.* It is an amazing school of Truth, which gathers together all the threads of relative Truth so as to lead back to Absolute Truth. 'Truth will set you free', runs the Gospel. Neither Faith, nor Hope nor Charity, but Truth! A slave is free when he is given his liberty and the only thing which can liberate a man is to go to the end of truth, to the end of what is. To approach our own truth is the key which makes sense of the most baffling Tibetan disciplines with their monstrous, distorted deities, their horror brought out into the light of day, their heroism and their beauty. These ascetic disciplines are a means of knowing oneself. 'Could I but know myself, I would know Thee.'

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The study of Tibetan refugees in India can be undertaken from many points of view. There is the political aspect: one may regard the Chinese Peoples' Republic with favour or not. There is a sociological approach: is the Tibetan society the last example of a traditional civilisation, based on metaphysical principles or, on the contrary, a social structure rooted in oppression and barbarism, as the Chinese aver, and as a certain number of respectable Westerners also believe? There is also the question of aid to the Tibetan refugees, how best to help lay people and monks: in most countries of importance there exist Tibetan Aid Associations.

My own contribution, for what it is worth, is the certainty—to which I am now bearing witness—that during 1964-1965, and again in 1967, I met in Sikkim and in India a great number of exceptional Masters. I hoped to discover one and I found twenty. And this happened without any of the mystery or legend which generally surrounds Tibetan matters.

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The names of these masters are known, as also where they are to be found. Unfortunately, they are often in military zones, for which an entry permit is required. For Sikkim it is almost impossible to obtain a permit and, unfortunately, the great Gyalwa Karmapa is living near Gangtok. But these masters exist. They are representative of a generation which is a pure product of Tibet. Sonam, who travelled so widely in Tibet, was quite definite: the men who have found refuge in India are the spiritual *élite*.

But there is no guarantee that this wealth of wisdom will be preserved as it is. For young *tulkus*, subjected to modern education in order not to appear outlandish survivals to the next generation of Tibetans educated in India, the temptations are great. Tibetan friends have told me also that those lamas who have gone out into the world to work in Universities and Institutes have considerable problems. Many would have made excellent monks and continued to develop, if they had remained in Tibet, but they find it difficult to preserve the quality of their inner life under the conditions which they encounter pretty well everywhere, more especially the undiscerning veneration and over hasty devotion accorded them by emotional admirers. As a matter of fact, it is just this Western tendency to pretend that one has found a great master, when it is not the case, which prepares the ground so ill for the coming—at least theoretically possible—of genuine *jivan muktas*.

I am well aware of the criticisms brought by many writers against the Tibetans, against their administration, the system of serfdom, the corruptness of the monks. I know that there is a certain amount of truth in these accusations. But what I am quite certain of is that the Tibetans, as I knew them in India and Sikkim, far from disappointing me, proved that all the good related of them is equally true. The reality bears out the reputation. And I am not talking about occult or magical powers, nor of miraculous phenomena, which do not particularly interest me, but of wisdom, knowledge and love. And of that which is priceless, which really is living water found in the desert, the presence of men worthy to be called Perfect, to be called Buddhas. I am quite certain that in the case of several of the Rinpoches with whom I had to do, the lead had been transmuted into gold.

I have written about them honestly, as best I could. I am not a specialist in these matters and my theoretical competence is limited. I have simply borne witness to what I have lived through.

## LETTER BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

PARIS, August 1966

*Sonam,*

During the months we spent together among the sages and spiritual masters of Tibet, we both tried after our fashion to be completely honest, and to serve instead of be served. We knew difficult moments—sometimes very difficult ones—and great happiness.

Well, Sonam, you know what the Tibetan gurus consented to do for me and what I owe to them, and it was you who made this wonder possible—this wonder which repeated itself from day to day. But you also know, you helped me to understand, what it means to find one's master and become a pupil. My own guide is not a Tibetan but a Hindu. He is not at all famous, and you are one of the very few people who knows his name. You will understand, Sonam, that I cannot dedicate this 'Message of the Tibetans' to any one of those Rinpoches whom I loved so well, and before whom I prostrated myself so often in the manner of your country, but only to 'Swamiji'.

*Arnaud*

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I refrain from mentioning the works of certain celebrated Western scholars, some passages of which I showed to the lamas, and which caused them considerable astonishment.

