

Tsong-Kha-Pa

Speaking to his closest disciple, Ananda, Buddha foretold the birth which would occur in fourteenth century Tibet of a Sage, Tsong-Kha-Pa. Tsong-Kha-Pa would dramatically affect both the future of Tibetan lineages and the development of spirituality in the West.

Indeed, Tsong-Kha-Pa (named Lobsang Drakpa at birth) was born in 1357 in Tibet where he dwelled until death in 1419. He is to this day regarded as the greatest Sage and Teacher in Tibetan history.

Prior to the fourteenth century, Buddhism had been brought into Tibet from China. Buddhism had been established from the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, The Buddha, in India circa 500 B.C. Ashoka popularized the teachings throughout India. Faxian, from China, brought teachings into China. This tradition spread in Asia over the centuries. While Buddhist lineages in Tibet remained intact, embodying the pure teachings, spiritual disciplines had become slack, priests emphasizing raising funds for individual monasteries. At this time, the West, on one hand, was governed by dogmatic, superstitious religion, the fate of souls in the hands of the Church, and, on the other hand, the beginnings of materialistic science, holding that only matter itself exists, thus denying any spiritual dimension to human existence.

While Tsong-Kha-Pa's mother was carrying him in her womb, she had a day-time vision in which a huge statue of the Tibetan deity, Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, was high above her head. He descended, becoming smaller and smaller, entering the top of her head, the Crown Chakra. During this same period, his father had a vision of another Tibetan deity, Vajrapani, who shot a lightning bolt into his pregnant wife. Vajrapani is the deity who slays "the demonic host."

At Tsong-Kha-Pa's birth, a wandering Buddhist monk, who was to become his first teacher, saw an emanation — descending from the sky — of Manjurshi, the Buddha of Wisdom and Discrimination. He knew this signified the birth

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of a great Sage and proceeded directly to the new parents, offering them gifts, telling them their son was an embodiment of Manjurshi, Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani.

At the age of three, Tsong-Kha-Pa was taken to a monastery where he took laymen's vows. Subsequently, he was able to attain high, deep states of meditation without having been taught how to do so. He made conscious contact with the three deities of which he was said to be the embodiment.

At the age of seven, he was taken to a different monastery, where he took his vows as a novice. Typically, in Tibetan tradition, a student might be qualified to take layman's vows by the age of twenty-eight, in the best of cases, or years later. Novice vows may or may not be taken within the same lifetime. Such was the spiritually advanced state of Tsong-Kha-Pa.

When he was sixteen, his first and only teacher until that time, took him to Lhasa, where he took Bodhisattva Vows before a statue of the Buddha. He was instructed to meditate upon five Tibetan deities from whom he would be given perseverance, discrimination, compassion, right effort and length of life. He was initiated into the *Karmapa* tradition and received *bodhichitta*, "the seed of Enlightenment, expressed as altruism." He was given, too, the *Mahamudra*, "The Seal of Perfection."

Since the age of three, he had been studying, and mastering, the sutras of Tibet's many spiritual lineages and by the age of nineteen had become a renowned Tibetan scholar. At twenty, he met Randawa who was to be his lifelong spiritual companion. Randawa conveyed to him "the essence of Buddha's Middle Way." In a dialectical manner, each became the teacher of the other.

Tsong-Kha-Pa at this time began to teach. His travels throughout Tibet would take an entire book to delineate. He would travel to a particular monastery which embodied a certain lineage. He would meet with the teacher of that lineage or with the one monk in Tibet knowing the text. Seeking out the most advanced monks in each monastery, he would study the texts and teachings of that lineage,

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effortlessly mastering them, fully *realizing* their spiritual truths. By his early twenties, he had mastered the teachings and practices of all Tibetan lineages.

Wherever he traveled, his reputation preceded him. He generated great awe, fascination. No monk had met any being of such accomplishments. Yet, upon meeting him face-to-face, people were immediately put at their ease, their sincere questions patiently and selflessly answered. Important monasteries recognizing him to be a Sage, invited him to instruct their advanced monks. At the age of twenty-four, Tsong-Kha-Pa was asked to become the imperial tutor to the Emperor of China. Tsong-Kha-Pa refused, saying his work was to occur in Tibet.

At thirty-two, Tsong-Kha-Pa began what was to become a voluminous series of writings, all of which exist in English translation. He wrote commentaries upon hundreds of sutras.

He wrote on the *Lahachakra Tantric Cycle*, the heart of which concerns a spiritual, mental and physical center called *Shambhalla*. A seeker, mastering this *Cycle*, would come to experience *Shambhalla* itself.

He mastered all the *Siddhis*, supernormal powers on the highest planes of consciousness. This entailed systematic study and mastery “of the four levels of the Vajrayana, involving deep meditations upon mysteries of Sarasvati, the Black Manjushri, Manjushri Dharmachakra and Guhyasamaji, ‘King of Tantras.’”

Subsequently, Tsong-Kha-Pa went, alone, on an extended retreat, about which little is known. Prior to this retreat, he had gained the ability and the permission to directly question Manjushri, the Buddha of Wisdom and Discrimination. It is thought that it was during his retreat that he determined to do the three things for which he is best known.

He initiated the Dalai Lama tradition, which was, he taught, to last for seven centuries. The being he chose for this position was an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, and was to be the same being holding that holy incarnation for the entire seven centuries. In his early book, *My Land and Its Peoples*, the current Dalai Lama describes

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how he was found, at an early age, to be the incarnation of the previous Dalai Lama.

Tsong-Kha-Pa founded the *Gelugpa* (Yellow Hat) Order, of which the Dalai Lama is the titular head.

He initiated a prayer festival, bringing together monks from all lineages. The first, in 1409, was attended by 8,000 monks. This festival has occurred yearly since that time. It is now held in Dharamsala, India, presided over by the current Dalai Lama with, reportedly, 30,000 monks in attendance.

Tsong-Kha-Pa, during this same period, initiated what has come to be known as “the seven century plan,” in which, during the last twenty-five years of each century, beginning in the fourteenth, one or more Bodhisattvas would be sent to the West to expose receptive minds to true spiritual teachings, leading them away from superstitious religion and scientific materialism. The intent was to “re-light the Mystery Fires in the West,” which had been put in place by Pythagoras and Plato that had been extinguished by the Church in the third century A.D.

In his mid-thirties, Tsong-Kha-Pa traveled to a certain monastery. There he met a monk named Khenchen, who instantly recognized him as Manjurshri. Tsong-Kha-Pa recognized Khenchen as Vajrapani, each an emanation of a fully enlightened Bodhisattva. They became close friends. When Tsong-Kha-Pa was invited to teach in India, Khenchen said he should not accept, both because the traveling was too difficult and “because what you have to offer can be best accomplished from Tibet.” Staying in Tibet led to his major writings, *The Lam-rim Teachings*. Tsong-Kha-Pa taught the *Path of Renunciation*, which is commenced by vowing to seek enlightenment for the sake of all beings. It is rooted in study of the teachings, meditation and cultivation of the moral virtues. Lacking these virtues, a student can, taught Tsong-Kha-Pa, fall into psychic excesses, inverting the teachings, falling off the path. These teachings are found in his first great work, “The Great Exposition on the Stages of the Path.” Upon its completion, Sarasvati approved it and Manjushri said, “You no longer have to ask questions of me. You are now

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capable of answering anything you need to know on your own.”

At the age of forty, Tsong-Kha-Pa initiated reform of Tibetan lineages, causing no resentments thereby. He purified what required purification, keeping intact the essence of each lineage.

He finally settled down at a location called Nomad Mountain where he caused a monastery to be built, naming it *Ganden*, The Celestial Abode of Maitreya. The construction of this monastery was put into the hands of the man who was to become the first Dalai Lama.

Tsong-Kha-Pa was invited to the most sacred of all Tibetan monasteries — the Drepung — to instruct its advanced monks. In the midst of a three-day teaching cycle, as he was discoursing, he stopped mid-sentence, saying no more. The monks present understood that, were they worthy of hearing the remaining teachings from Tsong-Kha-Pa, it would occur during their next incarnation.

The world, he taught, is composed of assertions and counter-assertions, of endlessly intermingling, changing polarities. *Shunyata* (the void, emptiness) is free of assertions, of counter-assertions, of polarities. In the highest states, the pupil comes to realize “the world and *Shunyata* are one.”

An authentic spiritual teacher is necessary, he teaches, in order that the aspirant can learn of the pitfalls along the Path. Only one “who has gone before” can truly teach such. All students must develop their own higher mind and intuition. The teacher instructs guides and adjusts along the way.

Towards the end his life, Tsong-Kha-Pa sounded what has come to be called The Tsong-Kha-Pa Pledge:

“Through whatever merit I have accumulated by love immortal, harmony and act, patience, effort, meditation and wisdom, may I attain Buddhahood for the sake of all living beings.”

His life-long teacher, pupil and friend, Rendawa, composed, in adoration of Tsong-Kha-Pa:

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“Avalokiteshvara, mighty treasurer of immaculate love; Manjushri, lord of stainless knowledge; Vajrapani, destroyer of the demonic host; O Tsong-Kha-Pa, Lobsang Drakpa, Crown Jewel of the Sages of the Land of Snow, humbly I request your blessing.”

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