

TIBETAN MEDITATION



S. K. RAMACHANDRA RAO

Both Buddhism and Tantra are systems that emphasize meditation as the basic approach for understanding reality and fulfilling human destiny. When the two systems fused, as they did in Vajrayana which flourished in Tibet, an elaborate thought structure was evolved to facilitate meditational exercises.

The present book seeks to reconstruct this thought-structure, based on the material gathered from Sanskrit sources, Tibetan manuscripts and oral precepts from meditation masters. Much of the material included here is appearing in print for the first time.

The book will be found useful for appreciating the rationale of Vajrayana meditation. It will also help one who is interested in practical involvement with meditation.

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THEORY AND PRACTICE

S.K. RAMACHANDRA RAO



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Dedicated to my Teachers :

Venerable Narada Mahathera of Vajirarama,
Colombo, Sri Lanka, who introduced me
to the method of Mindfulness,
Venerable Souitu Nakagawa of Toganji Temple,
Japan, who initiated me into Zazen practice,
and
Venerable Jamphel Shen-phen of Rgyud-med
Monastery, Gurupura (Karanataka), India,
who explained to me the importance
of Nagarjuna in Vajrayana.

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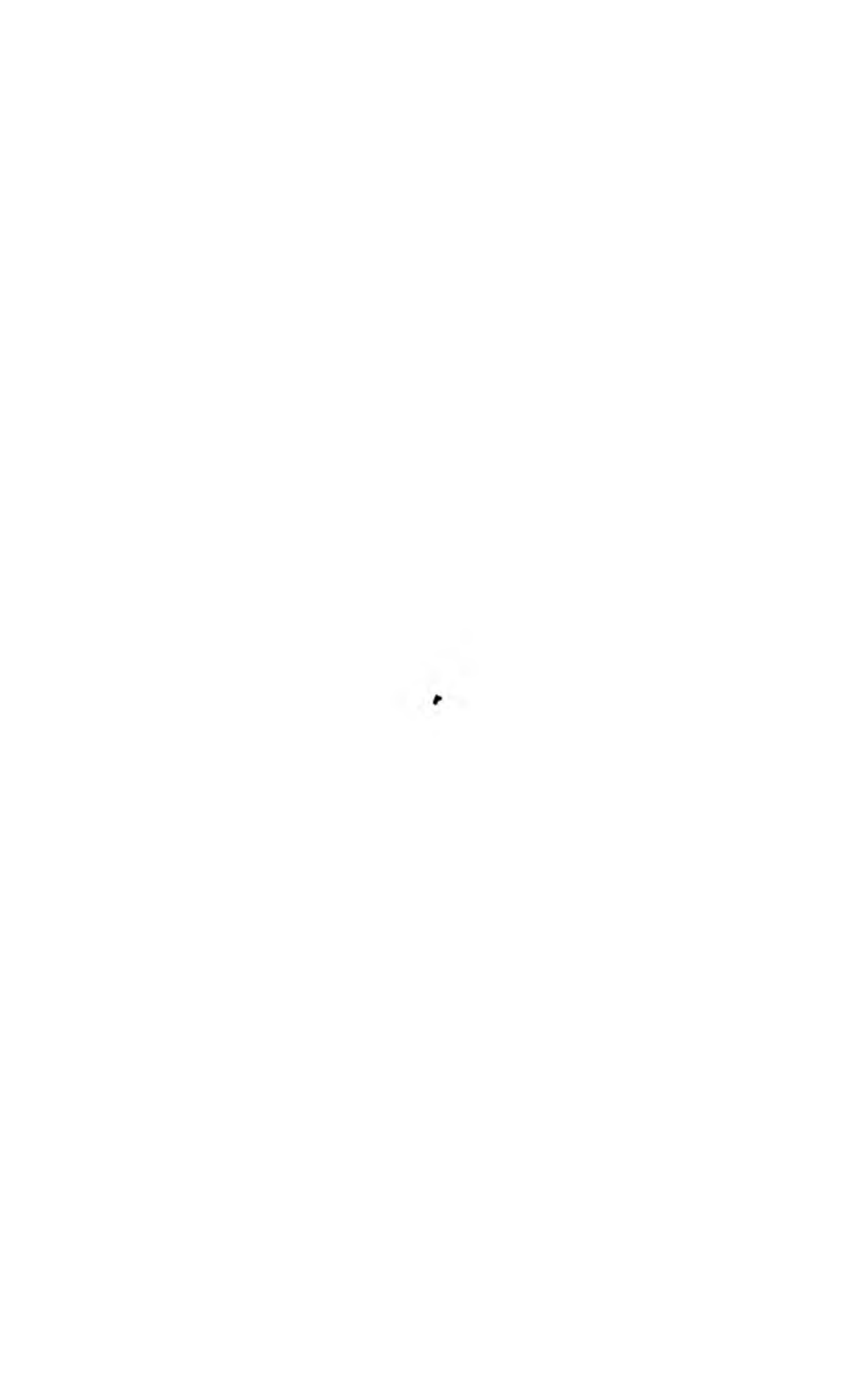
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METHODS



Why Meditation?

The soles of our feet are naturally soft and sensitive. They could readily be pricked by thorns which are hard and sharp. To avoid being pricked you should either not step on the thorn at all, or step on it wearing a shoe. This is an illustration offered in one of the commentaries on Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra*. We are like the soles of the feet, not all of us, but those of us who are sensitive; and the world around us can be like thorns. A speck of dirt makes no impact when it falls on our hands or feet; it is not even noticed. But the same tiny particle when it gets into the eye can be bothersome in the extreme. The pricks of the world go unnoticed, or are ignored when noticed, by a vast majority of humans; they are taken for granted and nothing is sought to be done with regard to them. But there are some sensitive people who are bothered by these ills. It is this sensitivity that prompts them to higher developments.

The stress in life is due to the harassment of the individual by the environment. The environmental impact is impersonal, neutral, cold, and callous. The phenomenal events have a logic of their own, altogether unrelated to our needs and fears. They are not even 'aware' of our existence; they are in fact not designed to be so aware. But we, on our part, can hardly ignore them; we are so designed that we are unceasingly aware of them while we are awake. And our sense-organs select and limit what and how much of our environment we should be

aware. The environment will thus be perceived by the individual, neither in its entirety nor in its objectivity, but as transformed by our motivations and expectations, prejudices and frustrations, evaluations and aspirations. We, therefore, tend to look upon the world as though the world were interested in us, as if it was concerned with us.

But when our bias is confronted with the stern but natural indifference of the environment, we call nature unsympathetic and hostile. We begin to perceive 'its' pricks and poundings, which are really our own projections. We imagine that the world is harassing the individual, and that the environment is providing stresses for us to cope with. The stresses are really in ourselves and they are of our own making. We externalize the sources of our stress and set about changing the environmental factors and patterns to eliminate or at least minimize the stress. Some experience will teach us, if we are willing enough to be taught, that the world is beyond our control, that the environmental events cannot be ordered about.

The environment has always been found by man to be stress-producing. Science and technology, trade and territorial ownership have contributed liberally to what we call progress; and along with progress, stresses have also mounted. Every year for several decades now, there are new needs to be satisfied, new challenges to be faced, and new problems to be solved. The more civilized and sophisticated man is, the greater is the impact of stress on him. Progress and tension have become unavoidable concomitants in the modern world.

The soles of our feet, in other words, have become sensitive, and the thorns have become sharp. We must either withdraw ourselves from the world, or wear a protective covering. Withdrawal can only be occasional, brief and partial. Total withdrawal is impossible; there is really no way of running away from the world. We are after all a part of the world, and our very being incorporates the world. Even if we can physically isolate ourselves, our minds are filled by the world, and the world's hold on our mind is subtle but strong, delicate yet deep. The only feasible alternative, therefore, is to wear a protective armour to ward off the hard impact.

Sensitive folk are feverishly seeking ways and means of keeping the world's pressure at bay as much as possible and for

as long as it can last. Endowed by nature with big brains, man has invented several buffers and shock-absorbers. Religious flights, poetic fancies, alcoholic inebriation, drug ingestion, artificially induced euphoric states and spells of insensitivity have been tried. An attempt to deaden the feeling apparatus by a surfeit of material comforts has been a continuous preoccupation. Man has tried to escape the painful perception of stress by hurling himself headlong into a maddening eddy of complex gadgets. And he has sought to defend his tottering ego by asking impossible questions based on partial cerebrations.

These are all no doubt intended to serve as coverings for the sensitive soles of our feet, designed to avoid the sharp pricks and hard knocks from the world. But they are coverings that sooner or later give way, and fall off. And, what is worse, the coverings themselves may start pricking and pounding.

The early man discovered, and the modern man is rediscovering, that meditation is a covering that does not easily give way, and that does not prick and pound in its own turn. It can not only absorb the shock, but can sustain and support the individual. Its gains are not only protective and preventive; they can be positive and constructive.

Meditation is undoubtedly one of the earliest methods that man has devised for eliminating stress and integrating the individual. But it has never been popular or persisting. Its appeal in every generation has been confined to the few, the few who are sensitive. The reason for this paradox is not far to seek. In its initial stages it appears forbidding and unrewarding. It insists on a temporary or permanent withdrawal even from the pleasant aspects of the environment. It consists of privations, exercises and a rigid regimen. It frequently entails dependence on a competent guide, who is of course hard to find. And, it is difficult to transmit except through personal contact.

Tibet and India

India and Tibet have been in continuous cultural contact since very ancient times. Tibet has looked upon India as its sacred land, the land of its religion; and India has looked upon 'Bhoṭa' (the Indian name for Tibet) as its religious frontier. But the formal Indianization of Tibetan religion began around 700 A.D. Of the Indian yogis who then made a deep impact upon the Tibetan imagination, the foremost was Padma-saṃbhava, whom Tibetans to this day revere as the 'precious guru'. With him entered into Tibet not only Indian magic and metaphysics but also Indian methods of meditation.

Tibetan meditation is essentially Indian in its orientation as well as background. But some of its aspects have disappeared from the Indian context. The reason for this strange occurrence is to be sought in the total destruction of the medieval Indian Universities (like Nālandā, Vikramaśīlā and Jāgaddala) in Magadha during the Muslim invasion in the thirteenth century. These centres of learning were the scenes of intensive literary and Tantra-Yoga activities of some of the eminent Siddhas (like Śānti-pa, Nāro-pā, Atīśa-Dīpaṃkara and Maitrī-pa), who had reconciled the traditional Yoga with the Yoga of Mahāyāna innovation. The Vajrayāna that emerged as a result of this confluence was undoubtedly the continuation of Indian tradition, although its spread was on the other side of the Himalayan ranges.

The Indian Siddhas, battered by the severity of religious

persecution in Magadha, fled to the security, if also isolation, of the Himalayan region, with their books and their practices. Tibet not only welcomed them warmly, but eagerly accepted their religious leadership. This was because hundreds of Tibetan scholars were already acquainted with this brand of Tantra-Yoga as students in the Magadha Universities. In fact, many Sanskrit texts had already been translated into the Tibetan language; and there were many Tibetans who were excellent scholars in Sanskrit. The Siddha who went to Tibet then, somewhat like the Tibetan Lamas who have come to India now, felt at home in Tibet and continued the Vajrayāna tradition there. Many Sanskrit texts concerning the Tantra-Yoga were translated into Tibetan, and numerous new treatises were written by Indian Panditas and Siddhas in the Tibetan language expounding the Vajrayāna synthesis in Indian tradition. This explains how a large number of Sanskrit works which are no longer extant in India are available in Tibet, some in original but most of them in translations.

There was a break in the continuity of Tantra-Yoga tradition in India during the unsettled period after the seventh century A.D. But, fortunately, the reconstruction of this phase is to an extent possible with the aid of the religious history of Tibet. Although possible, it is by no means an easy task because of ramifications and altered emphasis on certain aspects in that country. An initial look would suggest that the Tantra-Yoga tradition in Tibet as almost an indigenous one, because of the vast differences in details and forms from its Indian model. But a closer look would convince one that it is essentially Indian and that it was assimilated into the Traditional tradition. While the basic manuals and guide-books, and the theoretical presuppositions and arguments are no doubt Indian, there has been a remarkable development in this field in Tibet, owing to the genius of the Tibetan masters. Saved from the uncertain political wrangles that were then so peculiar to India, they could concentrate on the practical aspects of the Indian tradition in the quiet seclusion of their monasteries. A land of silence and loneliness, Tibet perhaps was peculiarly set to develop a mystical and meditational religion. Many of the saints in that country were remarkable for their perseverance in practice, for their extraordinary introspective bent of mind,

and for their striking originality in expounding meditational methods. A rich literature concerning Tantra-Yoga has therefore grown steadily in Tibet; and luckily a valuable bulk of it has been preserved, despite historical vicissitudes.

There have been both elaborate and brief commentaries in Tibetan on all the major texts of Indian origin. What are more valuable, however, are the 'oral precepts' and 'personal notes' in the zealous possession of many lama-masters. They are naturally looked upon as precious and confidential; they are communicated to the practitioner only after initiation and successful completion of preliminary practice. Some of the oral precepts have been committed to writing, and some personal notes have indeed been made public. Much of such material, however, is in manuscripts and in the personal possession of lamas.

LEVELS OF LIFE

In the Tibetan way of thinking, living beings are classified under three broad divisions. Each division is described as a meeting place (*hDu*) of kindred spirits, viz., beings with similar faculties of perception and action. But it is also a combination of particular aspects of life. The distinguishing feature in the divisions is the presence or absence of 'conscious conception' (*hDu-Shes*, in Sanskrit *saṃ-jñā*), the capacity to think and reason, to be aware of oneself and the surrounding. The world is a concatenation of these divisions and aspects; it is indeed a 'confection' (*hDu-Byid*, in Sanskrit *saṃ-skāra*). The basic idea is one of coming together, a patterning of factors and events.

The first division of living beings is characterized by the obvious presence of the thinking faculty, of the capacity, to reason (*Shes*). Human beings are included in this group. The second is distinguished by the absence of this faculty, and it includes higher animals that operate not on reason but on the basis of instincts and impulses. The third division comprises of the lower animals that do not appear to have even instincts or impulses. The Tibetan nomenclature for the last division, "without either the presence or absence of thinking" (*hDu-Shes-med-Min*), suggests the inapplicability of the criterion of reason for this group. The first division is rational and moral, the second arational and amoral; and for the third group the ideas of reason or morality do not apply.

Among the human beings who constitute the first division, there are again three groups described in Tibetan as the three 'ways' (*CHen-pai Lam*). First, there are the 'natural' persons. Although they can reason, they hardly ever bother to exercise that faculty beyond the common problems of daily life. They follow their natural inclinations, and seek to satisfy their bodily urges and appetites; they are mere worldlings, with no higher aspirations. Their spiritual orientations are minimal, if not totally absent. The second group consists of more advanced folk, who are not only aware of higher values in life but strive towards them to a limited extent. They are religious, but they are also involved deeply in the world. Their concern is to strike the most advantageous bargain between this world and the values beyond. The third group is composed of more evolved human beings, who can reasonably be called saints. They are devoted to the religious goal to the entire exclusion of worldly involvement.

There is an interesting parallel in Buddhist philosophical thought. The context of course is different, but the division is similar. It is the notion of 'three-fold fields' (*KHams-gSum*) or what may be styled levels of reality. The 'field of Desire' (*Kāmadhātu*, Tib. *aDod-pai Khams*) is composed of the external physical world as well as the heavenly regions which can be obtained by desires. This is the normal world, and the first group of 'natural' folk abides in this sphere. Above this is the 'field of Form' (*rūpaloka*, Tib. *gZugs-kyi Khams*), composed principally of mental formations (thoughts and images) and private reconstructions of the external world. This is the world of values and meanings, relations and judgments. It is here that the second group of advanced folk functions. Higher than this level is the 'field of non-Form' (*arūpaloka*, Tib. *gZugs-med-pahi KHams*). This sphere is nearer to reality, inasmuch as it is free both from objective presentations and subjective representations. The phenomenal aspect of reality has here almost been suspended. The third of the above groups of human beings, composed of saints, can perceive this sphere and abide in it.

It is to be noted, however, that no text, Indian or Tibetan, contains any suggestion of the correspondence between the three groups of human beings and the three fields of functioning. It is only in the oral tradition that the parallelism is indicated.

The religion in Tibet, being Tantrik in essential orientation, naturally idealizes the status of the saint and attaches great value to meditational practices. But there is a ready recognition that the first group of human beings are the most numerous; the bulk of mankind anywhere in the world gets in here. Religion addresses itself to them with grave misgivings. But the second group, while not so numerous, is considerably vast. Religion is more hopeful of them, although limitations are of course there. The religion prescribed for them is mainly a pattern of virtuous living, pious ~~transaction~~, ~~prayer~~ and worship. Faith in mind (*Dad-pa*), recitation of texts or religion in speech (*CHos-hDon*), and in body prostrations (*PHyag*) and circumambulations (*bsKor-ba*), together with offerings (*mCHod-pa*); these constitute the essential functional religion for the Tibetan laity. Meditational practice is not obligatory for them. Even among the ordained monks, its employment may be said to be minimal.

But those who come together in the third group are the more earnest among the laity as well as among monastic settlements. Meditation occupies in their life a favoured position. They are well on the 'way' (*Lam*), in the direction of the goal. For them the 'road is open' (*Lam-Tar*); there are no obstructions either from the field of Desire or from that of Form. It is necessary for such a wayfarer to choose, accept, and follow 'the guide on the road' (*Lam-mKHan*), viz., a teacher, usually within monastic settlements.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

There is in every religion an inevitable distinction between theory and practice. And although all religions emphasize the greater value of practice, the theory invariably succeeds in dominating. It is, therefore, that the strict Tantrik outlook prescribes exclusive attention to practice. But practice should draw its inspiration and sustenance from theory. Like India, Tibet also has encountered this paradox.

Tibetan canon is relatively vast; it comprises of hundreds of texts which are practical in import, besides a much larger quantity of purely theoretical literature. And there are hundreds of manuals which seek to explain the canonical texts of practical import. There are scholars who specialize in this aspect of the Canon, and their help is invaluable for hermits who devote

themselves exclusively to practice. There are teachers who explain texts, prepare manuals, and instruct the practitioner. There are also masters, who are more involved in practice. But more important than these two classes of guides are the 'secret preceptors' (*gSang-sTon*), who can explain practical details on the basis of their own experiences and relate them to theoretical formulations in the texts.

Tibetan Buddhism, being Tantrik, has solved this problem of Theory-Practice (*rTogs-sPyod*) with an emphasis on the latter. The serious student is recommended to plan his career in three phases: study (*THos*, 'hearing', Skt. *Śravaṇa*), reflection (*bSam*—'thinking', 'considering', Skt. *manana*), and contemplation (*sGrub*—'carrying out', 'performing', or *sGom*, 'meditation', Skt. *nidhidhyāsana* or *dhyāna*). The usual advice is to study the doctrine first, then master it, and finally set about to practise it. Study is a necessary preparation, and its value is not ignored. bLa-Ma Sangs-Pa counseled rMog-CHog-Pa, who was only 17:

You should study in your youth. If you begin to meditate without having first studied, the demons may carry you away!

The import is that meditational exercises without intelligent direction may lead one astray; instead of focussing the aspirant's life purposefully, it drives him to get lost in a hopeless maze. It is important that the experience and judgment of previous masters must be available for the beginner, both to prompt and warn him. Meditation is designed to bring about a change in the interior of the aspirant's life. The change must be orderly and beneficial.

Urgyan-Pa (born 1230), who was celebrated as a *mahāsiddha* ('eminent adept') resolved even as a boy:

I shall study first. And, then, practice. I shall, then, know the difference between the present state of my mind and the state of my mind in meditation.

Meditation is described as "removal of the wall that separates this life from the next".

Books are, therefore, considered an important equipment of every lama, even if he intends becoming a hermit. Every monastery guards its library with remarkable zeal, and the fame of a monastery is to a considerable extent dependent upon the size of its library. Books of practical value are carefully secreted, and are not readily made available to the uninitiated. During initiation, it is customary to place such a book on the head of the aspirant, signifying a formal transmission of wisdom contained in it. An advice that is frequently repeated is:

There is no benefit of a *kalyāṇamitra* except in books.

But this importance accorded to books is not unqualified. There is a warning frequently given that too much of involvement with books is likely to render one indifferent to meditation. Sharpening the mind may deaden the heart; and preoccupation with acquisition of bookish knowledge may preclude wisdom from dawning. The *Blue Annals* records the words of the eminent master KHu (born 1191 A.D.):

Images and books are too numerous! We should practise meditation. A single hermit is better than a hundred *Prajñāpāramitā* texts in a hundred thousand verses (*śatasāhasrikā*), written in gold!

There is a pretty story to illustrate the relative value of books and meditation. rNa of sPar-PHu, proud of his learning, went to meet the meditation master hGro-mGon (1110-1170 A.D.) at the PHag-Ma-Gru monastery. The master welcomed him and made an imprint of a splendid lotus flower in brown sugar, and offered it to the visitor. The visiting scholar turned it over and over in his hands, and admired its beauty. However, he would not eat it, because he could not bring himself to cut that charming piece into bits. Thereupon, the master took the piece from the visitor's hands, broke it into two bits, and gave the bits back to him, saying "Now, eat". The scholar ate the pieces and enjoyed their taste. The master explained:

Your studies are like this imprint of the lotus flower. You could hold the imprint in your hand and admire its form. But you could not enjoy its taste until you broke it up and put it into your mouth! Scholarship is a mere form; it would

be useless unless it is brought into your own experience by meditation. The purpose of all this learning is to help meditation. You must focus your attention on that.

The teaching of hGro-mGon came to be known as "the taste of brown sugar." rNa took lessons from him in meditation and soon became as adept (*siddha*). Later, as many as five hundred hermits gathered round him to learn meditation. He was celebrated as "the greatest in wisdom". Because of the monastery he established at sPar-PHu, he became known as sPar-PHu-Ba. Towards the close of his life he not only wrote manuals on Nāgārjuna's Six Treatises, but preached extensively. He used to say: "First meditate, and then preach and continue the lineage."

Theory thus would be proper only when practice has accomplished its end. It can never be a substitute for practice. Such was the insistence of the old masters on practice that long years were diligently spent in seclusion before an involvement with theory could begin. Preaching was a necessary duty on the part of a lama, because his compassion towards all beings must be expressed in transmitting the excellent doctrine. This is a familiar Mahāyāna attitude. The vow of the bodhisattva (and of every earnest lama that seeks to reach this status) is to labour for the welfare of all beings. And preaching is the major mode so far as a lama is concerned. But, for preaching to be effective, it is necessary to meditate first. "First meditate, and then preach."

It may, however, so happen that meditation covers the major period of life of a serious student. For instance, sGro, the eminent master, took to meditation when he was forty, and finished it only when he was Seventy one; and then he preached for four years, before he passed away in 1153 A.D. Preaching was prescribed also in order "to continue the lineage", which was necessary to preserve the saving grace of the doctrine for the benefit of the suffering humanity. When a master was asked, "What is more profitable? To stay in seclusion (and meditate) or to labour for the welfare of beings", he replied: "By entering into seclusion, you will also be labouring for the welfare of beings!"

In order to emphasize the necessity and value of practice, sometimes the study of scriptures was roundly discouraged.

hBrom (died 1064 A.D.), the famous successor to the Indian master Atīśa-Dīpaṃkara, counselled sPyan-sNa: "It is impossible to read the 84,000 sections of the Doctrine. Therefore, meditate on Śūnyatā only!" There is also the story of a lama who carried a load of books on his back beating his chest with hand and lamenting that years of study had disappointed him. The 'Wandering master' La-sTod advised him:

Such is study! The end of knowledge can never be reached! It is like drinking water from a mirage! Throw away the books, and meditate!

But it is usual to recommend that study and meditation should go hand in hand. Each should supplement the other. Study in this sense has been described as "completing the corners of practice".

The Teacher's Role

Meditation is essentially practical and personal. It comprises of techniques that are carefully graded and patterned. They are selected so as to be most effective for the individual practitioner considering his equipment, attitudes and aspirations, his strengths and his weaknesses, his background and his make-up. These are not what the individual himself can determine, but usually it is the teacher or guide that selects and prescribes, after a careful and comprehensive study of the aspirant.

The human intellect that normal life prizes so highly is of little aid here. It can, on the other hand, block and baffle. The practitioner is frequently advised to suspend his reason and judgment during the practice of these techniques. The yawning emptiness must be filled with an unwavering faith in the ability of the teacher to guide him successfully through. In practice, the teacher not only selects and prescribes the most appropriate techniques for the practitioner, but periodically evaluates his performance, encourages or admonishes when necessary, corrects and suggests changes when they are indicated.

The practitioner's attitude to his teacher is an important aid in progress and success. Humility before one's teacher has been valued highly in the East. Total and unquestioning acceptance of his system and method is held out as a necessary prerequisite. The student approaches the teacher not in the spirit of giving him a trial, but in order to give himself a

chance. Arrogance and doubt have often marred the chances of success in many a misguided pupil. Subjugation of the ego and its surrender to another person are extremely hard for an intellectually alert individual; but this is clearly unavoidable in this enterprise. The Indian texts recommend that the spiritual student must be a 'slave' of the teacher, for the teacher holds in his closed fist the power to grant success. It is therefore necessary to seek the "teacher's method" (*PHyag-bZes*) by serving him diligently and happily.

There are three kinds of teaching that are recognised in Vajrayāna. The first is called "Thought-transmission" (Thought-lineage, *Gongs-brGyud*) : it is direct communication of mind to mind, telepathic. The second is "Sign-transmission" (*brDah-brGyud*), employing mere signs and gestures, without a single spoken word. These two are naturally rare of occurrence : the first one needs a Buddha to communicate, while the second would require an adept of a high order (*mantra-dhāra*). The third kind, however, is more usual and more practicable. It is "transmission which is ear-whispered" (*Nan-brGyud*) : it is oral transmission from teacher to pupil, and is confined to direct precepts that the teacher's mouth pours into the pupil's ears. It precludes the teachings that are written down and are contained in books : this transmission relates to specific instructions regarding a contemplative procedure, and to certain revelations that are meant for particular pupils.

There are also "text-transmissions". The teacher here merely permits the pupil to read a text, recite some passages from it, or chant a magic formula (*dhāraṇī*) during a ritual. It is not enough if a book is handed over to the pupil; the teacher must first read or recite, and the pupil has to repeat after him. The entire proceeding follows a ritual sequence. Or, the teacher will read a text, translate the passages, and explain some points. This is also "textual transmission", but of a superior order. The third variety of transmission in this context is "instruction" with regard to a ritual or a meditational practice. In all these three, a teacher is indispensable but his role in the third is obviously most valuable.

The teacher "dispels the dark clouds of ignorance, shows the way towards freedom, cures us of the poison of five-fold passions and saves us from the quagmire of worldly involvement."

The numerous benefits the pupil receives from the teacher have often been enumerated. The following are the frequently occurring ideas :

He awakens our faith in the path of Dharma.

He acts as a wise and benevolent friend for one in distress.

He cuts off our greedy thoughts.

He frees our minds from ego-bound impulses.

He uproots our unbecoming attachments.

He helps us to achieve one-pointedness of mind.

He deepens our commitment to the path of meditation.

He makes firm the fleeting benefits of meditation.

He makes us inclined towards meditation throughout our lives.

He enables us to understand our true nature.

He helps us achieve our goal, and strive to help others.

The teacher is, for the student, more than a human being. He represents the entire lineage of teachers that have mastered the method and transmitted the wisdom. In Tibet, the Tantrik cult of *guru-yoga* has been preserved and developed. It is a systematic involvement with one's teacher, a gradual cultivation of an attitude that aids progress. The teacher is first looked upon as a human being, as another person related to oneself by periodical instructions. Then, the teacher is viewed as the representative of the entire line of teachers commencing from the primordial Buddha himself (*guru-paṅkti*). So far as the pupil is concerned, he is the sole representative; and his importance consists in linking the pupil directly with the Buddha himself. The *guru-yoga* culminates in the development of the attitude that the teacher is essentially identical with the pupil's own self. The thought that the teacher is not outside but inside helps in tapping one's own resources. And here the teacher is identical with the core of the doctrine. He symbolizes the Doctrine which the student desires to explore and experience. Oftentimes an ordinary teacher (*upāhyāya*), one who teaches without realizing the truths himself, is distinguished from the teacher who transmits the truths on the strength of his own realization (*ācārya*). The latter is obviously superior and is of

greater help to the aspirant. Sometimes, one who seeks to practice esoteric rites would be obliged to have a third teacher, the so-called 'secret preceptor' (*gSang sTon*), who specializes in the hidden precepts.

Notwithstanding the enormous importance attached to the teacher, it is recognized that real help can only come from within. "The best *kalyāṇamitra* is your own mind." The Buddhist expression for the guru or guide is an interesting one; *kalyāṇamitra* is 'the friend who works for your welfare'. He works with you intimately, and with perfect understanding and sympathy. Here is a piece of counsel that a Tibetan master (Dam-pa) gave to his pupil who asked him "When in doubt, whom should I ask, when you are gone?" :

The best *kalyāṇamitra* is your Mind! The teacher, who is capable of ridding you of your doubts will arise from within your own Mind. Should you be in need of another *kalyāṇa-mitra*, that would be the excellent scripture *Prajñāpāramita*. Study the text carefully. The human *kalyāṇa-mitra*, the individual who teaches, is indeed the lowest kind of *kalyāṇamitra*, because his help is limited.

(*Blue Annals*, XI, 146).

When the mind of the practitioner is ripe, it is believed that the proper teacher arrives, prompted by the inexplicable kārmic pressure. The Mind may even materialize the teacher! The effective teacher is not one who merely knows and is still practising, but one who already "gone there" and experienced directly. Tibetans distinguish between the written or spoken explanations of a text by a mere scholarly teacher ('Black Instruction', *Nag-KHrid*) and the explanations based on one's own experience ('White Instruction', *dMar-KHrid*). The latter are doubtless more valuable.

Many details of the 'White Instruction' naturally are not written down, but remain 'oral precepts'. To obtain them, one should approach a master, receive initiation from him, and begin practising. It is said that the Doctrine that enlightens and liberates is in four major streams :

- (1) elaborate commentaries on the basic texts;

- (2) oral precepts and personal notes;
- (3) initiations and practical guidance; and
- (4) the practice (meditation and worship).

They are here arranged in the order of increasing importance.' The teacher's role consists in making the pupil increasingly competent to pass from one stream to the other. Reliance on the teacher, therefore, does not absolve the pupil of the necessity to exert so as to become ultimately independent of the teacher. The Buddha said : "The enlightened ones only show the way; the going is your own concern !" The accepted system is the firm ground on which we set out, the chosen teacher directs our attention and lights up the path; but our resolution, wisdom, and energy must take us across.

INITIATION

Before one launches on any serious enterprise, adequate preparation is necessary. One needs not only to be informed about the modes and methods to be pursued and the goals to be reached, but also to be prepared and primed. Priming in spiritual matters takes the form of initiation. An aspect that is common to all religions, it assumes an especial significance in the Tantrik framework. An intense religious career is heralded by initiation, which is both a commitment and an equipment. "To make ripe a raw individual, initiation is necessary", said Kun-dGa.

Initiation (*dīkṣā*, Tib. *dBang-bsKur*) in practice is a procedure whereby the power of one is transmitted to the other. The Sanskrit expression is made up of two roots, the former (*dī*) signifying "endowment, gift, equipment" and the latter (*kṣha*) indicating "elimination, removal, destruction". The import is that the hindrances in the individual must be removed before he can pursue the path successfully. And, concurrently, a clear insight and a firm trust are to be generated in him. In effect, one who seeks initiation must cease to be a normal individual with natural inclinations and passions, but be ready to be 'reborn' into a new life of higher values. It is a total transformation that occurs; the coordinates of the initiate become altogether different. He begins a career of intense

devotion and extraordinary effort. He becomes 'consecrated' to the path.

Initiations take many forms. And even objects and places can come within its impact. Blessing a vase or a house, a scroll-painting, the image of a deity or of a lama-teacher, a diagram (*maṇḍala*) for contemplation or worship, a rosary, or a *rDo-rJe* bell, and infusing charm into a thread of wool or a piece of paper essentially partake of the nature of transmitting of power. But initiation in the present context is transaction between the teacher in whom the power resides and the pupil who is ready to share it with him. It is usually a rite (although not necessarily so), involving ritualistic purification of body and mind (*kriyā-dīkṣhā*), awakening of the psychic centres (*cakra-śodha*) and transmission of a formula for incantation or a method for contemplation. And, as the rite consists in the employment of consecrated water with which the initiate is given a ceremonial bath or which is merely sprinkled on the head and limbs of the devotee, the rite is also called (*abhiṣheka*).

The initiation not only cleanses the body, speech and mind of the initiate, but places some power at his disposal, thus making him capable of receiving the higher wisdom that comes either from the *guru* or from contemplation. In this sense, it authorizes him to obtain advanced instructions or special teachings in a secret text. At the same time, there is a firm commitment on the part of the initiate (*samaya*, 'pledge', 'oath') with regard to certain observances and abandonments; his behaviour is now strictly stylized, and he enters into a peculiar relationship with his teacher who has endowed on him the initiation. This is described as an intense mental effort which obviates the difference between the doctrine and his own teacher.

The teacher's precepts are useless if they are received and retained only in the manner of pouring water from one vessel into another. And those precepts fail to enter the depths of consciousness because of what is called 'the sealed knot of the mind' (or 'the knots of the heart', *hr̥daya-gran̥thi* in the Upanishads). Unless this knot is loosened, hesitation torments the devotee. Initiation is a procedure for this loosening of the mind's knot. Tying a knot and loosening it is a magical rite, intended to heal the sick. Mind's sloth and ailments are removed here. There is a saying recorded in the *Blue Annals* :

Hesitation is the greatest among creations of the devil. One should perform initiation right now, even if necessary provisions are not available.

It is in this sense that initiation has been explained as the direct contact between the mind and the doctrine.

Tibetan imagination described this as 'contact between the stone and the bone' (*rDo-Rus-PHrag*). "If one wishes to eat the marrow of the bone, he should crush the bone with the stone." Mind is the bone, and enlightenment is the marrow contained in it; the doctrine is the stone. Applying the stone to the bone is the act of initiation. The bone is hard and does not yield the marrow readily. It needs repeated crushing, and the initiation marks the commencement of this procedure.

In the Tantrik cults, there is a belief that each doctrine is zealously guarded by a group of supernatural beings (*dharma-pāla*, Tib. *CHos-sKyongs*). There is also a supposition that hidden aspects of the doctrine are communicated to the initiate by 'sky-traversing fairies' (*dākinī*, Tib. *mKHa-gro-Ma*). There is a belief that Padmasambhava entrusted "hidden texts" to the *dākinis*, who preserve them for hundreds of years before communicating them to the *sādhakas*. Although externalized in iconographically stylized forms, the fairies are actually spontaneous promptings within the deeper layers of one's own being. They emerge from levels far beyond ordinary awareness, and bring with them insights that are normally not accessible. Because the Tibetan artistic imagination has fixed the forms of these 'fairies' the initiate will conjure them up in the familiar forms. An initiate may attach himself to one or more of them for the purpose of integrating his natural constitution with the new experiences that he will receive during the period of practice. He is "bound in pledge" to them. His loyalty and devotion to them will determine the frequency and excellence of the intimations that he will receive from them.

Legends relate how one 'fairy' introduces an ascetic to his guru, and leads him to perceive the original nature of mind. Instructions are altogether absent. Another 'fairy' (*sukha*) reminds the meditator when his mind wanders: "Mind-without object, O Yogin!" Still another (*Jñāna-dakini*, Tib. *ś-Śes-PHab-Pa*) enters into the meditator dancing

and singing the *mantra*, and fills him with insight. The 'fairy' named *Sukhakarā* brings to the practitioner a state of utter happiness that he had never before experienced, and thereby strengthens his resolve to continue the practice. Another 'fairy' named *Cintā* dips the ascetic in a vale of worry and drives him to seek comfort in meditation. *Loka-dākinī* assumes a fierce aspect and strikes the initiate when he breaks his vow. *Vimalā* gently enters into the devotee and suffuses him with an unprecedented feeling of purity. There are sometimes male counterparts of these 'fairies' also (called *Vīra*, Tib. *dPa-Bo*), doing a similar service. They represent the valorous aspects of practice: perseverance, patience, endurance, courage and adventure.

The 'guardians', on the other hand, represent abstract but insistent commands for the initiate to fulfil all his pledges, discharge all his vows, and keep to the chosen path. These are in the shape of 'the terrible conscience', which will not brook any lapse or laxity. Their role becomes clear in the following anecdote. It is said that the great translator, Rin-CHen bZang-Po, obtained initiation when he was eighty five from the Indian saint Atiśa-Dīpaṃkara and practised uninterrupted meditation for ten years. For this practice, he erected a house with three doors. Over the outer door, he inscribed the legend: "Should within this door, even a single thought of attachment to this world arise in me, may the Guardian of the Doctrine split my head!" Over the middle door, the inscription ran: "Should, within this door, even a single thought of self-interest arise in me, may the Guardian of the Doctrine split my head!" And, over the inner door: "Should, within this door, even a single ordinary thought arise in me, may the Guardian of the Doctrine split my head!"

The practitioner's commitment to the pledge must be unflinching. There are rituals, a sequence of which involves the drinking of consecrated water (with the mystic *Ah-Hūm*) and reciting a formula: "In case I drink this water be the waters of hell, may it co in terrible agony! If, on the other hand this water turn into adamantite ne what I seek!"

The Guardian of the Doctrine fulfils the fulfilment of the pledges and vows; he



tioner from the forces both within himself and outside that seek to distract and frustrate. The Guardian has thus a terrifying aspect (demanding strict fulfilment of the pledge and driving away the disintegrating forces) as well as a benevolent one (protecting the devotee from distress and disappointment).

THE CHOSEN DEITY

Tibetan religion is peopled with deities, divinities, demons, 'guardians' and 'fairies'. They are not without significance. The wrathful aspect and the benevolent aspect, the postures and weapons, the colour of the body and the ornaments, have all their spiritual significance and psychological import. In fact, they are externalized representations of elements within man's psychic constitution. They are of particular relevance to those who take to contemplative life. Tibetan imagination has exquisitely portrayed the contending and commingling forces that make their appearances during sessions of contemplation in seclusion. The aspirant should be warned against them, and should be guided with regard to them; some he should fight, some dismiss, some sought, and some befriended. The purpose is to successfully complete the task he has undertaken.

We are not here concerned with the magical and sorcerial rites which involve them. Their value alters in such undertakings. But in meditation, they help a better understanding of oneself, and facilitate a firmer hold on the impulses and hindrances that are imbedded in our own nature. They make for integration, and the pursuit is rendered not only uninterrupted but effective. When the mind settles down comfortably and fixedly in contemplation, these images disappear. The serious Tibetan never mistakes their reality to be external; he is all the while aware that they are creatures of imagination, not his own imperfect imagination but the powerful imagination of the deity. After many years grappling with internal forces.

The teacher bestows on the pupil a 'chosen deity' to facilitate the progress of the pupil. This deity is chosen in consideration of the pupil's nature. It is called in Tibetan *Yi-Dam*, which is translated as 'bellgrove' or 'guarantor'. The fact of being bound to vows or precepts is called *Yi-Dam* (Dam). The term more correctly is

Yi-Dam-LHa (Skt. *iṣṭa-daiva*), the divinity watching over the vows of the practitioner, or the deity which is committed to his welfare. This is a personal 'god', guide or mentor. And there obtains a secret and sacred bond (*Dam*) between this deity and the practitioner. The bond is intimate, inviolable and personal. Each practitioner has his own *Yi-Dam* which is either chosen for him or by himself. He keeps it throughout his life, or until the stipulated period of austerity is completed.

In the early stages of development of the practitioner, the *Yi-Dam* will be treated as external, objective and independent of the practitioner. It is in this character that it is presented to him. It is iconographically stylized, and will be a statuette or a drawing. It would be looked upon with great devotion, for it also represents the *guru* and the 'fairy' who guide and aid enlightenment. It is later that the practitioner will realize that the *Yi-Dam* is really within himself, that it has no existence apart from himself, and that it represents a dominant element in his own constitution.

The practitioner is said to have three "hidden treasures" (*mDZod*): the *guru*, the 'fairy' (*dākinī*), and the chosen deity (*Yi-Dam*). The last one is often believed to incorporate the other two. The *guru* communicates the truth and bestows initiation. He represents the Doctrine; he is in fact the living embodiment of it. The 'fairy' provides hidden intimations from deeper layers of one's own being. sTag-Lung-THang-Pa (born 1142 A.D.) explained that 'precepts' are what one gets by one's own meditative experience. The picturesque way of speaking about the latter is that he gets them from a *dākinī*. Relating what one obtains from the teacher with what is got from his own experience during sessions of contemplation, is the function of the *Yi-Dam*.

Preliminaries

The practitioner must prepare himself adequately before he launches on the contemplative session. He spends four weeks in so doing. The first week he spends reflecting continuously and deeply about the great good fortune that has come to his lot in being born as a human being. He impresses it on himself that it is a rare opportunity, extremely difficult to obtain in this world of myriad kinds of creatures; and he feels grateful to the happy chance that has made him sound in body, sound in mind, intelligent, and interested in higher values in life. He tells himself that if he lets this opportunity go, he may never get another, and it would be matter for great grief. To have been born a human being, to have heard of the Buddha, to be interested in walking along the path he has shown, to have secured a good teacher to guide him, and to have an opportunity to practise are thoughts that fill him with earnest zest, without which the practice is not likely to succeed.

The second week is spent on thoughts concerning misfortunes like disease and infirmity, and concerning death. For one that is born, death is certain; and for one that is living, illness and old age are unavoidable. Accidents may overtake anyone and cut short his life or render him disabled. It is therefore necessary for one to practice meditation when he is well and alive. The third week is occupied by an intent reflection on the law of *karma*, on the fact that every occurrence presupposes an adequate and appropriate cause, and on the

truth that no deed will be without its reward or punishment. The fourth and the last week in the preparatory period is spent on ruminating over the miseries that abound in the world, and the terrors a human heart is filled with when evil fruits mature and begin to bear fruit. No creature on earth is free from anxiety, and at the human level the intensity and variety of anxiety are indeed staggering.

The four weeks thus spent are designed to make the aspirant realize the urgency with which the practice has to be undertaken. He should understand that meditation is the only technique by means of which the anxieties and stresses of existence are eliminated. These four preparatory reflections are regarded as "common", in the sense that they are common to both Mahāyāna and Theravāda.

Then there are the four preliminaries which prepare the individual directly for a meditational session, more especially for visualizations. These four are looked upon as "uncommon", in contradistinction to the four "common" ones detailed above, inasmuch as they are unique to Mahāyāna. The first preliminary is a composite of three distinct details: the refuge-going (or resorting to the Buddha, the Doctrine, the Community and the Teacher as ultimate and sure refuges), the vow-making (or taking the pledges of the compassionate saviour-saint or a *bodhisattva*), and the development of 'the thought of enlightenment'.

The third detail is not only interesting but significant. All sects and schools of Buddhism pin their faith on 'the thought or resolve concerning enlightenment' (*bodhi-citta*, Tib. *Byang-CHab*). It merely means the mind (*Sems*) intent on obtaining the Buddha's perfect wisdom in order to be of service to humanity. The vow to save all beings in the world (the *bodhi-sattva's* vow) is the central idea in the concept of *bodhi-citta*. Overcome by compassion for the sorrowing humanity, groaning in the pit of misery, forlorn and desperate, the practitioner is asked to resolve to help them and extend his firm arm in that direction so that the hapless folk may be rescued and comforted. Such is the instruction contained in a text, entitled *Abhidharma dīpā*. The thought of enlightenment is justified by the resolve to be the 'mother and nurse' for the suffering folk. It implies that of the two essential ingredients of enlightenment,

viz., compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*), compassion is more important and urgent. The actualization of this emphasis is to be seen in the image of Avalokita, the patron-Saint of Tibet, who is pictured as the merciful *bodhi-sattva*.

The development of this 'thought of enlightenment' involves the cultivation of some essential virtues. Vasubandhu mentions the following:

- (1) Gather round you friendly helpmates to encourage you and support you in the spiritual career.
- (2) Be devout and honour the memory of the Buddhas and other Saints.
- (3) Do whatever good you can, and acquire thereby the 'roots of merit'.
- (4) Be ever compassionate and considerate.
- (5) Endure with a smile whatever misfortune falls to your lot; do not regret or curse.
- (6) Remain friendly to all living beings, and be ready to help them whenever they are in distress.
- (7) Be even-minded, tranquil and dispassionate.
- (8) Think well of yourself on the count that you have taken to the great path shown by the Buddha.
- (9) Seek with diligence the right doctrine.
- (10) Aspire to obtain the Buddha-wisdom.

(*Bodhicittotpāda-sūtra-śāstra*)

In Tibet, the 'thought of enlightenment' is further regarded as the 'diamond' (*vajra*), which is the same as 'void' (*śūnyatā*) and in which is contained the essence of all Buddhas. It is hidden in the very core of individual existence, and its nature is that of 'great bliss' (*mahā-sukha*). It is looked upon as a mystic union in one's own body of the two principles of existence, wisdom and compassion. In this sense, there is a frequent identification of *bodhicitta* with sexual energy (semen), which has two forms: an involvement with the phenomenal world (*samvṛti*) and an absolute isolation (*vivṛti*). The latter form is 'great-bliss'. It occurs when the natural downward flow of *bodhicitta* is arrested either by the six-limbed yoga (*ṣaḍaṅga-yoga*) consisting of withdrawal of the senses (*pratyāhara*), focussing of mind (*dhyāna*), regulation of breathing (*prāṇāyāma*), mind-

fulness (*anusmṛti*), absorption (*dhāraṇā*) and trance (*samādhi*); or by the four-fold bodily yoga comprising of gestures (*mudrā*), posture (*āsana*), knots (*bandha*) and restraint of breath (*prāṇāyāma*). The basic idea is that the downward flow leading to the discharge and dissipation of sexual energy is injurious to the constitution inasmuch as it leads to phenomenal involvement. It is necessary not only to check its descent, but prompt its ascent. Meditation is the technique of securing this inversion of the flow of vital energy. When this energy successfully streams up and reaches the highest centre, viz., the 'lotus on the crown of the head' (*uṣṇīṣa-kamala*), it melts and suffuses the entire organism. It is in this state that one experiences it as 'great bliss'. It also becomes intensely effulgent (*prabhāsvara*), whereupon the highest wisdom dawns. This is the enlightenment one is looking for.

The development of the *bodhi-citta* is the favourite theme of numerous manuals. Many Sanskrit-texts have been preserved carefully in their Tibetan translations. The originals unfortunately have been lost, as for instance *Bodhicitta-bhāvanā* by Kamalaśīla, translated by Dharma-pāla and included in the Tibetan Canon, *Tangyur*; another work with the same title by Mañjuśrī-mitra and included in the *rGyud-hGrel* (Tantra gloss) section of the Tibetan Canon, *Bodhicitta-vivarāṇa* by Nāgārjuna, translated by Guṇākara and Rab-SHi-bSes-gNen, and included in the same section; *Bodhicittotpādaśādhī* by the same authority, translated by Surendrabodhi and included in the same canon; *Bodhicitta-vāyu-carāṇa-bhāvanopāya* by Tali (?), *Bodhicitta-asampramoṣa-samādhi*, *Bodhicitta-bindūpadeśa* by Karma-pa, *Bohdhicitta-bhāvanopadeśa* by Mañjuśrī-mitra and *Bodhicittamahāsukhāmnāya* by Atīsa-Dīpaṃkara. These works provide practical guidance in the matter of arousing the 'thought of enlightenment', making it firmly established, preventing its natural lapse, relating it to one's own chosen deity (*Yi-Dam*), absorption of the deity into the seed-syllable 'a', and the establishment of light in one's own heart; they also describe the nature of *bodhi-citta* and enumerate the benefits of the practice.

The development of *bodhi-citta* is followed by a ritual designed to clear away the impediments and defects which may prevent successful practice. Usually this involves the continuous repetition of a *mantra* (given by the teacher) for several thousand

times, all the while visualizing the chosen deity and the teacher. The next ritual in sequence is *maṇḍala-offering* to his teacher and the line of teachers represented by him. Atīśa-dīpaṃkara is believed to have introduced this ritual into Tibet, and there are several Sanskrit manuals in Tibetan translation which give details of this ritual. Many of these works bear the simple title: *Maṇḍala-vidhi*; and among the authors are Jayasena, Kamala-śrī, Niṣkalamka-vajra, and Ratnākara-śānti, all eminent *paṇḍitas* of the Nālandā and Vikramaśīla monastic colleges. Closely associated with this ritual is a visualization known as *guru-yoga* which is a mystic absorption of the teacher into oneself.

The concluding ritual dedicates the merit acquired by the preliminary sequence of rituals to the welfare of all living beings. It is important to note that all these involve visualizations, which are effective techniques of training the mind. Intimately involved in visualizations are the sacred formulae (*mantra*, Tib. *Ngag Sang*), the mystic diagrams (*maṇḍala*, Tib. *dKyil-KHor*) and dispositions of hands and fingers (*mudra*, Tib. *CHug-ja*).

The Yoga Approach

Although the Buddha advocated the Middle Path, eschewing the extremes of severe asceticism and careless enjoyment, unrelenting self-mortification and unconcerned self-indulgence, and total denial and total acceptance, he nevertheless emphasized the necessity of an austere life, the need for seclusion and the advantages of a contemplative life. He advocated thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*) for purposes of self-purification by shaking off defilements. In all the countries which have accepted Buddhism, monasteries are essentially places for quiet and secluded meditation. Monasticism itself is an ascetic practice. Withdrawal from the world necessarily involves privations and affliction of pain. Endurance of pain and indifference to comfort become distinguishing features of a monk. But asceticism in Buddhism was not driven to the point of torture and immolation. Food, posture and society were brought under discipline. In Tibet, where the approach to Buddhism is Tantrik, there is an arrangement both within the monastery and outside it for considerable stretches of absolute isolation and uninterrupted meditation, involving necessarily considerable curtailment of natural impulses and acquired habits.

There is also an importance attached to austerities and asceticism, sometimes of an extreme kind, in Tibet which appears rather inconsistent with the Master's teaching. The explanation offered is that while these austerities by themselves are not important, they must be observed because the Great

Sage (*muni*, the Buddha) had observed them. And because the Buddha practised austerities for six years, it is suggested that the ascetic who follows him must also observe a six-year period of austerities, after which he is free to continue them or give them up. But the real reason seems to be the impact of the Indian Yogis on the Tibetan religious life, which already had a predisposition to severe shamanistic practices under Bon influence. Magical rituals and austerities go together. The path to obtain and employ power (what in old Buddhism is called *iddhipāda*) is opposed to the path of ease and pleasure. Fasts, functional sensory deprivations, postural rigidity, refusing to lie down in order to sleep, ceaseless and frenzied circumambulations, intent repetition of the sacred formulae for hours on end, keeping of vigils during nights, the practice of rites in burning or burial grounds, the vow of complete silence, periodical isolation, voluntary poverty and mutilation are associated with both magic and religion everywhere in the world. This was also the magical and religious heritage in Tibet. The Indian impact only strengthened it.

The sect founded by Marpa (1012-1097 A.D.) in Tibet, known as Kagyu (bKah-brGyud), incorporates the essential elements of the ascetic traditions of India. The ascetics of this sect have a seven-fold vow to keep:

- (1) The ascetic should not visit his home on any pretext.
- (2) He should not in any circumstances cross the threshold of a layman's house.
- (3) He should not come down from the mountain retreat (where he has retired for practice) until the stipulated period is over, even if it means disaster or death.
- (4) He should sit up continuously in the meditational posture (of crossed legs and joined palms) and not "loosen the meditation belt" for the stipulated period.
- (5) He should not lie down during nights; he should snatch moments of sleep even as he sits.
- (6) He should wear but a single white sheet of cotton, whatever the vagaries of the weather, even in blizzards and snowfalls.
- (7) He should remain uninterruptedly silent, without communicating his thoughts or desires even by facial expressions or hand gestures.

In addition, some ascetics will undertake regularly to visit the haunted places at nights and practise meditation there (*gNam-KHrod*).

Together with such rather severe and especial vows, there will be many minor ones to observe in common with other monks of the Order. These are regarded as three-fold 'efforts' (*Bad Pa*) : of the body (*Lus*), of the mind (*Sems*), and of speech (*gNag*). It is obvious that this is a direct borrowal from Indian sources. 'Bodily efforts' include salutations and prostrations circumambulations, turning the Maṇi-wheel, and offering of ritual pieces. Telling the rosary, although a physical act, is regarded as a speech-expression. Like the Indian rosary, the Tibetan rosary consists of 108 (the Sa-sKya group prefers 111) beads, which are moved in a circular fashion to the accompaniment of a sacred formula (usually *Om Maṇi padme Hūm*) or a seed-syllable for each bead-movement. This movement of beads in practice, however, is not always accompanied by verbalization. With the laity, it becomes a mechanical affair, and can be regarded only as 'bodily-effort'. But when it is seriously taken up, the movement of the beads is a substitute for utterance of the formula. When the count is measured upto 10,800 tolls during the course of a day, or in a sitting, it becomes an act of asceticism. Similarly, transcription of sacred texts and inscription of the Maṇi-formula on stone slabs can be substitutes for verbal-effort, although the major involvement is the physical act.

Speech-efforts include chanting of selected texts, and preaching of sermons. Recital and exposition of scriptural texts, discussion and debate concerning doctrinal matters, reading and writing of sacred literature, even wood-block printing of the 330 volumes of Canonical texts (which practice, borrowed from the Chinese, has been in vogue in Tibet since the eleventh century) are regarded as 'mouth-re'ligion' (*KHa-dPe* and *CHos-sKad*), notwithstanding the bodily effort involved in them. Reading aloud of scriptures, muttering of the Maṇi-formula, utterance of mystic or magical spells while offerings are made, preparation of *maṇḍaḷas* for sacramental purposes and intoning the sacred formulae while telling the beads on the rosary are illustrations of the verbal expressions of religious activity (*CHos-hDon*).

In the Tibetan way of thinking (as in the Indian) man's existence has three aspects : body, speech and mind. And mind is said to be the king, while the other two are servants. Therefore, mental effort is considered supremely important in religion. Mind is distinguished by its capacity to have faith (*Dad-pa*): reliance on the Doctrine, devotion to the 'three perfect ones' (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha), reverence for the saints and gods, desire for emancipation (*THar-ba*), and the altruistic vow of the bodhisattva are all so many expressions of faith. Mind (*Sems*) is naturally and normally filled with 'sin' (*sDig-pa*). It is not accidental that the Tibetan expression also means, 'scorpion' which is known for its sting, and 'crab' which is well-known for its hold. Evil not only holds the mind under its clutches, but produces pain by its sting. Religion is an attempt to relieve the mind of this 'sin'. And faith is the first effort to clear the mind of its hold and sting.

Studying the doctrine, understanding its tenets and developing an insight into its import are likewise efforts of the mind. Bu-sTon urges that one must study the Doctrine with a sense of urgency; for it is only in the present time that the Buddha has appeared, and when our minds are favourably disposed towards his Doctrine we must, without losing time, take advantage of it. Procrastination may deprive us of the present opportunity of a favourable condition of existence. Health, leisure, presence of a teacher, absence of a distraction, and the mood are conditions that may soon pass off. Preparatory for study, and a precondition to it, is faith in the Doctrine, reverence for the teacher and confidence in our ability to understand. Symbolic hand gestures (*PHyag-rGya*), conceptualizing thought processes during certain rites and mental offerings in ceremonial sequences are also included in the same category: they position the mind in a favourable mood for study and practice. A rite is essentially a preparation.

All these are relatively minor and routine. Although they do involve withdrawal in various degrees from normal biological and social activities, and effort of varying intensity, they can hardly answer to the description of ascetic practices. The ideal of an ascetic is always prized highly; the Buddha himself is regarded as a 'great ascetic' (*mahāśramaṇa*). And even normal

folk periodically turn into ascetics now and then, albeit for a stipulated (and usually brief) period. A monk who cares to live in large conformity with the ascetic ideals ingrained in Indian and Tibetan Tantrik tradition merits great reverence and adoration from his fellow-monks as well as from the pious lay folk.

The two goals of the Tantrik way of life are pleasure and power. The urge for pleasure both here and hereafter is of course the more popular motivation; but all the practices that somehow involve it are regarded as 'lower' Tantra. The longing for power (power over others, power to accomplish things quicker and better, power to secure wealth, and so on) has resulted in a whole complex of magical practices which are included in the 'middling' Tantra. But the utter unison of pleasure and power, but altogether divorced from the phenomenal context, occurs as 'emancipation' or 'freedom' the urge for which constitutes the 'higher' Tantra. Whatever the grade of the Tantra, the ascetic involvement is not only indispensable, but considerable. Even to secure pleasure or power, one must undertake a strenuous course of asceticism, denying oneself smaller pleasures in the hope of obtaining greater pleasures, or forsaking in the expectation of higher power. Giving up in order to get, abandoning in order to obtain, suffering now in order to be later comforted, and welcoming pain as a prelude to happiness are necessarily involved in the Tantrik approach.

The Tibetan ascetics of olden days usually adopted the six limbed yoga (*Ṣaḍāṅga-yoga*. Tib. *sByor-ba Yam-lag Drug*) according to the method taught by the Indian master Anupama rakṣita. It consists of bodily postures, regulation of breathing, withdrawal of sense-functions, fixed attention, stilling of thoughts and absorption in a trance. It was usual to devote three years, three months and three days (adding another half-month to 'make up for possible lapses) over this yoga, in a forest retreat or on a solitary mountain. This Indian method is said to have been communicated to Tibet in a long line of teachers beginning with Ayalokiteśvara and Anupama-rakṣita, the latter a historical personage. The actual teacher who brought it to Tibet appears to have been Vanaratna (in Tibetan dPal Nags-kyi Rin-Che), the last and the most popular of Indian Panditas to visit Tibet. He was born in 1384 A.D. and

hailed from Bengal. He is said to have been initiated in this yoga by Nāgabodhi (disciple of the celebrated Nāgārjuna) at Dhānya-kaṭaka monastery in Andhra-Pradesh. Ideas of Tibetan asceticism can thus be directly traced to the Indian background.

ISOLATION

Higher mammals are not designed for isolated existence. They are therefore by inclination gregarious; group life not only offers them security but contributes to their development and well-being. This tendency has reached its culmination among the *Homo sapiens*, viz. in the human beings, for whom society is an indispensable cover and prop. Man is truly a social animal, and his survival is inextricably bound with processes of social facilitation. He matures and fulfils his impulses only within the social context. Being a biological imperative and a social necessity, the need for group life is fundamental to man. When he is denied group involvement by force or by accident, he feels lost and may go crazy. Solitary confinement can indeed be a disastrous punishment for a majority of human beings.

It would, therefore seem unnatural for an individual to voluntarily immure himself, or isolate himself from all group-coordinates. But Yoga would insist on such voluntary withdrawal, repeatedly and for brief or long stretches of time. This is meant not only to curtail his natural and outward orientation but to facilitate the development of the necessary inward attention. When we are caught in the processes of the world, acting and reacting, receiving and responding we are to that extent alienated from ourselves. We cease to be ourselves and put on a succession of masks, each of which is situationally determined. We are busy with what in modern jargon is called 'input processing.' We continually select our sensations, plan our perceptions, programme our responses, project our feelings, make our judgments, and order our values. All this would happen so automatically and so massively that our awareness is almost sidetracked and submerged.

Spiritual practice is in a valid sense a counter-current to worldly involvement. Therefore the practitioner is advised to "turn off the input processing" and periodically withdraw into

seclusion. However, it is not seclusion as such that benefits; it is the attitude which sustains the seclusion that is important. All religions have a contemplative aspect, and isolation is advocated in all religions as a factor that facilitates contemplation. Eastern religions attach a greater value to contemplative seclusion; they hold that solitude is a necessary condition in which meditation can be successfully practised.

Tibet, in particular, developed a philosophy of seclusion. The physical features of the land as well as the peculiar characteristics of the people there provide ample opportunity for the earnest to dwell in complete isolation for relatively long stretches of time. It does not, however, mean that Tibetans are by temperament lonely or seclusive. They have as avid and fine a sense of social life as any other people in the world. But those who have committed their lives to religious fulfilment can easily pass their time in strictest seclusion; this ability comes to them naturally. They do not feel oppressed if they do not sight another human being or hear a human voice for days or months or even years.

Important in this context is the Tibetan expression *mTHSams* which literally means "boundary-line", "border", "demarcation", "frontier". It is what marks off an area, a kind of partition, within which one must stay, and beyond which one may not stray. The word is employed to indicate the outer limits of one's property, as well as a line of demarcation drawn in a magical rite to mark off the consecrated area. In the latter sense, the space enclosed within this line is regarded as endowed with magical power; any act done here, and any person staying here would be extraordinary, consecrated, magically equipped, and mysteriously potent. The same thing when done, or the same person, when staying, beyond these limits would be ordinary, and lack all magical power. The Tibetan word has also a secondary meaning: "to plan", "to resolve", "to settle one's mind". In the meditational context, the two meanings are fused. It means resolving to set up a fence or boundary for oneself, to draw a barrier round oneself, and to cut oneself off from the surrounding (*mTHSams gCHod·pa*).

This is achieved by several devices. One of the most frequently employed procedures is to retire into a distant hermitage, a solitary house, hut, or cell in a monastery, or to a

cave in some mountain fastness, and to vow never to go out of it nor admit any one within it. The withdrawal is voluntary and deliberate; or it may be at the suggestion of his *guru*. During this period there is an arrangement priorly made to supply some scanty food and water (never much) to the person who enters into seclusion, through a narrow window or a small opening (called *Bug-Go*), without, however, affording an opportunity to see him or talk to him. If the ascetic is a well-to-do layman he may arrange with his own family, or with a family in the vicinity of his seclusion by paying for the service. There are ascetics who vow to what is known as "water and stone fasting". They are said to drink small quantities of water and munch tiny pebbles! There are accounts of saints (like Dharmasvāmi Zig-Po) who sit down for the practice of mind-purification (*bLo-sByong*) for 23 days at a stretch without even bothering to eat food.

The period of seclusion may last several months, sometimes it may extend to a couple of years. The Kalachakra ascetics observe seclusion for three years, three half-months and three days. The underlying belief is that the human constitution normally undergoes a significant change during this period. The Kagyu hermits prefer a seven-year or twelve-year seclusion. It is more usual for monks or serious laymen to retire every year to seclusion lasting a few weeks. It is also an accepted practice to snatch brief moments of seclusion everyday in the morning, noon, evening, and night. Some hermits wander into cemeteries and spend the nights under a lonely tree or an empty cave in the neighbourhood of the village. Seclusions are occasionally observed in the waning moon. Not infrequently it happened in olden days that meditation covered the major period of life. For instance, sGro (b. 1078 A.D.), the eminent master, took to meditation when he was forty and finished it when seventy one; he preached only four years before he died.

While in seclusion, the ascetic must consecrate himself to meditational practice and related study. The purpose of seclusion is to enable the ascetic to apply himself to practice with the same zeal as that of the parents bringing up their only child, or that of a "wool-cleaner washing the wool". Frequent descriptions of steadfast practice are "without loosening the belt", "without placing head on pillow for years", "till his

waist became sore" and "till the buttocks wore out". There is an interesting story concerning the famous ascetic-poet Milarepa.

When his disciple sGam-Po-pa was leaving Milarepa's hermitage after his study and practice, Milarepa accompanied him as far as a stream (for that was the customary send-off). He halted there, and told sGam-Po-pa : "Child, I have a secret. Shall I reveal it to you now?" sGam-Po-pa was eager to know. Milarepa turned and uncovered his own buttocks. sGam-Po-pa was shocked to find his teacher's buttocks in such a terrible plight. They had completely worn out and blackened and were altogether devoid of flesh, because of constant sitting in meditation. Milarepa then told his disciple:

Son, the secret of success in meditation is diligence!

Another celebrated master Dam-pa, advised his equally celebrated disciple Kun-dGa:

Live in a cave which can hold one person only, and wear clothes just enough to cover your shame. Your food should not be more than what is sufficient to keep you alive. And practise meditation until you begin to hate it!

The final remark is a common expression for saying : Practise continually and with a single-minded devotion. The import is a total and exclusive preoccupation with meditation practice. Seclusion is not merely a physical barrier excluding the ascetic from all normal contact with the surrounding. It is also a psychological barrier keeping away the normal mental processes. It is indeed a "turning off". Cut off from the outside, it is a voyage into one's own interior. It is a kind of death so far as the individual's participation in the world is concerned. He is 'dead' for the world, and the world is 'dead' for him. But this death means a new life. Prevented from going forward, he starts going backward. Time stands still for him; and space is excluded from his consideration. Habitual sensations and perceptions, conceptions and feelings, plans and cares are shaken off, and he begins to delve deep into his own psyche. Zang Rin-Po-Che (born 1123 A.D.) one of the 'three jewels of

Tibet', recounted: "I have given up the world in my mind. The link between me and the world is completely severed. I am absorbed in the heavenly nature of non-origination."

WORK IN THE DARK

We are often troubled by the surrounding; our minds are unable to get into contact with reality because it is in the nature of the presented world to veil, obscure and distort. There is, therefore, a need to escape from phenomenal involvement before we can rest our mind on reality. Not to attend to the world is difficult when the world moves us and moves around us. Mind is like a "mad dog barking at anything that moves, even at the faintest rustle of leaves". It is necessary to shut the mind up, and free it from distractions if we aspire to make mind discover its own natural modes and links. Seclusion is thus a technique favoured for self-discovery.

Having secured physical seclusion, it is of paramount importance to obtain psychological freedom also. Although the world in its physical and social aspects is left outside the 'barrier', the world in its mental and emotional aspects can still plague the practitioner. The world as known and remembered, as felt and experienced, continues to be a lump, too difficult to swallow. In order to train the mind to settle down, a series of practices are prescribed.

Isolation is always well-planned. It is not a mere sinking into oblivion or losing oneself in emptiness. In the Tibetan reckoning, "the work in the dark" comes only after "work in the open". The latter consists of studying the relevant texts, getting explanations from the teacher, and observing the general rules of virtuous conduct. The practitioner, even while immured is not continuously "in the dark". He can have a lamp (for which butter is supplied along with food periodically) and some books with him. He can break the 'barrier' when he feels like consulting his teacher, although it is usually not approved or encouraged.

"Work in the dark" is independent of books and teachers, it is essentially an encounter with one's own interior, exploiting one's own resources. Seclusion is described as "dark", and the *mTHSams* that the Tibetan yogi enters is indeed physically dark. It is not without a reason that darkness is prescribed as

favourable to meditational practice. Seclusion denotes withdrawal from the light of the day, the light which not only illumines the objects and aspects of the phenomenal world but facilitates transaction in it, but holds man a helpless captive in phenomenal involvement.

The Tibetan word for light, viz., *sNang-ba*, means "to emit light", "to show up", "to shine". In this sense, it comprehends everything that is visible, all things that the organs of sense can apprehend. It also means "mental appearance", "thought", "idea of the world". In an extended sense it means "apparition", "phantom" (*sNang-gyi sPHrul-ba*). The light outside not only shows up the objects of the world, but creates a net of appearances, conceptions and meanings within the mind. And conversely, the light of the mind illumines the world around and weaves for each one of us a meaningful context. It is the interplay of these lights that makes our existence a wierd but enticing maze of mystery and a bundle of suffering.

The outer light so constantly and so glaringly shows up the external world that one can hardly dare to look within. The light of the mind is naturally overwhelmed by the light streaming from outside. One who would look within must, therefore, necessarily shut off the outer light. The practitioner would meditate during the day closing his eyes, but the outer light thereby is not directly excluded. Although the physical objects are not directly perceived, their reflections, partly visual and partly mental, would still be there. It is for this reason that darkness is described as helpful to meditation. In a sense, the light outside would restrict the light within; and darkness outside would help the light within to shine brighter and more steadily. And what is important, darkness would emphasize the isolation of the practitioner from the world.

In a well-known and oft-used Mahāyāna text, *Sūrangama-sūtra*, there is an interesting dialogue between the Buddha and his disciple Ānanda. The Buddha ties a knot on a piece of cloth, while Ānanda watches, and ties another, and another. Seven knots are thus tied. Ānanda agrees that not all the knots are the same, for they are tied in a specific order. The Buddha tells Ānanda that in order to untie the knots, one must know how the knots are tied. Knowledge of the origin helps the accomplishment of dissolution. And prompted by the Master,

Ānanda says that to untie the first knot one must start with the last, that one must proceed in a reverse order. The seven knots refer to the seven psychic centres (*cakras*) in the human constitution; and the tying of knots is the body which is positioned in the world. The first knot is hidden in the deepest layers of the mind. In order to move in the direction of the first knot, we must follow the reverse order by shutting off the outer light and beginning to 'work in the dark'. Thus, this is an active process of 'opening up' one's awareness to the internal modes which structure the external world and determine our involvement in it. It is an effort to posture the mind in itself. It marks a major shift in the mode of consciousness.

Sitting Up

Meditation is an exercise of intense activity; it is described as 'supreme effort'. And the physical foundation for this heightened activity is, paradoxically, the postures of sitting perfectly still. Iconographically, it is the typical Buddha posture. And the posture is universally accepted as most helpful in all Yoga, Hindu as well as Buddhist (including Zen).

In Tibet, the assumption of this posture is known as the 'seven aspects of Vairocana'. First of the five *dhyāni*-buddhas, Vairocana represents the body, the corporeality, material aggregation. He is also the sun, the "illuminator" (*rNam sNang*). As a divinity, he enables his devotee to realize the true nature of all existence and the illusory nature of all phenomena. The body of the meditator when postured properly will ultimately lead to this realization. In the Tantrik framework, the body and mind are indistinguishable, and the body is essential for enlightenment. Hence the involvement of Vairocana's name in this context. The seven members of the posture are described as follows:

- (1) Sit up, crossing the legs, with both knees touching the ground, and both feet opening out like petals of lotus. This is described as 'lotus-posture' (*padmāsana*) in India and as 'adamantine posture' (*vajrāsana*) in Tibet. A wide and firm base is thus provided for the body. It fixes the animal core of the body, and loosens roots of consciousness around the navel region.

- (2) The hands are brought together, the left palm resting on the right, and held steadily just below the navel with the bends of the wrists firmly pressing against the thighs. This is the familiar contemplative posture in the Buddha images. The benefit is the equalization of bodily heat. Usually the hands are held perfectly horizontally, but sometimes they are cupped also. It is a practice with some hermits to bring the thumbs into contact, either in line with the upper palm or to form a slight circle.
- (3) Sit perfectly erect, keeping the spinal column straight. The Tibetan texts illustrate the erect spinal column "like unto a pile of Chinese brass coins one on top of the other". The explanation is that it should ward off slumping, which would distribute pressure unequally in body and thus be a source of disturbance to the mind. Erect posture does not mean stiff in a ramrod fashion; that would be an undue strain, and therefore, a distraction for the mind. Sitting erect in an easy manner relaxes the torso, arms and head; it regulates the flow of the vital currents in all parts of the body.
- (4) Expand and thrust the chest forward, pushing the shoulders a little backward, but not stiffly. This is to facilitate full and deep breathing, and to enable the air within all the cavities to move out.
- (5) Bend the neck so that the chin touches the top of the chest. This position is likened to the iron-hook or elephant-goad. In Yoga, it is known as *jālandhara-bandha*. The texts formulate its purpose as facilitating the expulsion of foul air from within the body. Stretching and bending the neck will quicken the mind's activity. It is to be noted that the usual practice is to keep the head upright, ears in line with the shoulders and the tip of the nose in line with the navel.
- (6) Touch gently the roof of the mouth or back of the upper row of teeth with the tip of the tongue, and hold it there. This will eliminate the rush of thoughts. All thoughts involve speech, and all speech entails movement of the tongue, when the tongue is held steady but not pressed, thought is considerably curtailed. And the

life-force is sucked by the tongue and is made to go upwards.

- (7) Lower and settle your gaze at a distance of about three feet (or a little over five feet, 'the distance of yoke') in front of you. But do not focus your attention on any object. The gaze must be relaxed and free. However, it is important that the gaze must not shift; when the eyes wink and wander, thoughts are formed and dissolved, for vision guides the thinking process. Opening the eyes or closing them altogether present difficulties for meditation, and they involve strain. Lowering the gaze will be found to be restful. Tip of the nose is often indicated for settling the gaze; or the sky-line right in front of the practitioner, if the practice is in the open.

By this seven-fold 'method of Vairocana', the body achieves stability and tranquillity at the same time. There are some lamas who hold that this method is in itself sufficient to induce states of meditative absorption. Their stand is similar to that of the Zen teachers who emphasize the advantages of *shikan-taza* ("just sitting") in Zazen. But it is more usual to regard this method as merely preparatory to the actual meditational sessions such as breathing, visualization, or void-cultivation. The immediate benefit of this method is to silence the bodily distractions by gathering all bodily parts and vital forces together into a steady posture. "Now", Kun-mKHyen-Pa the master told the initiate, "you should assume a posture like me, and keep your mind free from thoughts (*mi-rTog-pa*)".

A device known as the meditation-belt (or band) is sometimes used to make the posture firm and easy. The prescribed length is said to be "measuring, when twice doubled, about the circumference of one's head". It is secured encircling the body, across the shoulders and under the knees in the normal meditational posture. This will keep the body steady even when the ascetic enters into a trance state. The usual expression for diligence in practice is "without loosening the belt". The other aid to meditation is the meditation-cushion, a soft padded seat usually one cubit square and "four fingers' thick". Keeping it continually warm (by sitting on it) is another expression signi-

fiying persistence in practice. The value of cushions is also emphasized in Zen.

WATCHING THE BREATHS

Having integrated the body, speech is to be tackled before the mind can be conquered. Indian and Tibetan thought do not regard the distinction between the vocalizations which are bodily processes and the ideations which are mental, as absolute. The two processes are indistinguishably involved in speech; and respiration (breathing) is an integrated function of body, speech and mind.

Tibetan Buddhism'being Tantrik, breathing here assumes an especially important role. Watching the breath and counting the breaths without however controlling it in any manner are techniques adopted both in the Theravāda branch of Buddhism and in the Zen schools. Even in the Pāli Canon, there are discourses entirely devoted to this manner of stabilizing the mind (*sati-paṭṭhāna*). But in Vajrayāna, the active control of breathing is also advocated, and thus forms a necessary part of such practices as the *gTum-Mo*.

The theoretical foundation of the Tibetan techniques of breath control is borrowed from Indian Tantra. There are notions of the 'life-force' (*THig-Le*, Skt. *prāṇa-śakti*), its 'pathways' (*rTsa*, Skt. *nāḍī*) and its 'movement' (*rLung*, Skt. *prāṇa*). The 'life-force', both in the Indian and Tibetan contexts, is the mysterious essence of one's being. It is the 'seed' of all forms that the being takes. It is spoken of as sex energy or the 'semen virile' of individual existence, in its practical and procreative aspects. But in its own essential and inalienable nature, it is 'zero', 'naught'. It lacks the dimensions of existence, and is thus not grasped. It is a mere 'point' (*bindu*), although it gives definition to whatever appears. In the mystical vocalization of phonemes, the dot (ṃ) above the letter (like in *am*, *hrīm*, *om*, *klīm*, *gam*) represents the involvement of the 'life-force'. The same principle consists of the restraint of air within the body.

The 'pathways' are the three veins that are supposed to branch out from the 'heart' (which, and not the physical heart, is the 'seat of the life-force'): *rKyan-ma* (Skt. *iḍā*) to the left, *Ro-ma* (Skt. *piṅgalā*) to the right, and *dBu-ma* (Skt. *suṣumnā*, also called *dhuti*, Tib. *Srong-rTsa*) in the middle. The vein is

here defined as the 'root of life'; it is the pathway along which the vital current moves. It should, however, not be mistaken that this is in the nature of a vehicle or a channel through which the current courses. It is actually a mode of the life-force itself, the modal aspect of the vital current. The significance becomes clear when the nerve-paths are in Tantra regarded as so many vowels and consonants which are all modes and modifications of the one primal sound, 'a'. In fact, the three veins are symbolized by the three-lettered formula *OM—ĀH—HŪM*.

The movement is likened to the 'wind' or breeze (*rLung*, Skt. *Vāyu*) and its association with Mind is a persistent idea in Yoga and Tantra. Tibetan expressions like "Breath is the courser and Mind is the rider" and "*rLung* (breath) and *Sems* (Mind) are joined into one" make this association clear. Tibetans employ two expressions *Sems* (Mind, Skt. *citta*) and *Yid* (Mind, Skt. *manas*) without much confusion. The former has sometimes been used as the equivalent of the Sanskrit *sattva* (animated being), as in *Sems-CHan* ('animal', having the faculty of consciousness) and *Sems-dPa-CHen-Po* ('great being', a person of great worth and vitality). The latter term, however, is often used in the sense of thought-processes, conceptualization (Skt. *manasikāra*): it is mind in the ordinarily accepted usage, and approximates to the *vṛtti* idea in Yoga. Like Yoga, Tibetan meditation also seeks to suppress the mind (or the mental modes). Meditative absorption is described as *Yid-La-Mi Byed-Pa* (a state of no-mind, or non-conceptualization, Skt.—*amanasikāra*). It is not, however, the absence of Mind, but the commingling of Mind with the Breath, when the mind-movement is suppressed. This is the Tibetan notion of 'Breath-control' (*rLung-rTSol*).

This is sought to be achieved by withdrawing the breath from the two side-veins (to the left and to the right) and forcing it into the middle vein (*dhuti*). This is making the wind in the body 'pot-shaped'. The Tibetan practice (*Srog-rTSol*) is very similar to the Indian *prāṇāyāma*. It is described as comprising of four methods:

- (1) 'Breathing in' or inhalation of breathing. The air is slowly, gently and noiselessly sucked in through the

nostrils from about sixteen fingers' distance.

- (2) 'Filling', or 'pot-making'. The inhaled air is drawn in and forced into the abdominal region, thus swelling it to resemble an earthen pot.
- (3) 'Equalizing' or 'lung-expansion'. When the practitioner finds that he can no longer preserve the 'pot-shape', the breath is broken up into two units, one unit being forced into the left lung and the other into the right. The air within the body is thus equalized, the lungs being suffused with breath.
- (4) 'Shooting the breath'. When it is found impossible to continue the above any longer, the bodily breath is shot out through the nostrils like an arrow. This 'shooting' is done gently first, but later with great force. The 'dead' air is thus completely expelled.

While this method is usually adopted by the practitioner's intent on magical powers or by those who pursue the 'Short Path', it is more common to employ the sequence of inhalation-retention-expulsion of breath to facilitate visualization. In such a practice, the expulsion of 'dead' breath often becomes the initial stage, although the practice is flexible. The practitioner breathes out gently through the nostrils reciting mentally the seed-syllable *Om*; visualising at the same time the form of the letter as white. Then he inhales the air slowly and steadily, reciting *Hūm*, and visualizing it as blue or black in colour. Then, the inhaled air is retained within the body for a while, reciting *Āh*, and visualizing the form of this seed-syllable as red in colour. There is an interesting explanation that the three parts of the practice symbolize the three sects in Tibetan: exhalation which is white is the Kagyu sect (founded by Marpa); inhalation which is blue or black is the indigenous Bon; and retention which is red is the Nyingma (rNing-Ma founded by Padmasambhava).

But the important aspect of this method is the association of what is called 'the adamantine recitation' (*rDo-rJe-hi bZlas-pa*, Skt. *Vajra-japa*) with the practice which is not so much breath-control as breath-regulation. The recitation of the three-syllabled formula *Om-Hūm-Āh* is done inaudibly, while breathes (exhalation, inhalation and retention). The purpose is

to render the breathing process even, regular and rhythmic on the one hand and full of mystical power on the other. Serious practitioners count up to 21,600 breathings at one sitting. The order of the syllable is changed by some practitioners at one to *Om* (for inhalation), *Āh*, (for retention) and *Hūm* (for exhalation). It is more usual either to count the breaths or to repeat the syllables; seldom are the two done together.

The Tibetan Yoga also prescribes mere watching of the breathing process, without any attempt to regulate, much less to control. This is in common with Theravāda Buddhism and Zen. The benefit envisaged here is 'tranquillity' (*SHi-Ba*, Skt. *samatha*). The normal mind is likened to a burning fire, and 'the going out' of that fire is 'tranquillity'. The Tibetan word *SHi-Ba* means 'to die' or 'to go out' (*SHi-KHa Ma* is death, and *SHi-gNas* is a death-like state or condition). It is a sphere where the fire of mind has gone out. It corresponds to the Pāli expression '*sītibhūto*' ('cooled'). The practice involves the cultivation of tranquillity by means of 'bare awareness of breathing'. If the mind is wild and thoughts many, it would be an advantage to begin the practice by counting each breath;

- (1) Watch the breath as it goes out of your nostrils. Do not hurry it; make it slow and long. When the breath has completely gone out, count 'One'. Watch the breath as it enters your nostrils, and when it reaches the pit of your stomach, count 'Two'. When again the breath courses out, count 'Three' and so on. Continue till 'Ten', and begin again with 'One'. If you continue beyond 'Ten' you are likely to attend more to the counts than to the breath.
- (2) Now, as you watch the out-going breath, you extend yourselves mentally, as if you are opening out along with the out-breath, and when the out-breath is about to finish, say mentally 'Out' count 'One'. Watch the in-breath, with no involvement whatever, but when the out-breath starts, extend yourself again mentally, and as it is drawing to a close, say, 'Out', and count 'Two'. Continue till 'Ten', and then begin again with 'One'.

The second exercise will start after you have achieved a fair degree of success with the first. When a count is lost, because of some distraction, begin again with 'One'; do not try to resume from the last number. Let not the counting be mechanical. Employ your whole attention and entire energy to the business of counting while watching the breaths. Let not breath escape your awareness.

While you are watching and counting, do not allow yourself to be split into two parts: "in-breathing I" and the "out-breathing I". And do not vocalize the counting; do it entirely mentally. Try not to disturb the natural rhythm of your breathing.

When calm breathing has been established, when each breath could readily be watched, and when the counting is done without an error (that is, without getting distracted by stray thoughts), the practitioner is ready for the next phase of meditation, viz., 'insightful understanding' (*Lhag-THow* Skt. *vipaś-yanā*). An old instruction runs:

Link the thought-process with the breathing process; and forcibly control the mind.

The explanation is that thoughts appear and disappear in the period that elapses between an in-breath and an out-breath. Attention must be focussed on this interval, ignoring both the incoming and the outgoing breaths. Watching the movement of breaths should be abandoned, and the mind fixed on the 'natural retention' of the breath, which is an exceedingly brief span. Counting of the breaths is dispensed with at this state, and after a preliminary exercise of 'following' the breath-movements, one begins to observe the mind's working without in any way attempting to interfere with it. This is the practice of 'letting go'. Here is what a teacher explains:

Mind is like a lake, a sheet of water, muddy and agitated; waves and ripples constantly cover the surface. You can hardly catch your reflection on such a surface, nor can you see the bottom of the lake.

You can not clear the surface and calm the turmoil by beating the water with a stick or by stirring it with a rod.

The ordinary man is always attempting to still his mind and see its bottom in this very manner. The more he tries, the less are the chances of success.

Why not leave the lake alone! Just forget about it, think something else. Do not try to grapple with the mind; you will only make it more difficult to handle. Watch your breath instead! When the mind does attract your attention, that is to say, distracts you from your breathwatching, merely register the thought, barely become aware of it, and return immediately to your breathwatching.

You will soon find that mind becomes calm, and you can see through it. Letting the lake alone, you will find that its surface becomes clear and that the waves and ripples subside! That is what the revered siddha Saraha meant when he said: "When bound, the mind tried to wander in all the ten directions; but when freed, it remains still. I have learnt this lesson from how the camel behaves." And the venerable sGam-Po-Pa said: "If the mind be left relaxed; it becomes calm; if water be left undisturbed, it becomes clear!"

LOOK, REFLECT AND WORK

Meditation in Tibet goes by the name of sGom-pa (Skt. *bhāvanā*), which word originally meant 'to imagine', "to fancy" "to produce or generate something (*sKyed-pa*) in mind". It came to signify 'contemplation' or 'meditation' because it was essentially a mental culture, a creation, and a cultivation. The term was employed in the sense of holding one's attention on a deity (*LHa*), as well as in the sense of contemplating upon the formless. Among the forms, the 'non-breathing' objects like the image or deity, or tiny ball, or a lamp are distinguished from 'breathing' objects like in-breaths and out-breaths. The watching and counting of the breaths explained above, are grouped under preliminary practices. Meditation proper deals essentially with the 'formless'. Three stages are recognised here:

1. 'Viewing' (*lTa-Ba*). The Tibetan word signifies an act of will; it is an attentive, energetic, deliberate looking at, or into, something. The usage of the word in the context of the physician 'looking' at the pulse of a patient (*rTSa-lTa-Ba*) is significant. It is 'feeling' the pulse, an intent examination or a

close investigation by one who is not only competent but deeply and practically interested. The other frequent imagery employed to illustrate the significance of 'viewing' is climbing to the mountain-top and looking at the village from that height.

The ability to 'view' in this sense follows a skill in bestowing non-participant and bare attention upon the breaths, acquired in the preliminary practices. 'Viewing' is different from musing, or reflective and discursive thinking. It is a steady flow of awareness, more or less completely denuded of content. While this is essentially a practical and meditational approach, there is also a suggestion (more commonly accepted) that 'viewing' approximates to the study of the scriptures and the development of a viewpoint (*darśana*), as the first stage in systematic meditation. In this sense, it is the obtainment of an effective outlook.

The important outcome of this stage of meditation is the ability to combat normal distractions that emerge from our daily transactions. 'Viewing' is described as antagonistic to the 'rule of the senses'. Mind is freed from its habitual subjection to sense-function; mind is no longer lead by the sense-organs. To borrow an expression of Deikmann, it is 'deautomatization'.

2. 'Reflecting' (*sGom-Pa*). This may be regarded as meditation proper. It is contemplation, but not employing words and forms. Aśvagoṣha describes this stage as 'mirror-like awareness' (*The Awakening of Faith*. Richard's Tr.) When the mirror reflects an object, it does not accept, nor does it reject; it does not modify, nor does it judge. When the object is removed from its presence, it does not remember, nor does it anticipate. It merely receives, and does not hold on to it. Whatever object is presented, it is uniformly and accurately reflected. The mirror remains the same whatever the objects; and it does not matter to it whether objects come near it or go away from it. Mind in this stage is transformed into a clear mirror, not clinging to the phenomenal presentations, nor evaluating them in one way or another. The saint Nāro-pā, the disciple of Tilopa and teacher of Mar-pa, is credited with this advice:

Do not negate; do not suspend your thought; do not find fault; do not fix your mind on something; and do not judge. Just let it be !

When a thought holds on to an object, it is the normal life of bondage; when, however, the thought lets go, or lets the object just be, it is enlightenment. It is in this sense that meditation is said to be 'mirror-like'. It is in this sense that the great reformer TSong-KHa-pa described meditation as "the means of helping one to reject all imaginative thoughts together with their seeds". It is a matter of uprooting or burning such constructive mental processes which fill our minds, so that the mind is not cluttered and overwhelmed. Meditation is also called a "clearing technique."

There are two exercises which have been prescribed in order to accomplish this 'clearing'. The first exercise involves active but non-participating and non-interfering observation of the mind's working: one is here aware of the thoughts as they arise from apparently nowhere, and as they disappear into oblivion, he watches their uncanny spontaneity, and fleeting transience. But he does not 'think' about them, judge them, accept them or reject them. He merely 'looks at' them. The second exercise is more deliberate. It inhibits the random straying of the mind, focussing it on a chosen object. But it is not an objectbound contemplation in the usual sense of the term. There are two phases of it; the first gets involved with the chosen object to the exclusion of other objects and accomplishes a vivid mental image of the object; the second phase methodically eliminates all the details and characteristics from the object and frees mind from its commitment to forms and matter.

This stage is necessary in order to undo the 'rule of imagination.' Our mind is exceedingly fertile; it can throw up thoughts and feelings in an interminable succession. We are, therefore, ceaselessly troubled and tormented, disturbed and distracted. To make the mind sterile is difficult, and impossible without persistent and intelligent effort. The meditational 'reflection' is an attempt to recover the essential nature of mind which is passive reception. The Tibetan texts give three characteristics of 'reflection' at this stage: it should be clear and distinct (*gSal*), it should be free from deliberate inquiry and reasoning (*Mi-rTog*), and it should be steady (*MargYengs*). The Tibetan expression denoting the last characteristic is interesting. *gYengs* means "swift movement to and fro", "distraction", "distur-

bance''. Thus the characteristic mentioned involves not only freedom from distraction but alertness and sustained attention. It may be described as 'meditative absorption', or tranquillity of no-thought.

3. 'Working' (*sTod-Pa*). This stage consists of exercises and practices in order to perfect the second stage as well as behaviour in the world, in the light of the gains of such practice. It is frequently suggested that *sTod-pa* is the opposite of *lTa Ba*, 'viewing'. If the latter is theoretical viewpoint, the former is practical behaviour. Sometimes 'working' is regarded as realization, the result of the two aforesaid stages. In this sense, it becomes 'understanding' or 'insight' (*rTogs-Pa*).

The three stages of meditation are calculated to transform the normal man, who is confused, blind and passionate into a saint who is clear-headed, wise and cool. The first stage, viz. 'viewing', is meant to release him from the strong-hold of senses so that his confusions cease. The second state, viz. 'reflecting', is designed to eliminate the rule of imagination which obscures reality and projects illusory forms. The mind will attain not only stability but sight of reality. The third state, viz. 'working', is described as undoing the rule of passion. The practitioner is now tranquil and cool.

In accordance with these expected benefits, the meditator is warned against three normal inclinations :

If one lives in luxury, eating plentiful and rich food (*eZa*), Viewing is impossible. If one inclines to pomp and splendour (*Byin*), merriment (*rGod*) and wild living (*Yod*), Reflecting is impossible. If one desires excessively (*bLang*), or abides (*yod-na*) in the pair (*Dor*) of attachment and aversion, Working is impossible.

The celebrated 'six precepts' of the Indian founder of the Kagyu sect in Tibet, Tilo-pa, are significant in this context. The Sanskrit original of the cryptic philosophy of naturalness has been lost; but the precepts have been prepared in Tibetan:

- (1) "Do not imagine" (*Mi-mNo*). Imagination is fancy, thought which is far removed from the object, a mere mental process (*manana*).

- (2) "Do not design" (*Mib-bSam*). Designing is based on desire and is tied to an objective; it is a plan based on resolve (*samkalpa*).
- (3) "Do not analyse" (*Mid-PHyed-CHing*). Analysis is the discursive activity of the mind, involving reasoning (*mīmāṃsā*).
- (4) "Do not reflect" (*Mib-sGom*). Reflection is contemplative consideration, involving sustained attention (*bhāvanā*).
- (5) "Do not intend" (*Mi-Sems*). Intention is energetic and purposeful thinking, involving volition (*cetanā*).
- (6) "Abide in natural state" (*Rang-Babs-bZHugs*). *Rang* means 'self', 'spontaneous', 'natural': *Babs* is 'form', 'appearance', 'shape' or 'condition'. The two expressions together correspond to the Sanskrit word 'svabhāva' (natural disposition). *bZHugs* is 'to dwell,' 'to reside'.

Visualization Exercises

It appears rather paradoxical that Tibetan meditation which seeks to realize void prescribes visualization as an expedient device. However, it is not without a reason that this prescription has been made. And it rests on a perfect understanding of the mind's modes and manners. In a work ascribed to the great Padmasambhava we read:

Mind is uncreated and radiant. It rests on no objective support and its nature is vacuous like the sky. And it is free like clouds in the sky. The world of external appearances is nowhere save in the mind; and the appearances, like clouds, will fade away into their sources. Mind is transparent, without quality. To know whether this be so or not, look within your own mind. The *dharma* being nowhere save in the mind, there is no other place of meditation than the mind.

Visualization as a technique is peculiar to Vajrayāna and its practice is perfected in Tibet. It is derived from the Mahāyāna Buddhist conception of 'three aspects' (*tri-kāya*, Tib. *sKu-gSum*) of the 'One Essence of Mind'; its own essential vacuous nature likened to the calm and still expanse of the ocean (*dharma-kāya*, Tib. *CHoskyi sKu*), the 'bright' aspect that is compared to the mist, clouds and rainbow over the ocean (*sambhoga-kāya*, Tib. *Longs-sPyod-rZogs-sKu*), and the 'flowing out' aspect, likened

to the clouds being colourful because of the rainbow and their descending as rain (*irmāṇa-kāya*, Tib. *sPrul-pahi sKy*). This is an elaborate doctrine on which a large literature exists both in India and in Tibet. This is no place even to give a summary of the doctrine. It should be sufficient here to point out that visualization belongs to the third of these aspects.

The 'flowing out' aspect has been described as generative and creative. But the essential nature of Mind is vacuous (*sTong-pa-Nyid*) and, therefore, formless. What is it, then, that flows out? A mere appearance, altogether illusory (*sPrul-ba*), but an 'emanation' nevertheless. This is occasioned by the 'bright' aspect of the Mind. Basic to the technique of visualization is the theory of light or visibility (*sNang-ba*). The phenomenal world of appearance is called the 'illuminated or visible whirl of events' (*sNang-Srid*). It is, however, not real, in the ultimate, or absolute, sense; it is a mere transformation of the One Formless Mind. Its only characteristic is that it comes to view; it comes to be seen; it shines before us.

There is an interesting Tibetan theory, probably an echo of some Indian doctrine now difficult to identify, about the three phases in the manifestation of this visibility (called in Tib. *sNang-Ba gSum*); it relates the phenomenal emanation with psychic processes. The first stage (*hCHad-Pa*) indicates a cutting asunder, a drifting away, a split into subject and object. It is the onset or emergence of the developmental processes. It is a 'shining forth' (*sNang-Ba*). It is symbolized as red in colour, because in the Indian analysis of the *guṇās* 'rajas' (activity) is red. The second stage (*mCHed*) is the diffusion or spread of the initial glow. But there is here a dependence on the objective side of the split. It is described as 'the vision of darkness'. The glow is here dimmed by the encounter of the objects. The third stage is the settled 'gloom'. The glow gets very dim here; that is to say, awareness is lost. The subjective side of the split gets submerged in the objective, which alone now becomes visible. The world becomes bright in proportion to the Mind getting dim. In this sense, this stage has been called 'luminous', 'bright' (*hOd gSal*, Skt *ābhāsvara*).

In the practice of visualization, Mind's ability to project visions is made use of. This ability is said to rest on three preparations: postural perfection (*āsana*, Tib. *Lus-sbYong-Drug*),

skill in the restraint of breath, *kumbhaka* Tib. *Srog-rTsol*) and capacity to direct and sustain thought (*dhāraṇā*). In particular, breathing exercises and the practice of visualization go hand in hand. Exhalations are employed as vehicle for the visions to go out of the individual, and inhalations for withdrawing these visions into oneself. And as a preparatory requisite, time is spent in fixing the moving thought:

Assume the seven postures of Vairocana. Do not let the mind turn back and pick up the past; let it not gallop into the future either. Nor should it freely give shape to the present. Fix your gaze at the empty space in the sky.

Your mind will begin to throw up forms: there will be thoughts and feelings, doubts and decisions. You will also 'see' things out there, but they are from your own mind. They will dance about, tumble, hurry and chase each other. They gather and scatter. They change and agitate.

Bring this moving mirage to a stillness by watching and restraining the breaths and fixing your gaze. The vision will now settle down; the diversity of forms diminishes and their activity is lessened. Gradually they all merge into a single tiny spot (*THig-Le*). Some people will see it as dark; for others, it will be a small ball of light. But this spot will not rest at a place; it will shift its position.

Fix the spot now. Make it remain motionless; do not allow it to change its colour or size. This can be achieved by breath-restraint, gaze-fixure and thought-elimination. You will find that the spot will disappear in the surrounding darkness, and reappear. It will eventually come into yourself, and re-emerge from yourself, and go out.

Visualization exercises are all based on this general method. And the technique of 'evocation' is taught during initiation and it is accompanied by an effective ritual. Usually a deity with a well-known and stylized form is selected, and the practitioner is taught to direct his devoted attention to this deity, externalize clearly its conventional form in a dot, and after the image is visually fixed, he is encouraged to regard himself as that image; his mind flows out and assumes that deity's form. In this identification, the ego of the practitioner is transformed (or

rather transmuted) into the core of that deity. The deity is now not merely imagined; it is not just a vision or a phantom. It is as real as the practitioner himself. In fact, the two together constitute one reality. Later, by another careful effort, he takes the deity out of himself, disentangles it from his ego, and projects it again into the space outside him. He then contracts the deity's form and accommodates it within the dot he started with. The deity dissolves in the dot, and the dot returns to the practitioner's mind, and there gets lost in a void.

The mind is thus taught to project deliberate forms, and withdraw them as deliberately. From a pregnant but amorphous dot (which is the mind's essence), an elaborate and complex deity is made to emerge, and the entire thing is made to dissolve into the inside of the practitioner, and emerge out at will. Sometimes, during visualization, out of the body of one deity, several other deities are made to emerge and arrange themselves round the original deity in a stylized design (*maṇḍala*); and later they are all again absorbed into the body of the original deity, which in turn is absorbed into the dot. The entire vision, in all its colour and complexity is an emanation from one's own mind and the whole thing sinks into his mind again.

The involvement of breathing in visualization, which has already been mentioned, is an interesting detail. When the dot of light has been formed in the mind, as the practitioner breathes out, he visualizes the rays of light from this dot go out into the empty space in front of him, previously selected, and when he breathes in, the rays of light are visualized to re-enter the practitioner's body. In a variant practice, the rays of light are transformed into the mystic syllable *Hūm*, which is pictured as blue in colour, like the sky. The form of the deity emerges from this syllable, because each syllable is looked upon as the embodiment of a deity. The deity is seen to grow out of the syllable, the syllable itself remaining in the heart of the deity that has thus emerged. Or while breathing out, the numerous rays of light that dart out are changed into so many *Hūms* which seem to fill the world. The *Hūms* are transformed into as many deities, which are withdrawn into the practitioner's mind when he breathes in.

Visualization of an *Yi-Dam* is accomplished with the help of an appropriate 'seed-syllable' (*bija-mantra*). Every deity has its

own 'seed-syllable', a collection of several syllables known as the 'heart-syllables' (*hṛdaya-mantra*), and a formula (*mantra*) containing the name of the deity and certain ejaculations like *Hūm*, *Hrīh*, and *Om*. The practitioner learns to visualize the 'seed-syllable', the outline of which would be "fine like the filament of the lotus stalk". He achieves the visual representation of this seed-syllable alone in spotless void, filled with glowing light. From the centre of the light a lotus will emerge supporting the letter "as a king on his throne". Then the letter will gradually be transformed into the likeness of the *Yi-Dam* (whose form will be familiar to the practitioner, because of its stylistic and iconic representation). Within the heart of the *Yi-Dam* will glow the seed-syllable, encircled by the syllable comprising the 'heart-syllable'. The latter syllables would revolve round the seed-syllable, shedding light all round. A steady stream of light will rush into the practitioner's body. In the subsequent phase, the form of the *Yi-Dam* diminishes, and entering into his body through the crown of his head, settles down in his heart. He then feels his own form diminishing gradually, until it is of the same size as the *Yi-Dam*'s. The two bodies will merge into a perfect unison, and in the unified hearts the 'seed-syllable' and the 'heart syllables' now shine forth. In the next stage, the 'heart-syllables' will be withdrawn into the 'seed-syllable', and the 'seed-syllable' dissolves in the dot, when the dot also disappears, the practitioner will be in a state of trance.

The visions are never mistaken for reality. They are regarded as if they were reflections on a clean and bright mirror, or "like moon's reflected form in water". And when they are withdrawn, they vanish "as a rainbow vanishes". But they are not mere hallucinations. They are said to become "substantial enough to touch", and they are life-like, although the practitioner never groups them alongside the rest of life. It is an experience strictly confined to meditational sessions, and the vision in every case is voluntarily and deliberately conjured up, the practitioner being fully aware of its nature, meaning and function. The important aspect is that the practitioner expects to learn to regard the so-called reality of the world as essentially a vision, far from mistaking his vision for reality. The practice is likely to bring home to him experientially that the phenomenal world with all its objects, joys and sorrows, is nothing more

than a transformation of the One Mind, whose essence is vacuity (*sTong-Pa*).

This is brought home by CHos-dByins-Pa (b. 1324 A.D.) when he recounted: "Through (meditation) on the inseparable nature of void and Mind, which represents the Absolute (*CHos-Nyid*), which pervades the entire world and the living beings, like colour covering the edge of a book, I have opened my eyes on the cause and effect of the phenomenal existence and Nirvāṇa. I have eliminated the doubts, and I have reached the depth. I have dug the foundation and removed the floor."

While visualization is taking place, it is necessary that the practitioner should remain perfectly calm, detached, and alert. The texts warn that should any aspect of the vision 'please' or 'bother' him, the vision will fade away. He will suppress not only his feelings, but value judgements. He is advised to be a non-participant observer. Chanting of the texts or recitation of appropriate formulae during the process helps minimize his emotional involvement in the evocation. The categories of thinking can also be distractions; they are described as 'subtle', in contradistinction to the distractions from the outside world which are 'coarse'. The texts insist that sloth, drowsiness, and a casual attitude are inimical to success in the practice. If there is sloth, details of the vision will fade; in drowsiness, the vision's clarity will disappear; when the attitude is casual, the vision slips away.

THE EGO TRANSACTION

The great reformer TSong-KHa-Pa, who was instrumental in the ascendance of the dGe-Lugs sect, explained in great detail the value of visualization for the practitioner in regard to ego-modification. According to him, the core of visualization is the practitioner's identification of the deity with himself, the exchange of the 'ego of the deity' for his own ego:

In this practice, the ability with which one can cut asunder his own ordinary ego is important. To concentrate one's efforts on clearly fixing the form of the deity is to attend to the deity's body. But attention must be paid to the deity's ego also; it must be firm and vivid. Its ego must then be exchanged for the ascetic's normal ego. This is not possible

unless he is able to give up his normal ego, to abandon the clinging to his own ego.

It is clear from the above account that visualization is a dynamic process involving readjustment of egos, one the ordinary and weak ego of the practitioner, and the other an extraordinarily powerful ego of the Deity. Among the objectives of visualization are included the substitution of the normal ego with the Deity's ego. Important here is the willingness to forsake one's own ego, however weak and ordinary. And it is a difficult procedure, for one has lived with it for so long and one has come to regard it as his precious possession, in fact, his all: it is regarded as his substance, sustenance and support. The fear of its loss would result in a breakdown of normal personality. It is only the intense and earnest desire for enlightenment that can generate this willingness. The preliminaries mentioned earlier are designed to strengthen this willingness.

The abandonment of the normal ego has to be achieved in stages and must be accomplished with great care and skill. The aid of a competent and understanding teacher here is invaluable. The aspirant must 'take refuge', take the vows of a *bodhisattva*, 'arouse the intention of enlightenment', and 'offer 100,000 *māṇḍāla* offerings to the line of teachers'. Without such preparation, he is not only unlikely to achieve his goal but invite distress and malady; his teacher too would come to grief. In the words of Mila-repa: "Led by a deep ravine which presages destruction, yoked yaks fall together into the abyss."

Substituting for the ordinary ego the ego of the deity is an elaborate process and requires training and guidance. The first step is to achieve a vivid image, a clear mental picture, of the deity's form and nature. Manuals of meditation give detailed instructions as to how this is accomplished. It is an important step inasmuch as it is the foundation. And it depends upon complete concentration, freed from both distractions and drowsiness while the vivid image of the deity has been obtained, one must discern the ego of the deity. Concentration upon the form of the deity without attention to the nature of its ego would render the practice useless. When the ego of the deity has been firmly established, one acquires "the ability to cut off one's ordinary ego". But the manuals say that it is not until one turns

away from his own normal ego, that he can substitute for it the deity's ego.

The practice at this stage involves intent reflection that the practitioner is in fact the deity. There will no doubt be initially a sense of artificiality and unnaturalness about this identification, but concentrated reflection will eliminate this hindrance. The whole idea in so constructing an ideation (*abhūta-parikalpa*, as the *Yogācāra* school of Mahāyāna describes it) is to drive home the void nature of all phenomena, which consists in negating the difference between subjectivity and objectivity. The several formulae that the practitioner is taught to recite frequently centre round this constructive ideation:

Om svabhāva-śuddhā sarva-dharmāḥ; svabhāva-śuddho'
ham

(All things are in their nature void I too am void in my nature)

Om śūnyatā-jñāna vajra-svabhāvātmako' ham
(I am of the nature of wisdom-diamond of the void)

The immediate purpose of this practice is to draw into oneself the extraordinary power of the deity, so that the liberating insight may dawn fully and effectively. This insight helps in the total transformation of the ordinary consciousness.

M E N

Marpa the Eccentric Master

The venerable Marpa of LHo-Brag (1012-1097) was an illustrious, if also somewhat eccentric, son of Tibet. His continued celebrity, however, rests on his having been the teacher of the more illustrious poet-saint of Tibet, Milarepa. Marpa visited India several times, studied under many Indian masters, and founded the well-known Kagyu (bKah-brgyud) tradition in Tibet, which was a continuation of the Indian tradition of Naropa. He is celebrated as the 'Translator' (*Lo-TSa-Ba*), for he not only brought into Tibet a large number of Sanskrit Texts on Yoga and Tantra, but translated many of them into Tibetan. He was also a poet.

Marpa (Mar-Pa) hailed from LHo-Brag, ("South Rock"), an area in Southern Tibet bordering on Bhotan. That was his family name. Tibetan religious annals know four or five kinsmen of his, all scholars and teachers, who were also known as Marpas. This Marpa, therefore, is usually referred to as the person from LHo-Brag, or as the Translator. His family name, however, was bLo-Gras. He was born in 1012 A.D. as the second son of his parents, not much about whom is known. He was a bright child, but grew up to be a troublesome boy. His mischievous pranks were an unending source of anxiety for the entire village. His parents, in consequence, were nearly boycotted in the small village.

Marpa's father thought seriously of sending the boy away from the village, but had the wisdom to think of a good teacher

to take charge of the boy, who was hardly fifteen. He had heard that a certain teacher, who had visited India, was running a sort of boarding school, not very far from LHo-Brag. This teacher and his school were the talk of the whole region. The father took the boy there, and made arrangements with the teacher. He returned to his village with a two-fold satisfaction: the boy was away and the teacher would make a man of him.

The teacher was Brogmi (hBrog-Mi, "The Dweller of the Pasture-land", 993-1078 A.D.). He was known in that part of the country as "the precious master" (*bLa-CHen-Po*). He was proficient in Sanskrit, the sacred language of India, having learnt it from the excellent scholar Śāntibhadra, in Nepal. He had also studied the Indian religious lore for eight years in India, under no less a teacher than the great Ratnākata-Śānti, the celebrated pandita of the Vikramaśilā monastic college in Magadha. He had become an adept in Buddhist Philosophy, and had been initiated into the 'Diamond doctrine' (*Vajra-yāna*) by Prajñā-Indraruei. Returning to Tibet, he had settled down as a translator. He translated several Sanskrit texts on Tantra into Tibetan; and his translations became famous. He opened a school for teaching Sanskrit and explaining Tantrik texts in his Myu-gu-Lung monastery (near Sa-SKya in gTSang in Central Tibet). Many brilliant young men of Tibet joined this school.

Brogmi was a clever teacher, stern in the matter of discipline but kind-hearted otherwise. He had, however, a streak of eccentricity. He preferred living in a tent among his cattle. He spent most of his time in the open, day and night. When Marpa was brought to him, he not only perceived that a little devil had come to him, but understood that the boy had a great future. Brogmi attended to Marpa's education with especial care. The boy's unruly nature soon underwent a remarkable change. He had found his vocation; and, therefore, took to his studies assiduously.

He mastered Sanskrit in a couple of years. Sanskrit was called 'the language of translation'. Its knowledge was indispensable for one who aspired to take up translation of sacred texts as his vocation. While the entire mass of religious texts which were held as sacred and authoritative in Tibet was in Sanskrit, its knowledge was by no means common in that

country. A translator's profession was therefore highly prized. It also brought considerable wealth. It was natural for Marpa to emulate his master and aspire to become a translator like him. Brogmi had brought from India several Tantrik texts. Many of them were incomplete, and most of them were unrelated to each other. This left Marpa rather dissatisfied. He resolved, therefore, to visit India to acquire the complete versions of the texts, and to discover the relations among them with the help of oral traditions current in that country. For it was an accepted practice in the field of Tantra that not all the teachings were to be reduced to writing. The most essential doctrines were only orally communicated by the teacher to the deserving among his students.

After completing his studies with Brogmi, Marpa returned home. But, collecting about fifteen golden *sraṅgs* (*sraṅg* is a Tibetan weight, about an ounce), he at once set out on a journey to India. He spent three years in Nepal, to get used to the tropical climate of India. But he did not waste his time during this period. He studied several Tantrik texts under Nepalese monks. One of his teachers here, Benda-Pa, accompanied him to India and took him to the illustrious pandita, Nāropā (Nāḍa-pāda), in Magadha. Nāropā was the most eminent of Tantrikas in India in those days. Scholar, writer, teacher, mystic, recluse — he was indeed a phenomenon. He was a professor of Tantra at the Vikramaśīlā and Nālandā monastic colleges; he was also famed as a *yogi* and a *siddha*. He had learnt the 'great seal doctrine (*Mahā-mudrā*) from an equally eminent master, also a *siddha*, Tilopa (Taila-pāda), and was the sole exponent of that esoteric doctrine in the country. And he was adored by hundreds of students who eagerly gathered round him to listen to his expositions of Tantrik texts and to obtain initiations from him. There were also many Tibetans who studied under him.

When Marpa arrived in Magadha, Nāropā had been living in retirement in his native village, Phula-hari, on the outskirts of Nālandā. He was engaged in some secret practice, and was therefore in seclusion. But he came out for Marpa's sake. Impressed by the young Tibetan's zeal and brilliance, he readily accepted him as a resident student, and taught him the *Hevajra Tantra* with many hidden precepts. He also gave Marpa

as many as seven initiations into Tantrik rites, before resuming his seclusion.

When Nāropā retired once again to his contemplative seclusion, Marpa proceeded to Tulakshetra in the Western region in search of other *siddhas*. He met one, a famous *siddha*, jñāna-garbha (Kukkuri-Pa by name), and studied *Guhyasamāja-Tantra* with him. He was greatly impressed by the symbolism employed in this Tantra, and when he asked for hidden precepts bearing on this Tantra, he was told only Nāropā had them. Marpa returned to Nālandā and waited for Nāropā to come out of his retreat. While he waited, he prayed fervently that Nāropā should accept him as his disciple in 'the inner circle'. Marpa composed numerous poems in Tibetan and in Sanskrit, eulogizing the greatness of Nāropā. When Nāropā came out after a few weeks, he taught Marpa the *Guhyasamāja-Tantra* with the aid of an extremely abstruse but indispensable commentary called *Pradīpodyatana*, and gave him all the 'hidden precepts' connected with this Tantra.

When Marpa found that his funds had begun to dwindle, he returned to Tibet. But his heart was set on coming back to India before long for learning some more texts from Nāropā. When, therefore, he arrived in Tibet, he hit upon an ingenious plan to acquire sufficient quantity of gold to enable him to return to India. He set himself up as a magician in the northern part of Tibet, and specialized in conducting 'child-protecting' rites for wealthy families, charging ten golden *sraṅgs* for each rite. He soon became very popular, and rich folk clamoured to get his services. Marpa's fortune was quickly made. As luck would have it, a kinsman of his (Marpa mGo-Yags) who had struck on a gold mine at a place called Nam-ra became his client. Marpa now had bagfuls of gold. He could without a care set out on his second journey to India.

He went directly to Nālandā to resume his studies with Nāropā. But Nāropā had just left his village and had gone away to an unknown forest retreat for some Tantrik practice! Marpa was naturally disappointed, but he was unwilling to return to Tibet without meeting his great teacher. Marpa wandered about the forest in the eastern region in search of Nāropā. During the course of his search many were the mystics and saints that he met. An eager student that Marpa always

was, he enriched his store of hidden precepts. One of the hermits whom he met told that Nāropā was in a forest in South India. Marpa immediately set out for the South. After a diligent combing of numerous jungle retreats he located at last the great teacher on a mountain top.

Finding Nāropā, Marpa fell at his feet and offered him as gift all the gold that he had brought with him. Nāropā, however, threw away the gold in undisguised disgust. He kicked a rock with his foot, and the entire rock turned into glittering gold. He turned to Marpa and said: "Son, the whole earth here is gold!" With these words he abruptly disappeared behind the ramparts of the forest leaving the Tibetan utterly bewildered. That was the last that Marpa saw of his teacher.

Although Marpa was sorry that he could obtain no more instructions from the master, he was glad that he could at least see him. He was filled with feelings of gratitude for this good fortune. He spent the whole day worshipping the spot where Nāropā stood, and singing hymns that acknowledged the great blessing that Nāropā had showered upon him. He burst out into numerous songs of adoration. And since then, poetry came to him with effortless facility. And he dedicated his poetic muse to the praise of his *guru*.

Marpa was at that time 42 years of age. He resolved to spend the rest of his life teaching the doctrines that he had learnt from Nāropā. He returned to Tibet, settled down at his village in LHo-Brag and opened a school for teaching the Indian Tantras. He married and set up as a household teacher. Although he did not receive monastic ordination, he was known as a *lama*; he continued to be a yogi. He specialized in teaching *Guhyasamāja-Tantra* as expounded in Jinadatta's *Pañjikā*, in Sthagana's *Vivaraṇa* and in Jñānapāda's *Nibandha (Kusumañ-jalī)*. But this exposition, which was rather metaphysical, lacked meditative orientation. Marpa, therefore, supplemented the exposition with Nāropā's analysis which was "hidden". Marpa formulated a five-fold scheme of meditation based on the traditional exposition and Nāropā's analysis of *Guhyasamāja-Tantra*:

- (1) solitude of body (*Lus-dBen*),
- (2) solitude of speech (*Nag-dBen*),

- (3) solitude of mind (*Sems-dBen*),
- (4) illumination (*od-gSal*, Skt. *ābhāsvara*), and
- (5) merging of body and mind (*Zung-Jug*, Skt. *Yuganaddha*).

The last stage was meant to be the immediate precursor to complete enlightenment. Marpa also taught *Hevajra-Tantra*.

His school became popular, and Marpa became a celebrity all over Tibet. His expositions of Indian texts and initiations into esoteric practices attracted a large number of brilliant students. Although himself a famous lama now, his eagerness to acquire more knowledge and gather further initiations never abated. When, for instance, he heard from an acquaintance that a great *siddha*, Maitrīpā was teaching hidden texts pertaining to 'The great Seal' (*mahāmudrā*) doctrine in the Eastern region of India, he at once got ready to leave for India.

Marpa met Maitrī-pā in Bengal and obtained from him the hidden teachings and initiations. This gave him a sense of fulfilment. He acknowledged: "By the grace of my venerable master, my mind has now been set at rest, and my mind has at last been freed from doubts. I have realized the essential nature as non-origination and I have an insight into the relative nature of mind." His mind became clear like a quiet lake in clear moonlight; his heart became cool like snow on mount Kailas.

This was his third and last visit to India. In all, he had spent about eighteen years here. But he was a tireless pilgrim. After he returned to Tibet, he made two more visits to Nepal in order to collect texts and meet mystics. Just as he was about to return home after his second visit, political trouble broke out in Nepal, and Tibetans in Nepal were harassed by the local chiefs. Marpa decided to turn this detention to his advantage, and entered into a contemplative retreat in a cell. While so engaged in perfecting the meditative techniques he had so assiduously acquired in India, he dreamt one night that he was carried by a fairy to Śrīparvata in South India, where the well-known Indian *siddha*, Saraha-pāda, gave him initiations into many secret rites, thus integrating *Guhyasamāja-Tantra* and *Hevajra-Tantra*. When he woke up, his mind had been brilliantly illumined and his heart was utterly tranquil. He now understood that the two basic texts had 'the same flavour'; and he

developed a perfect insight into 'the unalterable one-flavour' of all phenomena.

When the political clouds cleared, Marpa returned to Tibet and resumed his teaching in a place called Gro-bo-Lung. He established a sort of monastery (although he was not a monk himself) in Lower Lung. Hundreds of students gathered round him; they lived with him and learnt from him. His wife, an affectionate and efficient lady, ran the house for him and his students. She was not only a mother to the students, but was herself a teacher. She not only helped in the initiations that Marpa bestowed on the students, she herself bestowed minor initiations.

Marpa was as eccentric as he was celebrated. He was a splendid teacher, but had a terrible temper. He was most exacting with his students: uncompromisingly severe and unreasonably demanding. He would frequently burst out: "I have obtained this marvellous teaching from Indian masters after untold suffering and sacrifice. Do you want me to throw it away for the sake of miserable money, and before such ease-loving fools?" He would scare away light-hearted students; only those who were really earnest remained. His wife was as sober as he was irascible; she was unfailingly gentle and kind and generous, and amply made up for all the severities his students experienced under the great teacher.

It was widely known that Marpa's ways were beyond comprehension. He was a saint, and spent hours in serene meditation. But he readily quarrelled with almost everyone that he met. His exterior was forbidding; it suggested a greedy and garrulous worldling. He had a sharp tongue, and his wit was taunting. He apparently spent the major part of the day looking after his extensive farm, an occupation altogether unsuited to a contemplative disposition. And he had a fondness, which almost bordered on the abnormal, for building odd houses and pulling them down. This avocation kept him continually busy.

But this was only a mask. The earnest students that remained were rewarded by an uncommon love and generosity from him. He spared no pains to help them in various ways. He would teach them without holding back a single detail. He was, in fact, kind, austere, unworldly, and benevolent. He had perfected the art of uninterrupted contemplation, wherever he

was and whatever he was doing. His wife often reassured the students: "The master is unpredictable, even crazy. But have patience; he is only testing you. There is no one who is kinder than him in all Tibet. He would even teach a dog that came to learn from him!"

Once a young man, Nyog (rNog CHos-rDor) approached Marpa with a request to be taught a text. He had brought an ordinary horse as a present for the teacher. Marpa looked at the horse, and flared up: "Is this your fee for my teaching you the entire text? Do you know what trouble I have gone through to get this text from India? Go away! It is too small a present! Or, did you want merely to meet me? In that case, it would be too big a present!" Nyog was bewildered at this strange reception. Marpa's wife who knew that Nyog was earnest made a sign for him to remain. Soon Marpa not only agreed to teach Nyog the text that he had come to learn, but offered to teach him many other texts that were related to it. He bestowed on him several initiations, and transmitted to him the entire tradition of the Great Seal. This Nyog (1036-1102) became in due course one of 'the four great pillars' of Marpa's. It was he who continued in the main the 'teaching lineage' of Marpa, as Milarepa (another of the 'pillars') did the 'meditation lineage'.

Nyog had set up as a teacher in his own right at a distant town after he left Marpa. He had also become famous and wealthy. It so happened that once, Marpa had built a new house for his son who had come of age. He invited Nyog to come and officiate as a priest in the feast he had arranged. Nyog arrived at Marpa's village, bringing with him all the cattle and sheep that he possessed as presents to his teacher. A lame sheep alone had been left behind, for it could not make the long journey. He sent a student of his ahead to inform Marpa about his coming, expecting the teacher to arrange some sort of a reception for him. But when Marpa was informed, he flew into a rage: "What does he expect? Does he expect a great teacher like me to go and receive him, merely because he has brought a couple of cows and sheep for me. If that is what he expects, let him go back! I will have nothing to do with him." But Marpa's wife who knew Nyog very well and had a regard for him prepared some Chang and went to meet Nyog outside the village. When Nyog arrived in Marpa's presence, he

presented all the cattle that he had brought with him, bowed before the teacher and humbly said: "Master, it is needless to say that all that I possess is yours; my prosperity has been entirely due to your compassion and grace. Still, I have brought all my cattle as a token of my gratitude to you. Only a lame lamb has been left behind, for it could not make this long journey." Marpa, however, said "Very well, Nyog, I am very happy you came, and I am glad you have brought this present. But you could have carried that lame lamb on your back and brought it! Please go back, and bring it along!" Poor Nyog had to return all the way to his home-town and bring the lame lamb, carrying it.

Everyone thought the teacher was heartless and crazy. What would he do anyway with a lame lamb? But when Nyog returned, Marpa said "Nyog, you are an ideal disciple! I shall bestow on you a rite that I acquired after you left me. In fact I invited you mainly for that. That is why I made you return to your home and bring on your back the lame lamb. I have indeed no use for that animal! But your offering is now complete."

Besides the 'four great pillars', Marpa had four 'spiritual sons' and ten 'large heads' who spread Marpa's teaching all over the country. One of his 'spiritual sons' was Mes-TSHor-Po, who became a monk and presided over the Ba-Do monastery. He wrote extensive Tibetan commentaries on *Hevajra-Tantra*. He had a large retinue of students and many wealthy patrons.

Marpa died in 1097, when he was eighty-six. His relics were enshrined in a beautiful casket made of acacia wood. Marpa had two sons, one of whom (Jo-Rim KHor-Lo) was given to gambling. Once he pledged this precious casket, and lost it. The winner threw away the contents on the road and carried the casket away. A niece of Marpa's who learnt about this sacrilege, ran to Nyog and informed him. Nyog immediately arranged to get the relics carefully gathered and got them enshrined in a silver tomb. Later, a temple was built over this tomb. People believed that this temple safeguarded the fortunes of the country for long years. Marpa was regarded as the incarnation of the Vajrayāna divinity, Dömbi-Heruka. He is said to have been an adept in the art of 'transference of con-

sciousness' which he learnt from Nāropā. However, he did not transmit this art to any of his disciples. He had transmitted it to one of his sons, who unfortunately predeceased him.

Marpa was among those who welcomed the 'precious lord' Atīśa-Dīpaṃkara, when the latter arrived in Tibet in 1042 to begin his celebrated reform of Tibetan religion. Marpa was at that time a young man of 31, who sympathised with the 'mission' of Atīśa. Marpa too carried out a religious reform in his own way, and became the founder of a sect known as Kagyu (*bKah-brgyud*), which emphasizes meditation in seclusion as the road to enlightenment.

Mila the Cotton-clad

Tibet knows Milarepa (Mid-La Ras-Pa, 1040-1123 A.D.) as 'the venerable lord' (*rJe-BTSun*) and as the 'lord of ascetics' (*rNal-Bvor-gyi dBang-PHYug*, Skt. *Yogeshvara*). There is no saint of Tibet who is more loved and adored by his countrymen than this cotton-clad ascetic. His life-story, especially as recounted by his favourite disciple, Rechung (Ras-CHung rDo-rJe Grag-Pa), is the best-known among Tibetan classics. Milarepa's songs have a universal appeal; and there are hundreds of them still on the lips of his people.

Milarepa's family name was *Mila* (*Mid-La*), *Repa* (*Ras-Pa*) means 'cotton-clad'. He was so called because of the habit of wrapping his body with a thin cotton sheet even in biting cold. The expression has reference to the yogic technique of generating 'internal heat' (*gTum-Mo*), in which this ascetic and his followers were adepts. His personal name was THos-Pa-dGa ('a delight to hear'). He was so named because he had a sweet voice, and later in life, when he used to sing his own songs, even animals were said to be spell-bound.

Mila was born in 1040 A.D. as the son of a rich merchant, belonging to the KHyung-Po ('the Sacred Eagle') clan. When the boy was seven years old his father died, leaving the mother and child in the care of his brother. The property which was considerable was arranged to be managed by this brother until the boy came of age. The brother, however, was a wicked sort. He wanted to marry the widow of his brother, and when she

refused, he swore an eternal enmity towards her and her son. He began ill-treating them, summarily snatched away their property, and reduced them to a pitiable plight.

The mother courageously bore the hardship, eagerly awaiting her son's reaching his fifteenth year. When he did reach it, she wanted the brother of her husband to hand back the property to her son. But the wicked brother disclaimed all knowledge of this arrangement, and refused to part with the property which he claimed was his own. Because this brother was both wealthy and rough, the villagers were scared of taking the side of the poor widow, although they knew that her claim was just. The widow had no alternative but to continue in penury.

Mila in the meantime had started learning to read and write under the village teacher. One day there was a feast in a neighbouring village, to which this teacher was invited. The teacher went there with Mila. Mila partook freely of the wine that was being served in the feast. When he returned in the night to his own village he found himself in unusually high spirits. He was singing merrily when he reached home. His mother who heard him rushed out to see, and found him in a hilarious mood. She was shocked. She could not make out how he could possibly be in such a gay mood when they were steeped in such deep misery. She took a stick, belaboured him soundly and shouted, "Shame on you! You are a blot on the family! A disgrace indeed to your dead father! How can you possibly sing so merrily when we are what we are? You should be busy learning sorcery to destroy your devil of an uncle and his whole family! Let me tell you, I shall not be happy until you avenge the injustice he has wrought on us!"

The rebuke went straight into Mila's heart. He resolved at once to proceed to Yar-KLungs (in dbUs area) where there are reputed sorcerers. His mother gave him the necessary provisions and bade him not to return until he had destroyed his uncle. Although young, he braved the long and arduous journey and settled down to study the black arts under Nyags, whose powers of magic and witchcraft were feared all over the region. After learning the general practices for a year, Mila appraised the master of the real purpose of his study. The sorcerer thereupon sent him to a colleague of his own, sNubs-CHung of TSang-Rong, who had specialized in destructive magic. Mila retired,

under instruction from sNubs-CHung, to an underground cell, and practised magical rites for a fortnight. He came out when he saw signs of success.

In the meantime, Mila's uncle was celebrating his son's wedding in his own house, and about thirty friends and relatives had gathered to partake in the festivities. The house suddenly caved in and all the people were killed, save his uncle and aunt, who were at that time outside. Mila's mother knew that this was her son's doing, and she was overjoyed. The villagers were not pleased with her satanic glee, and they kept away from her. The widow became vindictive and sent a letter to her son to send a terrible hailstorm so that the villagers may see what her son could do and learn a lesson. Mila obtained from his teacher instruction with regard to compelling hailstorms. Within a month, and just at harvest time, a devastating hailstorm raged in the locality and brought untold suffering to the people.

Mila's mother was satisfied, but Mila himself was sad. He was troubled with the thought that he was only piling up sin upon sin, all because of a foolish woman's vengeful nature. While he was still residing with the teacher of sorcery, a friend and patron of the teacher suddenly died, leaving the teacher in gloom and dejection. The sorcerer called and said, "Son, we have been assiduously acquiring sins. We have nothing but suffering in store for us! You are young, and it will not profit you to pursue this career. Why don't you take to religious life and help all creatures? If you are willing, I shall support you. It will spell good for me too." Mila was delighted at the suggestion.

When he told the sorcerer that he was willing, in fact eager, the sorcerer sent him to Rong (valley) to study under an acquaintance of his (Breton), the purificatory rites. When Mila achieved a measure of success in this branch of learning, he desired his teacher to instruct him in the art of meditation so that he might realize the ultimate essence of the great doctrine. Breton was not skilled in this, and so he advised Mila to approach the venerable Marpa of LHo-Brag in Southern Tibet. As soon as Mila heard the name of Marpa, his mind fluttered with elation; a strange delight filled his being. He at once left in search of Marpa.

Marpa was camping at that time in CHu-Kyer, Mila went

there. Strangely, Marpa knew about Mila's arrival and had offered special prayers to his tutelary deities to invoke blessings upon Mila. He was eagerly waiting for him, and had in fact gone to the outskirts of the village to receive him, of course concealing his purpose. But when Mila appeared at his home and bowed before him, he appeared indifferent and spoke harshly. When Mila settled down, he set him lay tasks like ploughing the barren fields, building odd houses (which incidentally was his special craze) on lands that were not his own and erecting useless stone-walls. Marpa was especially severe and exacting where Mila was concerned. He made the young man labour until his body was bruised. Whenever Mila begged for initiations, Marpa only rebuked him and refused to do anything of the sort. He always taunted Mila reminding him of his flirtation with sorcery. In fact, Marpa always referred to Mila as a 'the great sorcerer', much to his discomfiture and dejection.

Mila reached the limit of his endurance. He planned to leave, and when the kindly Damema (Marpa's wife) was informed of his plan, she counselled patience. She pleaded with her husband on Mila's behalf, in vain. Then, she took a bold step. She sent with Mila a letter with Marpa's seal to one of the chief disciples of Marpa, Nyog (rNog), asking him to bestow initiation on Mila. By way of payment therefore she sent him a precious stone, given to Marpa by Nāropā and therefore especially esteemed by Marpa. All this was unknown to Marpa.

When Nyog heard about Mila's past as a sorcerer, he wanted Mila to send a hailstorm against the villagers of a neighbouring tract who had stolen his cattle. Reluctant though Mila was to repeat the sinful practice, he did send a hailstorm for the sake of obtaining precepts from Nyog. But he felt extremely unhappy. When Nyog noticed Mila's depression, he reassured him, and bestowed on him the initiation into *upāya-mārga*. Mila entered into seclusion and began meditating.

In the meantime, Marpa sent an invitation to Nyog to come to LHo-Brag and participate in the consecration ceremony of a nine-storeyed house he had lately built. Nyog took Mila with him to Marpa's festivity. As soon as Marpa sighted Mila, he feigned annoyance and demanded from Nyog how he gave

initiation to Mila (who was Marpa's student). When the bewildered Nyog mentioned about the letter and the present, Marpa seemed to fly into a rage and rushed upon Damema to belabour her. She, however, ran out in fright. And, immediately, Marpa cooled down, smiled pleasantly, and asked Damema to serve Chang liberally to the honoured guests. Marpa then revealed that Mila was in fact his favourite disciple, who had however, to cleanse himself of his sins before he became worthy of initiations. He explained that all the suffering which Mila had to undergo was only calculated towards this end. The odd houses that he made Mila build with such effort and distress were actually *maṇḍalas* which purified him progressively. Nyog and Damema heaved sighs of relief.

Marpa now took Mila under his care, and gave him hidden precepts and initiations. He sent him to a cave in rTa-Nag PHug ('Black Horse Cavern') for meditation. Mila put forth extraordinary effort and obtained an insight into the ultimate and undifferentiated essence of all phenomena. He then returned to Marpa and began studying the texts of the 'great seal' (*mahāmudrā*). He lived with the teacher, following him like a shadow, for six years and eight months. When he left Marpa to return home, Mila was forty-four.

Mila arrived at his village, only to find that, his mother had in the meantime died. The villagers were scared of him, and would not talk to him or go near him. He was for them a dangerous sorcerer, a hated magician who had brought upon the village untold suffering. Mila went to his house, which had fallen into decay, and discovered the remains of his mother in a heap of bones in one corner. People were too frightened of her son and too annoyed with her to attend to the old woman in her last days or to give her a proper funeral. Mila spent the night in his home, resting his head on the remains of his mother and meditating intensely in order to bring peace and fortune to the departed spirit of his mother.

His mother had still owned a small patch of farm, after all the property was snatched away by her wicked brother-in-law. But no one dared to cultivate it or go near it for fear of Mila's magical powers. His uncle too had died. The wily aunt, however, met Mila and volunteered to cultivate the farm if Mila made it over to her, and in return provide Mila with some

provisions so that he might engage himself in meditation without a night worry. Mila agreed, although he knew it was greed to grab that patch of land that had prompted his aunt. He made over the patch of land to her.

Mila moved to the outskirts of the village and settled down at the foot of a mountain. He spent six months meditating, and mastered the art of generating 'internal heat' (*gTum-Mo*). Even in the severest winter, he went covering himself with nothing more than a thin cotton sheet. He came thus to be called 'Mila the Cotton-clad' (Mid-La-Ras-Pa). The aunt, however, was eager to get rid of him, and began troubling him in various ways. He, therefore, moved on southward. He selected a mountain recess on the Nepal border, and spent nine years there in strict seclusion, practising *prāṇāyāma* and other meditative techniques. During this period, he subsisted only on the green nettles that grew abundantly and wild in that area. The result was that his body took on a greenish hue. Although his body was emaciated by asceticism, his face was radiant with peace and fervour. At the end of the period, he obtained the realization that made him a second Buddha.

After perfecting himself in this manner, he decided to come down to human settlements in order to help his fellow-creatures. For this was the vow that every *bodhisattva* kept. He proceeded towards mount Everest, preaching to the nomads and pilgrims on the way. A large number of devotees gathered round him, and heard his religious discourses. Many studied texts under him. Although he soon became a well-known teacher all over Tibet, and, therefore wealth was within his easy reach, he remained an uncompromising ascetic. He spurned gifts, rejected comfort, and lived like a destitute mendicant. He had turned his back on the world finally.

He wandered about alone in difficult valleys and on mountain heights, and spent most of his time meditating. He loved nature and the Himalayan scenery inspired him to many a song. He had not formally taken the monastic order, nor did he establish a school as his teacher Marpa had done. But whenever earnest folk approached him for instructions, explanations, or initiations, he readily gave them. If people came to him, he would preach to them, and sing religious songs he himself composed. He had a fine voice, and when he sang, the message travelled

far. His songs have been preserved in a collection called "A Hundred Thousand" (*gLu-Bum*). They reveal not only his spiritual eminence, but also his keen appreciation of nature.

He died in 1123 A.D., when he was eighty-four. Being an extraordinarily interesting personality, numerous brilliant disciples were attracted to him.

Famous among them were Rechung (Ras-CHung-Pa, 1083-1161) who was reputed to be 'moon-like', and Gampopa (sGam-po-Pa) who was 'Sun-like'. The former who met Mila when he was only eleven was stricken with leprosy and had to live in utter seclusion. But he luckily met three Indians who took him to India and got his ailment cured at the hands of a Tantric expert, Bālacandra. On his way back, he lived for some years in Nepal as a disciple of the Yogi Atuladāsa. Returning to Tibet, he became a student of Mila and adopted the life-pattern of his master. He lived like a wandering ascetic, dwelling in empty houses and meditating all the while. He had attended on Mila diligently, and had obtained from him an especial yogic insight (*rTogs-Pa*). He visited India twice at Mila's instance, and brought to Tibet four teachings to complete the "nine classes of doctrines" from 'formless dākinīs'. He received many hidden precepts and initiations from Tipūpa (a disciple of Nāropā) during his visits to India and Nepal. His oral 'Samvara' instructions continued in a distinct lineage, within the general framework of bKa-brGyud sect (founded by Mila's master Marpa). Rechung composed an elaborate biography of Mila, which has justly become famous, *Jetsun Kahbum*. He was seventy-eight when he died in Central Tibet (*dBus*) and many celebrities of the region were among his disciples.

Gampopa the Sun-like

Among the disciples of Milarepa, Gampopa (sGam-Po-Pa, 1079-1153 A.D.) is described as the foremost. He was popularly called 'the sun-like' disciple of Mila, because he revealed the hidden precepts of Mila, and illuminated Tibet with Mila's light. His personal name was Nyi-ba (sNi-ba), but was better known as "The venerable one of the Dvag-Po hermitage" (*Dvag-Po LHa-rJe*), also *sGam-Po-Pa* after his monastic settlement. He bore the title "without an equal" (*mNam-med*). He was believed to have been an incarnation of the celebrated emperor, Srong-TSan-sGam-Po (who died in 650 A.D.)

He was born in 1079 as the second son of his parents in LHarje of Dvagpo in Eastern Tibet. As a young man, he studied medicine and became not only rich, but famous as a physician. He married early in life, but in his twenty-fifth year his wife died. He had loved her very dearly and he became so dejected that he gave up lay life and became a monk. His monastic name was "the Jewel of Merit" (*bSod-Nams Rin-CHen*, Skt. *Punya-ratna*). He studied Buddhist texts under Kadampa hermits, (bKah-gDam-Pa, a sect founded by Atiśa-Dīpaṃkara and his disciple Brom). But the sorrow of bereavement still dogged him. He left his home-town and travelled northward. He received initiation into contemplative absorption from Byang-Chub Sams-dPa, who was celebrated as a *bodhisattva*. He shut himself in a cell for thirteen days, and without getting up from his mat, practised meditation. He attained the first stage of meditative trance. His

sorrow was to a considerable extent assuaged. He returned home.

As he was nearing his village, it so chanced that three beggars were walking a little ahead of him. He could listen to their conversation. One of them said: "How I wish I had plenty of barleyflour and green vegetables!" Another broke in: "If it is a matter of wish, why don't you wish to be a King?" The third protested, "Why a King? What good is he? You should rather wish to be a Milarepa, who has no need to eat, or clothe himself, who is always singing merrily although possessing nothing at all, and who can fly across mountains!"

As soon as Gampopa heard the name of Milarepa, a strange tremor of happiness ran through his limbs. His heart became peaceful as never before. He was eager to know more about this Milarepa. He offered some provisions to the beggars and asked them who this Milarepa was and where he was residing. They told him that he was a yogī, who was given to wandering in mountainous tracts and valleys. They also told him that they had found him on the hill-top of Brin Nyenam.

Gampopa immediately turned and set out to Brin. It was a long and a difficult journey. But his faith was so great, and his eagerness to meet Milarepa so intense that he covered the distance soon. But just outside Brin, he took seriously ill, and had to rest for a while. He fervently prayed that his body may be spared at least until he had a look at Milarepa. He at once felt better, and so soon as he was able to walk, he entered Brin. When he stepped into the confines of Brin, a monk accosted him and said: "Are you Gampopa? Welcome to you! You are indeed lucky. Master Milarepa has been waiting for you!"

When Gampopa heard these words, his heart was naturally elated; he even felt proud. He accompanied the monk and went to where Milarepa was residing. But Mila did not come out to greet him, nor did he meet him for a fortnight. Gampopa waited in vain, and waited eagerly. At length he realized that his pride it was that came in the way of meeting the Great One. At once he regretted it, and felt humble. Immediately, Mila sent for him.

Gampopa bowed before him and placed at his feet a piece of gold and a packet of tea as gifts. But Mila laughed, and said: "Gold and I do not agree. We have never agreed ever since I was born! And, what use is this packet of tea to me, for I have

not utensils at all to make tea! Please take back both of them. I am content with your greeting." Then Mila inquired of Gampopa what his name was. When Gampopa mentioned his monastic name, "Jewel of Merit", Mila closed his eyes, repeated, "Merit, Merit, Merit," and broke into a song which ended with this refrain: "Come out of the confines of Merit, for you are a jewel among men!" He then told Gampopa "That is my welcome to you!"

Gampopa then begged Mila to bestow on him an initiation. Thereupon the following conversation took place between them:

Mila: "Did you have any initiation earlier?"

Gampopa: "Yes."

Mila: "How long do you sit for meditation?"

Gampopa: "Usually for six hours."

Mila: "What do you experience?"

Gampopa: "Nothing at all!"

Mila: (laughing) "How can that be? You practise each day for six hours, and yet there are no signs of progress!

Well that is a sign that you should give up this practice, and try another!"

Gampopa: "Master, I am willing to try your method."

Mila: "Then you must start right from the beginning!"

At this, Gampopa began to take off the Kadampa monastic robe which he was wearing (for he was still a monk of this sect), and sought to be given a white cotton sheet (like the one Mila was wearing). Mila laughed, and stopped him; "No, no. That is not what I mean! You need not change your clothes. I do not want you to be a replica of myself. You must in fact bring out your own teaching. My initiation is mine. Your teaching must be yours!"

Mila then bestowed on Gampopa hidden precepts and initiation, then and there. This was an unusual proceeding, for Mila was given to delay much in the matter of initiations and hidden precepts. Gampopa thus became Mila's spiritual son. Mila at that time was an old man of seventy-one, while Gampopa was thirty-two years of age. Mila asked Gampopa to immediately enter seclusion, and gave him instructions regarding

Vajra-vārāhī Cycle. Gampopa arranged with a householder for the supply of food during his seclusion in exchange for some pieces of gold, built for himself a hut at the foot of a mountain three miles from Brin, and retired into it.

After six years of retreat, Gampopa began to have mystic visions. He saw the luminous form of the Buddha and the clear representation of a *maṇḍala*. And several other signs also occurred to him in succession. Each time a sign appeared, Gampopa imagined that he had attained the highest degree of meditative trance, and ran to Mila to get confirmation. Mila, however, kept on discouraging him. Every time Gampopa came, Mila would say, "That is nothing! Go back to your practice!"

After a few more weeks, Gampopa had a vivid vision of the six worlds. He was now sure that there was no mistake about the highest attainment. He ran to Mila in Brin, but Mila was asleep at that time. Gampopa was all excited, and was in no mood to wait until the master got up on his own. Gampopa woke him up, and excitedly reported to him the details of the vision he had. Mila merely said: "Let me sleep! I am not a scholar like you. But I know that *Prajñāpāramitā* says that all this is mere illusion. I suggest you go back to your hut and continue the practice!"

Gampopa was disheartened; his face fell and his courage began to fail him. Mila noticed it, and reassured him: "Son, all these are signs (*rTogs*) that some psychic centers in the body are drawing the vital current (*rLung*, Skt. *prāṇa*) to themselves. They are no doubt signs that you are advancing. But you should not stop at them. They are not benefits in themselves. You must, in fact, ignore them, and persevere! A mere glimpse of reality must not be mistaken for complete realization."

Gampopa took courage at these words and went back to his hut. He resumed the meditation with greater vigour; the signs no longer tempted him, nor did they scare him. In due course he was able to sustain himself for an entire day with a single breath; he could feel the air entering his body and going out through the tips of his fingers. Sometime later, Gampopa had a vision of the sun being eclipsed by the demon Rāhu. At the very moment, Mila walked into his hut and bestowed on him the final initiation into the highest degree of "inner heat" (*gTum-*

Mo). He left the hut, saying "Worthy son, you have done well! You will soon become a great hero! Continue the practice." Gampopa persevered and, as the master had predicted, soon obtained the advanced stage of trance.

Mila now asked him to come out of the hut. He congratulated him, and said: "You have practised enough in my presence. You may now go back to your village. But you must promise me that you will continue this practice for three more years. The gains must be properly consolidated; otherwise they may slip away! Keep carefully out of mundane matters. Avoid the company of worldlings. Beware of lust, anger and sloth. Dwell in seclusion. Move about in solitary haunts. And persevere in your practice!" He also gave him many hidden explanations, and accompanying him till the bridge outside Brin, bade him farewell. As Gampopa bowed before the master and turned to go, Mila said, "Come here after twelve years! You may then teach others, bestow precepts and initiations on those that seek."

Gampopa left Brin and arrived at Nyal. He set up a hermitage there and practised meditation for three years, without leaving his mat, or loosening his belt. He realized the true nature of mind and the essential nature of all phenomena. He discovered that everything had but one flavour. He now realized that his master, Mila, was not merely a *siddha*, but verily the *dharmakāya*. He followed the instructions of the master and wandered about in solitary places for twelve years, spending most of his time in meditation.

After twelve years, he returned to Brin, as his master had commanded. But he was delayed on the way. By the time he reached Brin, Mila had just passed away. But he had instructed his disciple to preserve a share of his relics for Gampopa. Gampopa received the relics and moved in the direction of Gampo (sGam-Po) or Dvagspo. He knew that his own end was fast approaching, and that he had no more than three years to live. He would have been happy to spend the rest of his days quietly meditating in mountain retreats. But his Master, Mila, had asked him to teach and bestow precepts and initiations on those that sought them. People indeed were coming to him, and they urged him to set up a monastery at Gampo. Gampopa, however, was not eager to undertake this

mission because his life had almost been completely spent. At the insistence of the people, he underwent a life-prolonging rite (of Tārā).

With life thus renewed, Gampopa settled down to work for the benefit of living beings. He set up a monastery at Gampo and began teaching texts, giving initiations, and instructions for meditations. He preached to the lay folk as well as monastic brethren. He also composed several manuals and guide-books for contemplation. He naturally attached great importance to meditation. He used to say "One fleeting glimpse of great wisdom that arises during meditation is more precious than loads of knowledge got from books or by listening to sermons." But he did not ignore the value of books or teachers. He said "Meditation, without sufficient preparation by hearing the doctrine and reflecting upon it, is likely to land one in darkness; he would not know what to look for, and he would fail to recognize it even when it stands right before him!"

He had a large following. Among his disciples were anchorites, ascetics, monks, and laymen. He himself was austere in his habits, a recluse by preference, and loved solitude. But whenever anyone asked for precepts or explanations he would readily give them. It is recorded that when he lay on his death-bed, two monks came to discuss with him some metaphysical issue. He did not want to be disturbed. Then they asked for initiation into the Great-Seal (*mahāmudrā*). Gampopa at once asked his attendant to admit them!

He died in 1153 A.D. at the age of seventy-five. When his body was cremated it was found that his heart had not been consumed by fire. A golden cairn was set up to house this wonderful relic.

Phagmo the Blessed and Brikhung the Leper

Among Gampopa's disciples, the most celebrated was PHag-Mo-Grub-Pa (1110-1170 A.D), who was principally responsible for the spread of the Kagyu sect in Tibet. Before he met Gampopa he had studied with every teacher he could find, and had practised all the rites and contemplations that were available to him. He had initiations from thirteen yogis, and had discussions with all scholars well-known in Tibet at that time. But Gampopa was the only teacher who gave him lasting peace.

PHag-Mo-Grub-pa (meaning 'Made Perfect by the Sow-goddess or Vārāhi') was not his real name; he came to be so called because of his monastery with that name. His name was hGron-mGon ('Protector of Beings'). Dissatisfied with all the teachers he had met, and disappointed with all the contemplative techniques that he had tried, he came to Gampopa, who was eating his lunch. Phagmo bowed before him and described all that he had learnt till then; Gampopa lifted a ball of parched barley-flour, half-eaten, and said: "Surely, this (ball of barley-flour) is much better than all that you have acquired!" Needless to say, Phagmo was downcast with shame and regret.

Gampopa noticed his discomfiture and said, "Well, young man, do not grieve! We will see what we can yet do. But my students are awaiting me for a class immediately after my lunch. Have a stroll on the hill-side outside the village and come back

in the evening." And he patted Phagmo's head as he bowed to withdraw. Phagmo went to the foot of the hill and began to wander about. He was alone, and he began to turn round in his mind all the doctrines that he had learnt. A couple of hours passed in such intent recollection. He suddenly realized that all that learning was only the chaff, the outer covering, the husk. And at the same time he obtained a profound insight into the nature of things. He felt as if his mind was suddenly freed and moved in the sky without obstructions, even as a spear could be swung freely in the open air.

About the time the sun set he returned to the residence of Gampopa. Gampopa looked at him, and exclaimed : "Well, my man, I could not have taught you better !" He had understood the change that had come over Phagmo. He accepted Phagmo as his disciple and gave him many secret precepts. Phagmo immediately retired into a cell and meditated for eight months at a stretch. His entire body was suffused with a feeling of well-being that he had never before experienced. When he came out of his cell, a thorn pricked his foot and blood oozed out. But Phagmo experienced a pleasant sensation thereby, and his insight was further illumined.

After he left Gampopa, he built his own monastery in sGan-Sa-mTHil, which became famous as the first great Kagyu monastery in Tibet. But Phagmo himself lived in a small grass hut, engaged almost uninterruptedly in meditation. But whenever he taught, he taught so well, and whenever he preached he preached so effectively that he became popular, and large numbers of students gathered round him. Although he did not formulate his own teachings and did not establish a sect of his own, his disciples branched out into several subsects. Eight of them became well-known, one of the subsects was founded by Gluigs-Ras Padma-rDo-rJe (1128-1288 A.D), who went to Phagmo and obtained the highest realization within three days.

Phagmo was celebrated for his interesting and effective ways of teaching. There was once a student learning meditation from him : he had made very little progress. Phagmo had an insightful understanding of the nature of the hindrance that prevailed in this student. One day, Phagmo asked him to keep with him a sword while meditating. And in front of the meditation hut, he made

a net of ropes so that the student would not come out easily. When the student's meditation session was about to end, Phagmo brought before the student the man who had murdered the student's father. The student was promptly enraged upon seeing him, and rushed out with the drawn sword. Phagmo who was in hiding called out : "You are angry ! Look into the source of anger !" The student stood back, and within seconds a perfect understanding arose in him. (This story is also told of the teacher CHan-bu rGya-Ras and the student sGom-Rings.).

Phagmo had an encounter with the proud scholar, later called sPar-Phu-Ba, when the scholar visited Phagmo in his hut, Phagmo gave him a piece of brown sugar carrying an imprint of a charming lotus flower. The scholar took it in his hand, admired the design, but did not eat it. Phagmo thereupon took it from his hands, broke it into two bits and gave them back to him, saying "Now, sir, eat !" The scholar ate. Phagmo explained : "All your studies are like this beautiful imprint : meditation is like the taste of sugar. There is a difference between information and formation. Information rests in the head ! but formation deals with the whole life ! The purpose of all learning is to aid meditation, which is the very essence of the Doctrine." The scholar settled down as a pupil with Phagmo.

At first Phagmo did not give him any directions for meditation. He just said : "Enter into seclusion, and meditate." The scholar entered the cell, and began to reflect : "What is this ? The teacher did not give me any precepts. He merely told me to meditate !" He sat for a while considering the difference between precepts and meditation. The mind gradually got loosened, and suddenly he obtained an insight into the nature of things. Later, Phagmo explained to him that each practitioner must develop his own precepts. In due course, the scholar became a *siddha*, and he taught as many as five hundred monks. His monastery at sPar-Phu became celebrated as a meditation center.

Another illustrious student of Phagmo was hBri-KHung-Pa (b.1143). hBri-KHung ('yak-cavity') was the name of a sect, and he was known only as a member of this sect: his real name has been forgotten. His parents were sorcerers belonging to the older Nyingma group. There was a famine which raged in

the area where he was born, and even as a young boy he had to move southward. He got into the company of wandering priests and learnt how to recite some scriptural texts. He also meditated sometimes. He heard of Phagmo and at once resolved to meet him. With difficulty he acquired a small quantity of tea and a rather expensive horse and approached Phagmo with these presents. Phagmo, however, smiled and said : "My dear young man, It is not my custom to accept living beings as presents. Please take back your horse. I will gladly take the tea that you have brought." And Phagmo boiled the small quantity of tea and prepared the beverage. About eighty monks of the monastery partook of this !

He listened to many of Phagmo's sermons and developed a theoretical understanding of the nature of things. About two years after his arrival, Phagmo passed away. The young man retired to a cell and meditated. But suddenly he became a victim of leprosy, a dreaded disease which was incurable. The disciple decided to wander off into the impenetrable valleys and die there so that no one could even see his dead body. He made preparations to go, left his cell, took his leave and moved out of the village. But he had grown too weak to proceed further. One evening, he sat under a tree, took out his tutelary icon of Avalokiteśvara and made prostrations before it. He sat down before it and recollected minutely all his sorrows and sufferings. He also thought compassionately of the untold misery to which other beings are also subjected. As he thought of the woe of others, he began to shed copious tears; he forgot his own misery. He spent the whole night like this. Towards dawn, he saw a dark dragon (*nāga*) take form from his body and move out. Soon after, he found that his health was restored.

He now returned to the village and entered the monastic order. He was only thirty-five at that time. He strictly followed the Vinaya regulations, and never touched meat or wine. His austere life and high realization brought him a large number of disciples. It is said that at a festival that he arranged, there were as many as 55525 disciples ! He was especially known for the cures that he effected on lepers by his compassion alone. People looked upon him as an incarnation of the great *bodhisattva* Nāgārjuna.

He died at the age of seventy-five in 1218 A.D. Just before he died, one of the disciples asked him : “Master, where are you going from here ?” He replied : “I am not going anywhere ! I will stay in your minds.”

Dampa the Oath-bound and Kunga the Cheerful

Dampa (Dam-pa, “the holy one”, “one bound by an oath”) who died in 1117 was celebrated as a ‘dharma-svāmī’ (‘master of religion’). Although widely involved in Tibetan lineages, he was actually an Indian, hailing from the Southern region. His Indian name and identity have been lost, but he has always been known in Tibet as the Indian *āchārya* and a *siddha*. The Tibetan chronicles such as the *Blue Annals* have preserved some details of his life and career. He is said to have been a disciple of Dharmakīrti, the eminent Buddhist master.

He is also reputed to have heard discourses from great teachers like Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Āryadeva, Śāntideva and Guṇaprabha. He is also credited with having received an initiation into the ‘the Great Seal’ (*mahāmudrā*) from Saraha-pāda himself, who was one of the earliest and most celebrated among the *siddhas*. Dampa practised austerities for several years, and had had visions of many tutelary deities. He is said to have possessed extraordinary magical powers.

We do not know what prompted him to go to Tibet, but he visited that country five times. During his fifth visit he went to China, where he lived for twelve years. An account relates that he died in China, but a more reliable account makes Tibet the place of his death. While in Tibet, although he travelled all over the country, his favourite place of residence was Dingri, where he is said to have spent as many as twenty-one years. It

was in this place that he met the great Tibetan poet-saint Milarepa.

He must have been a sort of genius, with a variety of talents. His work in Tibet became almost legendary. Besides being an excellent and popular teacher, he was well-known as a physician. He cured even physical ailments by what we would now call psychotherapy; he evolved a method of introducing the patient to his own mind. He was honoured by his contemporaries for having eradicated epidemics by the employment of spells (*dhāraṇīs*). He could not read the thoughts of others, but could influence them. His students vouchsafed that a mere look of his would be enough to bring a blessing into their lives. While camping in the Gyal monastery, he is credited with a curious invention: a stove that could be ignited and kept burning without needing to be blown. This stove was named after him, and became popular in Tibet.

Being a fine teacher, he gathered round him an exceedingly large number of students. His disciples have been likened to stars in the sky; too numerous to be counted. And, like the stars, most of them were lone lights, shining unto themselves, and did not continue his lineage. He gave instruction and precepts mostly to individuals, and others did not know about them. The one exception was Kun-dGa, who we will consider at length shortly. Dampa had four principal disciples, described as "Yogi gate-keepers" (*sGo-pai rNal' Byor-Pa-bZi*, "the four who guard the treasure of the door of tranquillity"). To the North was Kunga (Kun-dGa), to the West PHyar-CHung, to the South Vajrakrodha, and to the East Dampa PHyar-CHen.

He believed in teaching each student individually. He examined him and analysed his personality before imparting to him the instructions, explanations and precepts appropriate to his need, temperament and capacity. He gave to Kunga the precepts of mind-purification by a gradual development. He considered Vajrakrodha suited for the 'the way of blessing', and therefore asked him to pray incessantly. Another disciple (rGya-sGom-Pa) was asked to look carefully into his own mind, identify every thought and separate the 'odour' (*dre*) of the thought itself. Still another disciple (CHug) was made to understand and perfect the symbols, and reflect upon the explanations given by the teachers.

Dampa developed a method of teaching by means of which the student was methodically guided through five stages. In the first stage, the instruction and precepts were given to the student (*sByin-pa*, "to bestow", "to deliver", "to gift."). In the second stage, the student was encouraged to think for himself (*sNam-pa*, "to think", "to suppose", "to imagine"). The third stage was to be distinguished by an examination of the meaning of the precepts (*Don-dPyod*, "to sense or examine"). In the final stage, called 'sense-gathering' (*Don-hTHun*) there was an attempt at integrating the meaning of the precepts with one's own thoughts.

When he admitted a disciple, he administered to him three vows (*rTen-sDom-Pa gSum*, "three supports and bindings"): the vow of perfecting one's conduct (*prātimokṣha-samvara*), the vow of practising meditation (*tantra-samvara*), and the vow of working for the welfare of all creatures (*bodhisattva-samvara*). He explained that the three vows were complementary to each other. He stressed the value of oaths in contemplative life. This is how he came to be known widely as Pha Dam-Pa ("Father Oath-bound"). He founded a sect which was predominantly Tantrik, known as *ZHi-Byed*. He had numerous women disciples also. He transmitted his wisdom and lineage principally to Kunga.

sKam, well-known as the follower of the *Prajñāpāramitā* school, was another disciple of Dampa. sKam one day asked the teacher: "Master, whom should I ask when I am in doubt, when you have gone?" Dampa answered:

The best friend-and-guide (*Kalyānamitra*) is your own mind. The teacher that can remove your doubts will surely emerge from your own mind! The second aid is the scripture. Read, therefore, *Prajñāpāramitā* diligently. The lowest kind of friend-and-guide is a human being who offers to teach you!

sKam was a sick person, with tumours in his abdomen. He was introduced by Dampa into his own mind by the practice of meditation; this also cured him of his ailment. Dampa believed that understanding the nature of the ailment and taking the ailment itself as a subject of meditation will provide the cure for

it while at the same time furthering the cause of realization.

Kunga was born in 1062 A.D. as Tsha-Gung, to the east of Ding-ri the place which had almost become the headquarters of Dampa in Tibet. As a child he used to call himself 'Kun-dga' (meaning "all cheer") and the name stuck to him. It is also said that Dampa called him so the very first time he met him, and so the name stuck to him. Kunga soon lost interest in wordly affairs, and began to withdraw from normal interests. He even gave up the small job that he had, and the family was left in a difficult situation. His wife and son had to beg from others. But Kunga remained unmoved and unconcerned.

One day, Kunga suddenly decided to leave home. He told his wife that he would go with a party of brigands who were planning to raid the region of sNe-Nam La-Kha. Raids among the nomadic tribes were a usual feature, and brigandage was accepted as one of the modes of livelihood for many people. Kunga left home, but proceeded straight towards gLung-'Khor, where Dampa was at that time camping.

That morning, Dampa got up early, roused the disciples at the monastery and told them to make all preparation to receive an honoured guest. The disciples were puzzled when no one turned up till that afternoon. As they were planning to give up waiting a dirty man dressed in rags walked in, and some disciples joked about his being the honoured guest. But they were dumb-stricken when the teacher came out rushing, and welcomed him: "What a delight to see you, Kunga!" He took him in, and bade the disciples prepare a high seat for the guest. While the disciples stood staring, unable to comprehend what was indicated. Dampa himself heaped up a pile of ashes placed on top of it four arrows crossed, and beckoned Kunga to sit on it. As soon as Kunga was seated, there was an instantaneous question that came out of him:

Kunga: "Of what nature is this phenomenal existence?"

Dampa: "It is an insect in the excrement of a dog!"

Kunga: "Can a being in this world attain happiness?"

In answer, Dampa made the sign of a chain with his interlocked fingers, and said:

Suffering is like this chain! When the chain is broken, there can be happiness.

As soon as this dialogue ended, Kunga closed his eyes and began praying mentally for the entrance into the path. He could feel Dampa's blessing enter his whole being. And he was filled with faith.

Dampa then said: "Come, I shall make a hero of you!"

Whereupon Kunga protested: "But where are my sword, my shield, my armour and my steed?"

Dampa replied: "Retire to a small cave, and avoid all contact with others. That will be your armour. Eat food that enables you barely to survive, and wear clothes just enough to cover your body. That will be your shield. Practise meditation until you are sick of it! That will be your sword."

Kunga: "How am I to meditate?"

Dampa: "Let your gaze be upward. That is the posture of *Prajña-pāramitā*."

Kunga immediately set off and entered a cave nearby. He practised meditation with zeal and fortitude and obtained the first trance in which he perfectly understood the nature of phenomenal existence. Dampa came to his cave and called, "Come out, Kunga!" When he came out, Dampa asked him: "In case you are chosen as a prince, will you sit on the throne? If a magic rope is placed in front of you, will you climb up? If the world is given to you, will you rule it as an emperor?"

Kunga answered: "No, no, and no! I was never successful with the world, and I do not want to succeed in the world! But I am now capable of understanding, if you will teach me!"

Dampa was pleased with the answer and took him to his hut and bestowed on him the hidden precepts. He told Kunga, "Son, did you not set out to raid? You should now raid the King's palace, and you should have keys to open all the doors there! I shall give you hidden precepts which will make you under-

stand the sublime truth. The King's palace is not open to all, and one has to force one's way into it. The great truth is hidden from ordinary folk, and one who would obtain it must put forth great effort!"

Kunga lived with Dampa like his shadow for eighteen years. When Dampa was about to pass away, the disciples that gathered round him were greatly agitated. Dampa, however, pointed to Kunga, and told the disciples: "When the sun sets, the moon will rise. There is no cause for sorrow!"

Kunga survived him for seven years and passed away in 1124 A.D.

Pashab the Careful

Kunga placed his mantle on Pa-TSHab sGom-pa, and thus the mystic teachings of Dampa continued in Tibet. PaTSHab was not only a great scholar, but a writer of distinction.

Pa-TSHab was born in 1077 A.D. in Yung-po in Lowar Phan-Yul. At the young age of eleven, he entered a monastery as a novice, and when he was nineteen, he was ordained as a monk. He then settled down to a serious study of Buddhist scriptures under eminent teachers. This went on till he was thirty-seven, when he reflected: "Enough of studying! I should now start practising!" And he set out in search of a competent master.

He heard that a teacher, sKam-sGom, was proficient in *Prajñāpāramitā* method of meditation. Pa-TSHab went to the hermitage of sKam and obtained from him the preliminary entrance into the meditational method. He felt that a light had been placed within his dark interior. When he wanted further initiation, sKam told him "I am not your real teacher. You should go to Ding-ri, and get the precepts from Dampa. The teacher and the student must be related by *karma*, if the teaching is to be effective."

Pa-TSHab collected some gold, turquoise and silk, and went to Ding-ri only to find that Dampa had just passed away, and all that Pa-TSHab was able to see was the funeral pyre of the great Master. He could not bear this misfortune, and at once he swooned away. When he woke up, he found an old woman in rags nursing him. She told him: "Do not grieve! You will

surely achieve your purpose. Dampa is dead, but Kunga is an exact replica of his! Take him as your master." She directed him to the hut where Kunga was residing, and when he bowed before him, Kunga at once inquired of him; "Are you not tired after a long journey?" The words filled Pa-TSHab with faith. He related how he came to Ding-ri in order to obtain precepts from Dampa, and how the old woman had directed him there. He presented gold *songs* to Kunga and requested him for hidden precepts. Kunga said, "This present is fine! But a disciple of the great Indian master does not need gold. However, I shall accept them, because my acceptance will be favourable to you!" He took the gold coins and threw them up in the air. Then he asked Pa-TSHab to get ready for initiation. "Initiation is necessary to ripen a raw individual. Spend the night in a cave and come to me in the morning."

The following morning Kunga gave him the combined initiation according to Dampa's method, and asked him to spend a year in seclusion. Pa-TSHab developed an insight into the nature of phenomenal existence. When Kunga was appraised of this, he asked: "You were a scholar before you came to me, I gave you the initiation and you have meditated for a year. Tell me if the insight that you have developed is due to your learning or due to the practice." Pa-TSHab replied: "Master, I did have a knowledge pertaining to the nature of phenomenal existence before I came here. But it was like touching an object in the dark. But now I could see it in broad day light!"

Because he was learned, he was asked by Kunga to write manuals and guides. Pa-TSHab wrote what is called the "Black Guide" (*Nag-KHrid*) and explained the hidden meaning of numerous texts. He also explained orally his own experiences in relation to them (*dMar-Khrid*). And combining the two, he prepared "conclusions" (*Phra-Tig*). Then he discussed them with other disciples and *yogis* and revised the conclusions.

Pa-TSHab sought Kunga's permission for continuing to reside in Ding-ri with the teacher. But Kunga said: "No, I suggest you go home. Your people are worried about you. You must attend to them. But do not get involved in worldly affairs. Practise meditation for twelve years, and then, you may do what you like!"

Kunga gave him books and also a magic stone for a safe

journey. He accompanied him till the outskirts of the village and bade him goodbye.

Pa-TSHab returned home in dbUs and practised meditation for 13 years, a year more than what his master had suggested. He then commenced working for the happiness of all beings. Many hundreds of students gathered round him to listen to his discourses and obtain initiations from him. But he was strict about admission of students, and although he himself was learned, he emphasized the importance of meditation. His advice to one of his pupils, Ten-Me was:

Meditate for ten years. If you should be inclined to continue for a longer period, by all means do. There will be no harm in it. But if you feel that you cannot continue it any longer, then come out and preach. But preach only the ordinary doctrines. Do not communicate the hidden techniques of bKa-dzi to any one who is not likely to devote himself entirely to religion and become a master in his own turn. Do not impart the details of mystic rites of rTen-'Brel to anyone who is not interested in the welfare of others. And do not introduce any one who is not committed to contemplation into the *rTen-'brel-gyi KHang-pa*. Limit your students. Do not accept more than about four or five disciples. You must spend most of your time in meditation and exert your utmost to obtain enlightenment in this very life. Meditation is the essence of the Doctrine. Teaching and preaching must be done only to secure the welfare of other human beings, not for any other gain. Do not be a 'merchant of the Doctrine'!

Pa-TSHab passed away in 1158 A.D. in his eighty-second year.

Sami the Hermit

There are many tales about the hermit sMon-Lam-hBar (meaning the 'Bloom of the Wishing Prayer'), who was popularly known as Sa-Mi ('The Meaty Man'). But the tale concerning his enlightenment is most interesting. Born in 1085 A.D., he went to the teacher So-CHung-Ba even as a young man. He served him diligently for several years, and did ungrudgingly all the hard work that was assigned to him. But he did not get any precepts, and he was sorely disappointed. One evening, it occurred to him: "Perhaps this man is a pretender and has no precepts. Otherwise, he should have given me. I am probably wasting my time here; I should seek another teacher." He continued to exercise his mind in this matter, and about midnight, it again occurred to him: "But this man is not a common man. Sometimes he seems to read my thoughts! It may be that he has some precepts. I wonder why he does not impart them to me !" Towards dawn he thought, "Well, I suppose I should continue to serve him. It is likely he will give me some precepts."

When he got up in the morning and came to his teacher as usual, the teacher told him: "Oh my young man, your thought in the evening was useless and incorrect; your thought at midnight was better and helpful; and the thought at dawn was correct and proper." Sami was nonplussed. The teacher continued: "Young man, we are having our lunch today with a householder in the neighbouring village; he has invited me.

Let us start as soon as I am ready." Sami bowed and returned to his room to make preparations. In the meantime, the teacher ate his fill and sent word to Sami that he was ready.

The two started out, the teacher well-fed and the student hungry. Having reached the village, the teacher pointed to a house and said: "That must be the house. Let us go and knock !" But as soon as they came near the door, he said, "No, I do not think this is his house." He pointed to another house and said: "That must be the one! Let's go there." Again, he changed his mind when they stood in front of that house and pointed to another house. And so on they moved from house to house until evening. The whole day poor Sami was starving. At last, the teacher said "I have forgotten his house. Let us go back !" and returned to his monastery. While they were returning, Sami was very indignant. He thought it was odd that the teacher should not have bothered to ascertain the exact location of his host's house. He did not, however, suspect that it was a trick played upon him by the teacher.

A few day later, Sami came back to the monastery after a day's hard work. He found his teacher talking to a stranger. As he approached his teacher's room, the teacher lowered his voice and told the stranger, loudly enough to be heard by Sami, "Sir, hide your things. This disciple who is coming is not reliable: he may steal them !" Sami was enraged when he heard this: "I have been serving him so loyally all these years, and this is what he thinks of me !" He could not control his anger, and taking up a stick that was lying there, rushed at the teacher.

But the teacher got up and ran out of the room. He went into another room, and bolting the doors from within, shouted at Sami, "Young man, your mind is now filled with anger. Look at the source of that anger !" Sami stood there and did as he was told. A realization suddenly dawned on him that the mind was indeed a void. He knelt down before the closed doors and, bowing again and again, praised his teacher: "My master pardon my ignorance and impatience ! You are wise, clever and compassionate ! It is my good fortune that I have come to you !"

Thereupon, the teacher opened the door and came out of the room. He lifted up Sami who had clasped his feet and said: "I

knew all along that you deserved the precepts. But your interior was not ready yet. I have often tried to make you angry, but you were not till now sufficiently angry at any time. It is only when the inner constitution is burning and boiling that any lasting benefit can be had. You are now ready for precepts." The teacher immediately made arrangements for bestowing the initiation on Sami; and he imparted to the happy student a complete set of hidden precepts.

Sami served his teacher for altogether thirty-four years, until the teacher's death in 1128 A.D. And then he built a monastery of his own at bZang-Grong. But his monastery was a mere hut. He spent his time playing with children tending the sheep and gathering cow-dung. But no one could fail to notice that his interior was perfect. He became a celebrated hermit. He died in 1171 A.D. at the age of eighty-seven.

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