

A Collection of Studies on the **Tibetan Bon Tradition**

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A Collection of Studies on the Tibetan Bon Tradition

A Beginner's Guide to the Bon Religion of Tibet

by Tsering Dhundup

This article is based primarily on *The Bon Religion of Tibet: The Iconography of a Living Tradition* by Per Kvaerne, Professor of the History of Religions and Tibetology, University of Oslo, published by Serinda Publications, London, 1995.

The 'Bon' religious tradition of Tibet is often misunderstood as just another branch or sect of Buddhism. Such misconceptions on the part of the average Westerner may easily be forgiven when one considers the ignorance of the average Tibetan about Bon religion. The historical predominance of Buddhism in all aspects of Tibetan political and social culture since the seventh century is responsible for such misconceptions. 'Bonpos', the followers of Bon religion had to endure centuries of persecution and social and political marginalization at the hands of the Buddhist majority.

It is no small feat of survival and tenacity that in spite of such adverse circumstances, the small Bonpo religious communities, scattered in different parts of Tibet, have not only managed to preserve their distinct traditions and culture but have also successfully begun to promote them internationally. Like Tibetan Buddhist traditions, Bon has a growing following in the West both among academic circles and spiritual seekers. At 'home', it's enjoying a gradual revival within Tibet and among its minority Tibetan community, based mainly at Dolanji, in Himachal Pradesh, India, and other small communities in Nepal. The founding fathers of the monastery who also persuaded fellow Bonpos to come together to live in a separate Bonpo community at Dolanji (two hours drive from Shimla) deserve credit for their vision and determination to preserve and restore their living culture in exile. Since coming into exile, there has been a progressive change in the perception and understanding of Bon among the majority Tibetan Buddhists. Many now respect Bon as a distinct and important religious tradition of Tibet and accord equal rights to freedom of belief and practice to the Bonpos.

Under the democratic Charter of the Tibetan Government in Exile, followers of Bon are entitled to be represented in the Tibetan People's Assembly by two elected representa-

tives at par with the representatives of Sakya, Nyingma, Kagyu and Gelug sects of Buddhism. Among the many causal factors for such a positive change are the fact of China's takeover of Tibet; His Holiness the Dalai Lama's non-sectarian and ecumenical approach to all religious traditions; the equal political status granted to Bon as one of the major religious traditions of Tibet in the Charter mentioned above; Professor Namkhai Norbu's persuasive validation of Bon religious culture as the native, pre-Buddhist civilization of Tibet; the secularization and greater religious tolerance inculcated by the new generation of educated Tibetans; and greater knowledge and understanding of Bon as promoted through the writings of Western and Tibetan academics like Giuseppe Tucci, David L. Snellgrove, R. A. Stein, Per Kvaern, Namkhai Norbu, and Samten G. Karmay.

Ignorance appears to have been one of the fundamental causes of religious intolerance towards the Bonpos in the past. Through the following paragraphs, an attempt is made to present the salient features of Bon religion. The term Bon as used by Western scholars has three connotations :

(i) The pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet which was gradually suppressed and supplanted by Buddhism in the 8th and 9th centuries. It is considered to have consisted of an elaborate ritual of 'king-worship', concerned mainly with the safe passage of the soul of the deceased to the land of bliss transported on the sacrificial animals (such as a yak, horse or sheep), and the well-being and fertility of the living.

(ii) The religion that appeared in Tibet in the 10th and 11th centuries which coincided with the revival of Buddhism, after a period of decline. Although sharing many similarities with Buddhism in terms of basic doctrine and practice, Tibetan Buddhists regard it as a distinct religion.

(iii) It has reference to the vast body of popular beliefs, cult of the worship of local deities and conception of the soul and other mythological beliefs. As for the first and third sense of the term Bon, there appears to be disagreement amongst the scholars as to their accuracy and evidence. The living Bon tradition that flourishes today is by and large agreed to be the unbroken tradition that has continued since the 10th and 11th centuries. A 'Bonpo' is a believer in Bon, which signifies 'Truth', 'Reality' or the eternal, unchanging Doctrine in which Truth and Reality are expressed. Thus, Bon has the same range of connotations for its adherents as the Tibetan word 'chos' (Sanskrit - dharma) has for Tibetans.

The Bonpos refer to their religion as 'Yung Drung Bon' or the 'Eternal Bon' whose teachings are universally applicable and for all times. A swastika turning anticlockwise called the 'yung drung', is the symbol of Bon which appears in various Bonpo iconographies. The yung drung symbolizes to the Bonpo what the dorje (Sanskrit - vajra) symbolizes for Buddhists - indestructibility and permanence. Following the turn of the yung drung, Bonpos turn their prayer wheels to the left and circumambulate temples and stupas and other holy places such as mountains in anticlockwise direction. This is because they believe that it is the normal ritual direction which facilitates moral purifi-

cation and eventual enlightenment. Likewise, they refer to enlightened beings as 'yung drung sempa' (vajrasattva) just as the Buddhists refer to them as 'jangchub sempa' (bodhisattva). Instead of the holy Buddhist mantra of 'Om Mani Padme Hum', the Bonpos have 'Om Matri Muye Sale Du'. Although Mt. Kalish is revered by

Hindus, Buddhists and Bonpos alike, the Bonpos have their holy Bonri Mountain in the south of Tibet. The doctrine of Bon has many similarities with that of Tibetan Buddhism, believing as they do in the concept of 'samsara', as a world of suffering, the law of 'las dras' or the law of moral causality (karma) and the corresponding concepts of rebirth in the six states of existence; and the ideal of enlightenment and liberation from samsaric rebirth. In terms of visible features and practices such as monastic buildings, stupas, statues, thangkas, monasticism and the rituals of burning incense, putting up prayer flags, incantation of prayers, visualizing deities, making symbolic offerings, going on pilgrimages and the concept of reincarnations of high lamas, Bon and Buddhism share so many similarities that some scholars have accused the Bonpos of plagiarism. According to Professor Per Kvaern, "Rituals and other religious practices, as well as meditational and metaphysical traditions are, undeniably, to a large extent similar, even identical. Concepts of history and sources of religious authority are, however, radically different and justify the claim of the Bonpos to constitute an entirely distinct religious community."

According to its own Bon historical perspective, Bon was introduced into Tibet many centuries before Buddhism and enjoyed royal patronage until it was finally supplanted by the 'false religion' (Buddhism) from India in the 8th century. It is claimed that Bon flourished in a land known as Zhangzhung until it was conquered and converted to Buddhism and assimilated into Tibetan culture. Although there is no agreement as to the exact location or extent and the ethnic and cultural identity of the Zhangzhung empire, its historical reality is no longer in doubt. Many believe that the Zhangzhung empire flourished in the present day Ngari region of Tibet centered round Mt Kailash in the west, concurrent with the empire of 'Purgyal' in central Tibet and the empire of 'Sumpa' in the east.

Just as the major canonical texts of the Tibetan Buddhists have been translated from Sanskrit, the scriptures of Bon have, so the Bonpos claim, been translated into Tibetan from the language of Zhangzhung. Although the authenticity of Zhangzhung language is hotly debated, scholars like Erik Haar and Namkhai Norbu support its existence and even produced a bilingual Tibetan-Zhangzhung vocabulary. The Bonpos believe that 'Eternal Bon' was first proclaimed in a land known as 'Tazik' or 'Wolmo Lungring', which refers not just to a geographical country but also to a 'hidden', semi-paradisiacal land which latterday humans can only reach in visions or by supernatural means after being spiritually purified. Thus, it has the same characteristics as the Buddhist holy land of 'Shambala'.

Just as India is the holy land where the Buddha was born and preached the Dharma, Tazik or Wolmo Lungring is the holy land where the founder, Toenpa Sherab was born and preached the way of the 'Yungdrung Bon'. The Bonpos have a voluminous

hagiographical literature in which Toenpa Sherab's exploits are extolled. Although there are those who contest the historical and literary genesis of Toenpa Sherab and even regard him as a misrepresentation of Shakyamuni, there are manifest differences in the lives of these two religious founders to negate such claims.

Whereas Shakyamuni was a prince who renounced the world after seeing the true nature of samsara as being 'suffering', and through renunciation of his worldly life and embracing asceticism achieved enlightenment before showing others the true path, Toenpa Sherab ascended the throne as a king but traveled far and wide, propagating the doctrine of Bon and performing numerous rituals of purification. Whereas Buddhist rituals have no direct canonical basis, in Bon, as pointed out by Philip Denwood, "we have whole developed rituals and their liturgies specified in the minutest detail in the basic canon". The propagation of Bon by Toenpa Sherab included the construction of temples and stupas, but not the foundation of monasteries. His numerous wives, sons, daughters and disciples also played significant roles in propagating the Bon faith which have no parallel in Buddhism. It was only late in life that Toenpa Shenrab was ordained, and retiring to a forest hermitage, he finally succeeded in conquering his mighty opponent, the Prince of Demons. By the late eleventh century, the Bonpos began to establish monasteries organized along the same lines as those of Buddhists. The most prestigious Bonpo monastery, founded in 1405, is Menri (Medicine Mountain) in the Central Tibetan province of Tsang, but there are numerous other monasteries in the eastern and north-eastern Tibetan regions of Kham and Amdo. Monks are bound by strict rules of discipline, including celibacy. Fully ordained monks are called 'Dangsong' (rishi): the semi-divine seers. Over the centuries, the monastic life of the Bon has increasingly come under the influence of the traditions of academic learning and scholastic debate that characterizes the dominant Gelugpa school.

The vast literature of Bon which Western scholars are beginning to explore was described by David L Snellgrove in 1967: "by far the greater part would seem to have been absorbed through learning and then retold, and this is not just plagiarism". Subsequently, other scholars have conclusively shown that some Buddhist texts were exact copies of original Bon texts, which establishes the fact that Bon and Buddhism had interacted and mutually influenced each other in various ways over the centuries of co-existence and growth.

The Bon tradition holds that the early kings of Tibet were adherents of Bon who gave their royal patronage to the religion and contributed to its propagation far and wide in the kingdom. However, the eighth king, Drigum Tsenpo, persecuted the followers of Bon with the result that a large number of sacred Bon texts had to be hidden away so that they may be preserved for future generations. Thus, began the tradition of recovering 'concealed textual treasures' (Terma) at a later time by pre-ordained individuals called 'Terton' (Treasure Revealer). Although Bon was reinstated by Drigum Tsenpo's successor and flourished for a while, it was once more persecuted by King Trisong Deutsen in the 8th century who, as a devout Buddhist, gave royal patronage to Buddhism and tried his best to undermine the power and influence of the followers of Bon in government. Bonpo priests were either banished from Tibet or forced to conform to

Buddhism. Once again, Bon texts were concealed, to be discovered and used to propagate the faith anew when the time was ripe.

Once the rediscovery of such sacred texts began in the 10th century, the texts which were considered to be derived, ultimately from the teachings of Toenpa Sherab, were collected to form a canon, (comprising of 190 volumes) that constitutes the Bonpo Kagyur (teachings of Toenpa Shenrab). These are believed to have been compiled before 1450. The Bonpo Kagyur is divided into four parts: 'mDo' (Sutras), 'Bum' (Prajnaparamitra), 'rGyud' (Tantras), and 'mDzod' (Treasure-House) containing texts dealing with higher forms of meditation.

Like Buddhists, Bonpos also have a vast collection of commentarial, philosophical and ritual texts known as the 'Tangyur' (Commentaries). The contents of the 'Tangyur' are divided into three categories :

- (i) 'External', including commentaries on canonical texts dealing with monastic discipline, morality, metaphysics, and the biography of Toenpa Shenrab.
- (ii) 'Internal', comprising the commentaries on the Tantras including rituals focusing on the 'Tantric' deities and the cult of 'Dakinis' (goddesses) whose task it is to protect the doctrine, and worldly rituals of magic and divination.
- (iii) 'Secret', a section that deals with meditational practices. A significant genre within Bonpo literature is that of historiographical texts, the importance of which lies in the particular perspective on Tibetan history. The Tibetan Buddhist texts, inevitably, interpret the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet in the 7th and 8th centuries as a great blessing, preordained by Buddha Shakyamuni, that ended the period of darkness and ushered Tibet into the age of learning, ethical living and civilization. However, the Bonpo literature, presents an altogether different picture.

The introduction of Buddhism into Tibet is interpreted as a catastrophe that caused the suppression of Bon leading to the 'setting of the sun of the doctrine', followed by the dissolution of the Tibetan state, and the spread of moral and social anarchy. In spite of such understandable and contradictory perspectives on history which have been made worse by the polemical writings of both Buddhist and Bon scholars over the centuries, we are beginning to witness a period of religious tolerance and greater understanding that allows the religious tradition of 'Yungdrung Bon' to flourish once again. For this, Western scholarship deserves a lot of credit in its dispassionate study and dissemination of factual knowledge about this indigenous religious culture of Tibet.

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The Bon-Religion - An Introduction

The following Introduction to the Bon-Religion is based on a text from Per Kvaerne (Bon. IN: Mircea Eliades (ed.) The Encyclopedia of Religion, New York (Macmillian) 1987, 2: 277-281).

There are two organized religious traditions in Tibet: Buddhism and a faith that is referred to by its Tibetan name, Bon. Since its introduction into Tibet in the eighth century, Buddhism has been the dominant religion; in the person of the Dalai Lama, present-day Tibetan Buddhism has an articulate and internationally respected spokesman.

The Bon religion is much less well known, although the number of its adherents in Tibet is by all accounts considerable. In the West, the traditional view of Bon has been less than accurate. It has been characterized as "shamanism" or "animism," and as such regarded as a continuation of what supposedly were the religious practices prevalent in Tibet before the coming of Buddhism. It has also been described in rather unfavorable terms as a perversion of Buddhism, a kind of marginal countercurrent in which elements of Buddhist doctrine and practice have either been shamelessly copied or inverted and distorted in a manner that has been somewhat imaginatively compared with satanic cults. It is only since the mid-1960s that a more accurate understanding of this religion has emerged (first and foremost thanks to the efforts of David L. Snellgrove), so that Bon is now recognized as closely related to the various Buddhist schools in Tibet (in particular the Rningmapa order) and yet possessed of an identity of its own that justifies its status as a distinct religion.

Problems of Definition. An adherent of the Bon religion is called a Bon-po, again using the Tibetan term. A Bon-po is "a believer in bon," and for such a believer the word bon signifies "truth," "reality," or the eternal, unchanging doctrine in which truth and reality are expressed. Thus bon has the same range of connotations for its believers as the Tibetan word chos (corresponding to the Indian word dharma) has for Buddhists. A problem, however, arises when one is confronted with the fact that an important group of ritual experts in pre-Buddhist Tibet were likewise known as bon-pos. It is possible that their religious practices were styled Bon (although scholars are divided on this point); certainly they were so designated in the later, predominantly Buddhist historiographical Tradition. Be that as it may, their religious system was essentially different not only from Buddhism, but also, in certain important respects, from the Bon religious Tradition as practiced in later centuries. For example, the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet gives the impression of being preoccupied with the continuation of life beyond death. It included elaborate rituals for ensuring that the soul of a dead person was conducted safely to a postmortem land of bliss by an appropriate animal—usually a yak, a horse, or a sheep—which was sacrificed in the course of the funerary rites. Offerings of food, drink, and precious objects likewise accompanied the dead. These rites reached their highest level of elaboration and magnificence in connection with the death of a king or a high nobleman; as was the case in China, enormous funerary mounds were erected, and a large number of priests and court officials were involved in

rites that lasted für several years. The purpose of These rites was twofold: on the one hand, to ensure the happiness of the deceased in the land of the dead, and on the other, to obtain their beneficial influence for the welfare and fertility of the living.

The term Bon refers not only to these and other religious practices of pre-Buddhist Tibet, but also to the religion that apparently developed in close interaction with Buddhism from the eighth century onward and that still claims the adherence of many Tibetans. It is with the latter religion that this article is concerned. The Bon-pos claim that there is an unbroken continuity between the earlier and the later religion—a claim that, whatever its historical validity, is significant in itself.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that there has always existed a vast and somewhat amorphous body of popular beliefs in Tibet, including beliefs in various techniques of divination, the cult of local deities (connected, above all, with certain mountains), and conceptions of the soul. In Western literature, such beliefs are frequently styled "Bon," and reference is made to "Bon animism" and other supposedly typical Bon attributes. This has, however, no basis in Tibetan usage, and since this popular, unsystematized religion does not form an essential part of Buddhism or Bon (although it is, to a large extent, sanctioned by and integrated into both religions), an appropriate term for it is the one coined by Rolf A. Stein, "the nameless religion." The Bon-po Identity. Although limited to Tibet, Bon regards itself as a universal religion in the sense that its doctrines are true and valid for all humanity. For this reason it styles itself G'yung-drung Bon, "Eternal Bon." According to its own historical perspective, it was introduced into Tibet many centuries before Buddhism and enjoyed royal patronage until it was supplanted and expelled by the "false religion" (Buddhism) coming from India.

Before reaching Tibet, however, it is claimed that Bon prospered in a land known as Zhang-Zhung and that this country remained the center of the religion until it was absorbed by the expanding Tibetan empire in the seventh century. There is no doubt as to the historical reality of Zhang-Zhung, although its exact extent and ethnic and cultural identity are far from clear. It does, however, seem to have been situated in what today is, roughly speaking, western Tibet, with Mount Kailasa as its center. The ultimate homeland of Bon, is, however, to be sought farther to the west, beyond the borders of Zhang-Zhung. The Bonpos believe that their religion was first proclaimed in a land called Rtag-gzigs (Tazik) or 'Ol-mo Lung-ring. Although the former name suggests the land of the Tajiks (in present-day Soviet Central Asia), it has so far not been possible to identify this holy land of Bon in a convincing manner.

In Rtag-gzigs, so the Bon-pos claim, lived Ston-pa Gsen-rab (Tönpa Shenrap), a fully enlightened being who was, in fact, nothing less than the true Buddha of our world age. The Bon-pos possess a voluminous biographical literature in which his exploits are extolled. Without entering into details, or discussing the many problems connected with the historical genesis of this extraordinary figure, one may at least note that his biography is not closely related to the biographical traditions connected with Sakyamuni, the Buddha on whose authority the Buddhists base their doctrines. Ston-pa Gsen-rab was a layman, and it was as a prince that he incessantly journeyed from his capital in all

directions to propagate Bon. It is remarkable that this propagation also included the institution of innumerable rituals, the supervision of the erection of temples and stupas, and the conversion of notorious sinners. His numerous wives, sons, daughters, and disciples also played a significant role (in a way for which there is no Buddhist parallel) in this soteriological activity. It was only late in his life that he was ordained as a monk, and at that point in his career he retired to a forest hermitage. On the other hand, Ston-pa Gsen-rab is considered to have been a fully enlightened being from his very birth, endowed with numerous supernatural powers. His importance in the Bon religion is crucial; it is he who –directly or indirectly– lends authority to the religious literature of the Bon-pos, and he is the object of their intense devotion.

Religious Beliefs and Practices. In the same way as the Buddhists of Tibet divide their sacred scriptures into two vast collections, the Bon-pos also—probably since the middle of the fourteenth century CE—possess their own Bka'-'gyur (Kanjur, texts considered to have been actually expounded by Ston-pa Gsen-rab) and Brten-'gyur (Tenjur, later commentaries and treatises), comprising in all approximately three hundred volumes. Since the middle of the nineteenth century wooden blocks for printing the entire collection have been available in the principality of Khro-bcu in the extreme east of Tibet, and printed copies of the canon were produced until the 1950s. (The blocks were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution). Large portions of the Bka'-'gyur and Brten-'gyur may be reconstituted on the basis of texts published by Bon-po exiles living in India, and it seems that a complete set of the printed edition has survived the ravages of war and of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet itself.

A common division of the Bon-po Bka'-'gyur is the fourfold one into Sūtras (mdo), Prajnaparamita texts ('bum), Tantras (rgyud), and texts dealing with the higher forms of meditation (mdzod, lit. "treasurehouse"). The Brten-'gyur is divided into three basic textual categories: "External," including commentaries on the Vinaya, the Abhidharma, and the Sutras; "Internal," comprising the commentaries on the Tantras and the rituals focusing on the major Tantric deities, as well as the cult of dakinis, dharmapalas, and worldly rituals of magic and divination; and finally, "Secret," a section that treats meditation practices. A section containing treatises on grammar, architecture, and medicine is appended.

For the sake of convenience, the Indian (Buddhist) terms corresponding to the Tibetan have been used here, but it must be kept in mind that although the Bonpos employ the same Tibetan terms as the Buddhists, they do not accept their Indian origin, since they trace, as explained above, their entire religious terminology to Zang-Zung and, ultimately, to Rtag-gzigs.

As this review of Bon-po religious literature indicates, the doctrines they contain are basically the same as those of Buddhism. The concepts of the world as suffering, of moral causality and rebirth in the six states of existence, and of enlightenment and Buddhahood are basic doctrinal elements of Bon. Bon-pos follow the same path of virtue and have recourse to the same meditational practices as do Buddhist Tibetans.

In the early fifteenth century—and indeed even earlier—the Bon-pos began to establish monasteries that were organized along the same lines as those of the Buddhists, and several of these monasteries developed into large institutions with hundreds of monks and novices. The most prestigious Bon-po monastery, founded in 1405, is Sman-ri in central Tibet (in the province of Gtsan, north of the Brahmaputra River). Fully ordained monks, corresponding to the Buddhist *dge-slon* , (Skt., *bhikṣu*), are styled *dran-srong* (a term that in Tibetan otherwise translates *ṛṣi*, the semidivine "seers" of the Vedas). They are bound by all the rules of monastic discipline, including strict celibacy.

Over the centuries the monastic life of Bon has come increasingly under the influence of the Tradition of academic learning and scholastic debate that characterize the dominant *Dge-lugs-pa* school, but the older tradition of Tantric yogins and hermits, constituting an important link between the Bon-pos and the *Rning-ma-pas*, has never been quite abandoned. [See *Dge-lugs-pa*.] An important class of religious experts, which likewise finds its counterpart in the *Rnin-ma-pa* Tradition, consists of the visionaries—both monks and laymen who reveal "hidden texts." During the Buddhist persecution of Bon in the eighth and ninth centuries, the Bon-pos claim, their sacred texts were hidden in caves, buried underground, or walled up in certain temples. Later (apparently from the tenth century onward) the texts were rediscovered—at first, it would seem, by chance, and subsequently through the intervention of supernatural beings who would direct the chosen *gterston* ("treasure finder") to the site. Later still, texts would be revealed in visions or through purely mental transference from divine beings. The greater part of the Bon-po *Bka'-'gyur* and *Brten-'gyur* consists of such "rediscovered" or supernaturally inspired texts. "Treasure finders" have been active until the present, and indeed may be said to play an important role in the revival of religious activities in Tibet today, as texts that were hidden for safekeeping during the systematic destruction of the 1960s and 1970s are once more being removed from their hiding places.

As is the case in Tibetan religion generally, these texts are particularly important in that they serve, in an almost literal sense, as liturgical scores for the innumerable and extremely complex rituals, the performance of which occupies much of the time and attention of the monks. Many of these rituals do not differ significantly from those performed by the Buddhists, except that the deities invoked—although falling into the same general categories as those that apply to the deities of Mahayana Buddhism—are different from the Buddhist ones. They have different names, iconographical characteristics, evocatory formulas (mantras), and myths. A systematic study of this pantheon remains, however, to be undertaken, and likewise, our knowledge of the rituals of the Bon-pos is still extremely incomplete.

The laypeople are confronted by many of these deities, impersonated by monks, in the course of mask dances. The lay Bon-pos have the same range of religious activities as Tibetan Buddhist laypeople: the practice of liberality toward monks and monasteries (in exchange for the performance of rituals); the mechanical multiplication of prayers by means of prayer flags and prayer wheels; and journeys of pilgrimage to the holy places of Bon, such as Mount Kailasa in the western Himalayas, or *Bon-ri* ("mountain of Bon"), in the southeastern province of *Rkong-po*.

The Diffusion of Bon. Both Buddhists and Bon-pos agree that when Buddhism succeeded in gaining royal patronage in Tibet in the eighth and ninth centuries, Bon suffered a serious setback. By the eleventh century, however, an organized religious Tradition, styling itself Bon and claiming continuity with the earlier, pre Buddhist religion, appeared in central Tibet. It is this religion of Bon that has persisted to our own times, absorbing doctrines and practices from the dominant Buddhist religion but always adapting what it learned to its own needs and its own perspectives. This is, of course, not just plagiarism, but a dynamic and flexible strategy that has ensured the survival, indeed the vitality, of a religious minority.

Until recent years, much has been made in Western literature of the fact that the Bon-pos perform certain basic ritual acts in a manner opposite to that practiced by the Buddhists. Thus, when circumambulating sacred places and objects or when spinning their prayerwheels, the Bon-pos proceed counterclockwise rather than following the (Indian and Buddhist) Tradition of pradaksina, or circumambulation "toward the right." For this reason, it has been said of Bon that "its essence lay largely in contradiction and negation," and Bon's "willful perversions and distortions" have been pointed out. The error of such views cannot be too strongly emphasized. The Bon-pos are conscious of no element of "contradiction and negation" in their beliefs and practices but regard their religion as the pure path to liberation from suffering and rebirth. It is true that down through the centuries Bon-po historiographers have generally regarded the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet as a catastrophe, which they have ascribed to the accumulated collective "evil karma" of the Tibetans. On the other hand, conciliatory efforts have not been lacking; thus one source suggests that Ston-pa Gsen-rab and Sakyamuni were really twin brothers.

It is difficult to assess just how large the Bon-po community of Tibet is. Certainly the Bon-pos are a not insignificant minority. Particularly in eastern Tibet, whole districts are populated by Bon-pos. Scattered communities are also to be found in central and western Tibet, particularly in the Chumbi Valley (bordering Sikkim) and among nomads. In the north of Nepal, too, there are Bon-po villages, especially in the district of Dol-po. At a point in history that remains to be determined precisely, Bon exerted a strong influence on the religion of the Na-khi people in Yunnan Province in southwestern China; with this exception, the Bon-pos do not seem to have engaged in missionary enterprises. In India, Bon-pos belonging to the Tibetan refugee community have established (since 1968) a large and well-organized monastery in which traditional scholarship, rituals, and sacred dances are carried on with great vigor. Since 1980, when religious life was revived in Tibet itself, the Bon-pos there have rebuilt several monasteries (albeit on a reduced scale), installed monks, and resumed—to the extent that prevailing conditions permit—many aspects of traditional religious life. It would thus seem that there is good reason to believe that Bon will continue to exist, and even, with certain limits, to flourish.

The *Bonpo* tradition

The Founder of *Bon* and His Teachings

Three brothers

It is said that in a past age there were three brothers, Dagpa (Dag-pa), Selba (gSal-ba) and Shepa (Shes-pa), who studied the *Bon* doctrines in the heaven named Sridpa Yesang (Srid-pa Ye-sangs), under the *Bon* sage Bumtri Logi Chechen (ʼBum-khri gLog-gi lCe-can). When they had completed their studies they visited the God of Compassion Shenlha Okar (gShen-lha ʼOd-dkar) and asked him how they could help living beings who are submerged in the misery and sorrow of suffering. Shenlha Okar advised them to act as guides to mankind in three successive ages of the world.

To follow his advice, the eldest brother Dagpa completed his work in the past world age, while the second brother Selba took the name Shenrab and became the teacher and guide of the present world age. It will be the youngest brother, Shepa, who will come to teach in the next world age.

Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche

According to the *Bon* religion of Tibet, about 18000 years ago Lord Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche (sTon-pa gShen-rab Mi-bo-che: Teacher and Great Man of the Shen) was born in the land of **Olmo Lungring** (ʼOl-mo lung-ring), a part of a larger country called Tagzig (sTag-gzigs: Central Asia). “Ol” symbolizes the unborn, “mo” the undiminishing; “Lung” denotes the prophetic words of Tonpa Shenrab, the founder of *Bon*, and “ring”, his everlasting compassion. Olmo Lungring constitutes one-third of the existing world, and is situated to the west of Tibet. It is described as an eight-petalled lotus under a sky which appears like an eight-spoked wheel. In the centre rises Mount Yungdrung Gutseg (g.Yung-drung dgu-brtsegs), the “Pyramid of Nine Swastikas.” The nine swastikas represent the Nine Ways of *Bon*, which will be described below. The swastika or yungdrung is a symbol of permanence and indestructibility of the wisdom of *Bon*.

At the base of Mount Yungdrung Gutseg spring four rivers, flowing towards the four cardinal directions. The mountain is surrounded by temples, cities and parks. To the south is Barpo Sogye (Bar-po so-brgyad) palace, where Tonpa Shenrab was born. To the west and north are the palaces where Tonpa Shenrab’s wives and children lived. To the east is Shampo Lhatse (Sham-po lha-rtse) temple. The complex of palaces, rivers and parks with Mount Yungdrung Gutseg in the centre constitutes the inner region (Nang-gling) of Olmo Lungring. The intermediate region (Bar-gling) consists of twelve cities, four of which lie in the four cardinal directions. The third region includes the outer land (mTha`-gling). These three regions are encircled by an ocean and a range of snowy mountains.

Tonpa Shenrab was born a prince, married while young and had children. At the age of thirty-one he renounced the world and lived in austerity, teaching the doctrine. During his whole life his efforts to propagate the *Bon* religion were obstructed by the demon Khyabpa Lagring (Khyab-pa Lag-ring), that fought to destroy or impede Tonpa Shenrab's work until eventually the demon was converted and became his disciple. Once while pursuing the demon to recover his stolen horses Tonpa Shenrab arrived in present-day western Tibet. This was his only visit to Tibet. On this occasion he imparted some instructions on the performance of rituals, but on the whole he found the people unprepared to receive more teachings. Before leaving Tibet he prophesied that all his teachings would flourish in Tibet when the time was ripe. Tonpa Shenrab passed away at the age of eighty-two. Admittedly 82 years in Olmo Lungring correspond to some 8200 years of human time.

There are three biographies of Tonpa Shenrab. The earliest and shortest one is known as Dondu (mDo`-`dus: "Epitome of Aphorisms"); the second is in two volumes and is called Zermig (gZer-mig: "Piercing Eye"). These two accounts were rediscovered as terma (see below) in the 10th and 11th centuries respectively. The third and largest is the twelve volume work entitled Zhiji (gZi-brjid: "The Glorious"). This last book belongs to the category of scriptures known as Nyan gyud (bsNyan-rgyud: oral transmission), and was dictated to Loden Nyingpo (bLo-ldan sNying-po) who lived in the 14th century. ⁽¹⁾ The doctrine taught by Tonpa Shenrab and recorded in these three accounts was spread by his disciples to adjacent countries such as Zhang-Zhung, India, Kashmir, China, and finally reached Tibet. Its transmission was secured by siddhas and scholars who translated texts from the language of Zhang-Zhung into Tibetan.

Of Tonpa Shenrab's many disciples, the foremost was Mucho Demdrug (Mu-cho lDem-drug), who in his turn taught many students, the most important of whom were the "Six Great Translators": Mutsha Trahe (dMu-tsha Tra-he) of Tazig, Trithog Pasha (Khri-thog sPa-tsha) of Zhang-Zhung, Hulu Paleg (Hu-lu sPa-legs) of Sum-pa (east of Zhang-Zhung), Lhadag Ngagdrol (Lha-bdags sNgags-grol) of India, Legtang Mangpo (Legs-tang rMang-po) of China and Sertog Chejam (gSer-thog lCe-byams) of Phrom (Mongolia).

They are regarded as especially important in the dissemination of *Bon* because they translated the teachings into their own languages before returning to their countries to teach.

Tonpa Shenrab taught his doctrines in two systems

The first classification is called Thegpa Rimgu`i *Bon* ⁽²⁾ (Theg-pa rim-dgu`i bon), the "*Bon* of Nine Successive Stages" or, as it is more commonly known, the "Nine Ways of *Bon*," of which there are three versions: the Lhoter (lho-gter) or "Southern Treasure," the Jangter (byang-gter) or "Northern Treasure" and the Uter (dBu-gter) or "Central Treasure". ⁽³⁾

The second classification is called *Gozhi dzonga* (sGo-bzhi mdzod-Ing), “The Four Portals and the Treasury, the Fifth”:

According to the system of the *lho-gter* (Southern Treasure) the Nine Ways are:

1. **Chashen thegpa** (Phywa-gshen theg-pa), the Way of the Shen of Prediction, describes four different ways of prediction, by divination (mo), astrology (rtsis), ritual (gto) and examination of causes (dphyad).
2. **Nangshen thegpa** (sNang-gshen theg-pa), the Way of the Shen of Visible Manifestation, expounds the origin and nature of gods and demons living in this world and various methods of exorcism and ransom.
3. **Trulshen thegpa** (Phrul-gshen theg-pa), the Way of the Shen of Magical Power, explains rites for disposing of adverse powers.
4. **Sidshen thegpa** (Srid-gshen theg-pa), the Way of the Shen of Existence, deals with the after-death state (bar-do) and with methods for guiding sentient beings towards liberation or at least towards a better rebirth.
5. **Genyen thegpa** (dGe-snyen theg-pa), the Way of Virtuous Lay Practitioners, guides those who apply the ten virtues and ten perfections.
6. **Drangsong thegpa** (Drang-srong theg-pa), the Way of the Sages, contains the rules of monastic discipline.
7. **A-kar thegpa** (A-dkar theg-pa), the Way of the White A, explains the practices and rituals of the higher Tantras.
8. **Yeshen thegpa** (Ye-gshen theg-pa), the Way of the Primordial Shen, stresses the need for a suitable teacher, place and occasion for Tantric practices, explains the mandala in greater detail as well as instructions for deity meditation.
9. **Lamed thegpa** (bLa-med theg-pa), the Unsurpassed Way, is concerned with the highest attainment through the path of Great Perfection (i.e., rDzogs-chen).

The second classification is called *Gozhi dzonga* (sGo-bzhi mdzod-Ing), “The Four Portals and the Treasury, the Fifth”:

1. **Chab-kar** (Chab-dkar), the “White Waters”, contains spells and higher esoteric Tantric practices.
2. **Chab-nag** (Chab-nag), the “Black Waters”, consists of various rituals (healing, purificatory, magical, prognosticatory, divinatory, funerary, and ransom rituals).
3. **Phenyul** (“Phan-yul), the “Land of Phen”, explains rules for monks and nuns and lay-people and expounds philosophical doctrines.
4. **Ponse** (dPon-gsas), the “Masters Guide”, instructs on psycho-spiritual exercises and meditation practices of Great Perfection (rDzogs-chen).
5. **Thothog** (mTho-thog), the “Treasury”, subsumes the essential aspects of all four portals.

The Propagation of *Bon* in Zhang-Zhung and Tibet

Zhang-Zhung

The first *Bon* scriptures were translated from the language of Zhang-Zhung into Tibetan. The works contained in the *Bonpo* canon as we know it today are written in Tibetan, but a number of them, especially the older ones, retain the titles and at times whole passages in the language of Zhang-Zhung.

Until the 8th century **Zhang-Zhung** existed as a separate kingdom, comprising the land to the west of the central Tibetan provinces of U (dBus) and Tsang (gTsang) and generally known as Western Tibet, extending over a vast area from Gilgit in the west to the lake of Namtsho (gNam-mtsho) in the east and from Khotan in the north to Mustang in the south. The capital was called Khyunglung Ngulkhar (Khyung-lung dngul-mkhar), the “Silver Palace of Garuda Valley”, the ruins of which lie in the upper Sulej valley south-west of Mount Kailash. Its people spoke a language classified among the Tibeto-Burmese group of Sino-Tibetan languages.

The country was ruled by a dynasty of kings which ended in the 9th century A.D. when the last king, Ligmincha, (Lig-min-skya) was assassinated by order of the king of Tibet and Zhang-Zhung militarily annexed by Tibet. Since that time Zhang-Zhung has become gradually Tibetanized and its language, culture and many of its beliefs have been integrated into the general frame of Tibetan culture. Due to its geographical proximity to the great cultural centres of central Asia such as Gilgit and Khotan, it was through Zhang-Zhung that many religious concepts and ideas reached Tibet.

Persecutions

The *Bon* religion has undergone two persecutions in Tibet during its long history. The first occurred during the reign of King Drigum Tsenpo (Gri-gum btsan-po`) in the 7th century B.C. All but the “*Bon* of Cause” (rgyu`i bon: the first four of the Nine Ways) was abolished, and most of its practitioners banished. They were, however, able to conceal many texts as terma (gTer-ma, “treasure”) that were rediscovered at a later date by tertons (gTer-ston, “treasures discoverer”).

With the increasing interest in Buddhism and its establishment as the state religion and the founding of Samye (bSam-yas) monastery in 779 A.D. *Bon* was generally discouraged and a further serious attempt was made to eradicate it. This was the second persecution of *Bon*, by King Trisong Detsen (Khri-srong lDe-btsan). However, adherents of *Bon* among the nobility and especially among the common people, who had followed the *Bon* beliefs for generations, retained their religious convictions and *Bon* survived. Again during this period many *Bon* priests were banished or forced to flee from Central Tibet, having first concealed their scriptures for fear of their destruction and in order to preserve them for future generations.

One of the foremost Bonpos of the time, **Dranpa Namkha** (Dran-pa Nam-mkha”),⁽⁴⁾ played an important role during the second persecution of *Bon*. He headed the *Bonpo* side in a contest against the Buddhists organized by the king to discover which side had the greatest miraculous power.

The Bonpos lost the contest and had to disperse in fear of their lives or be converted to *Buddhism*. While ostensibly embracing the Buddhist religion out of fear of being killed, in fact Drenpa Namkha did it for the sake of preserving in secret the *Bonpo* teachings, thereby saving *Bon* from complete eradication.

Resurgence of Bon

From the 8th to 11th centuries the practice of *Bon* went mainly underground. The year 1017 C.E.⁽⁵⁾ marks the resurgence of *Bon*, which began with the discovery by Shenchen Luga (gShen-chen kLu-dga`, 996–1035) of a number of important concealed texts. With his discoveries *Bon* re-emerged as a fully systematized religion. Shenchen Luga was born in the Shen clan, descended from Kontsha Wangden (Kong-tsha dBang-ldan), one of Tonpa Shenrab`s sons. The descendants of this important family still live in Tibet. Shenchen Luga had a large following. To three of his disciples he entrusted the task of continuing three different traditions. To the first, Druchen Namkhai Yungdrung (Bru-chen Nam-mkha` g.Yung-drung) born in the clan of Dru which migrated to Tibet from Druzha (` Bru-zha, i.e., Gilgit), he entrusted the studies of cosmology and metaphysics (mDzod-phug and Gab-pa). It was to this end that one of his disciples and relations, lama Drurje Yungdrung (Bru-rje g.Yung-drung bla-ma) founded the monastery of Yeru Wensakha (gYas-ru dBen-sa-kha) in Tsang province in 1072.

This monastery remained a great centre of learning until 1386, when it was badly damaged by flood. Despite the decline of Yeru Wensakha the Dru family continued to sponsor the *Bon* religion, but the family came to extinction in the 19th century when, for the second time, a reincarnation of the Panchen Lama was found in the family. The second disciple, Zhuye Legpo (Zhu-yas Legs-po), was assigned to maintain the *Dzogchen* teachings and practices. He founded the monastery of Kyikhar Rizhing (sKyid-mkhar Ri-zhing). The descendants of the Zhu family now live in India. The third disciple, Paton Pelchog (sPa-ston dPal-mchog), took responsibility for upholding the Tantric teachings. The Pa family too still exists.

Another important master of that time was Meukhepa Tsultrim Palchen (rMe`u-mkhas-pa Tsul-khrims dPal-chen, b. 1052), of the Meu clan, who founded Zangri (sNye-mo bZang-ri) monastery, which also became a centre for philosophical studies. Thus during this period the Bonpos founded four important monasteries and study centres, all in Tsang province (Central Tibet).

Menri monastery

In 1405 the great *Bonpo* teacher, Nyammed Sherab Gyaltzen (mNyam-med Shes-rab rGyal-mtshan, 1356-1415), founded Menri (sMan-ri) monastery near the site of Yeru Wensakha, which had been destroyed by flood. Yungdrung Ling (g.Yung-drung gling) monastery was founded in 1834 and, soon afterwards, Kharna (mKhar-sna) monastery, both in the vicinity of Menri.

These remained the most important *Bon* monasteries until the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959, and following their inspiration many monasteries were established throughout Tibet, especially in Khyungpo, Kham, Amdo, Gyelrong and Hor, so that by the start of the 20th century there were 330 *Bonpo* monasteries in Tibet.

Nyammed Sherab Gyaltzen was especially venerated for his great achievements and realization. He was known as a great reformer and reinvigorated the *Bonpo* monastic tradition, causing many monasteries to flourish. Nyenme Sherab Gyeltsen also was the first master to collect and hold all the transmissions and empowerments of all the *Bon* lineages. All of these transmissions have continued to be held by each of the successive abbots of Menri, and over time the abbot of Menri came to be regarded as the head of the *Bon* religion. This tradition was officially recognized by the Tibetan government in exile in 1977.

The *Bon* Pantheon and Religious Commitment

The Bon Pantheon

The *Bon* pantheon contains a great number of deities. Every Tantric ritual cycle in the *Bonpo* canon has its own complete set of divinities, method of visualization and worship. One classification divides the deities into three groups: the peaceful (zhi-ba), the wrathful (khro-bo) and the fierce (phur-pa). Also, *Bonpo* cosmogony describes groups of deities of Light and Darkness. ⁽⁶⁾

The highest ranking deities are **Kuntu Zangpo** (Kun-tu bZang-po), the Bonku (bon-sku), **Shenlha Okar** (gShen-lha `Od-dkar), the Dzogku (rdzogs-sku: Perfect Sphere), and **Tonpa Shenrab**, the Tulku (sprul-sku) who is the Teacher (sTon-pa) of the present world age. The most important female deity is **Jamma** (Byams-ma), the “Loving Mother”, also known as **Satrig Ersang** (Sa-trig Er-sangs). There are also sets of 1000 Buddhas and of the Buddhas of the three times (past, present and future). Among the guardian deities, known as the Dharma`s Protectors (bKa`-skyong), the most important are **Sidpai Gyalmo** (Srid-pa`i Gyal-mo: “Queen of Existence”, the female guardian of the *Bonpo* teachings), **Midud** or Midud Jampa Traggo (Mi-bdud `bYams-pa Khrag-mgo: the male guardian of Menri monastery) and Tsengo Hurpa (bTsan-rgod Hur-pa).

The most general division of the deities is that which distinguishes between the supra-mundane gods of the higher spheres (`Jig-rten las` das-pa`i lha) and the demi-gods and minor deities who remain active in this world (`Jig-rten pa`i lha).

To the latter group belong a whole host of mountain gods, local gods (Sa-bdag), evil demons (gNyen), female demons (Ma-mo) and other spirits such as the `Dre, Sri, kLu, etc.

Religious Commitment

Religious life among the Bonpos may take many varied forms. Here we will briefly examine the traditions of monastic life, the Ngagpa, Dzogchen and Chod.

Monastic life

According to *Bon* it is by good actions and a virtuous life that a being achieves spiritual perfection and the spheres of the Perfect Buddhas (Sangs-rgyas). The methods for reaching the highest goal were taught by Tonpa Shenrab and by successive *Bonpo* sages.

The noblest way to practise religion is to take religious vows; a layperson may strive for perfection, but it is the monastic life that offers the best opportunity of attaining the highest levels. In fact over the centuries the monastic life has formed an essential part of the *Bon* religion.

There are four grades of religious vows, two lower and two higher. The lower ones, called nyenne (bsNyen-gnas) and genyen (dGe-bsnyen), are normally taken by lay-people who want to practise religion in a more perfect way; when taken by monks they are considered to form an initial stage in their religious life.

These vows can be taken for any period of time. The higher grades are called tsangtsug (gTsang-gtsug), that applies on taking monastic initiation (rab-byung) and consists of twenty-five vows, and drangsong (Drang-srong), that applies on full ordination and consists of two hundred and fifty vows. Nuns take three hundred and sixty vows.

Ngagpas

The Bonpos are also particularly known for their tradition of Ngagpas (sNgags-pa), who are recognizable by their uncut, loosely worn hair. Ngagpas are lay practitioners, who take the vows of refuge, genyen and Ngagpa genyen, that primarily practice tantra. There are family lineages of Ngagpa, with the practice of a particular tantric yidam being passed down through the family, but any man may choose to become a Ngagpa and take the appropriate vows. Though a Ngagpa may marry, have children and work in

the world, he must spend a great deal of time in retreat and perform rituals when requested by villagers.

While Ngagpas may perform many different rituals, they are particularly known for performing birth rituals, weddings, funerals, divinations, and pacification of ghosts or nature spirits. Typically Ngagpas live with their families in villages, but many Ngagpas also congregate in Bonpos, the Ngagpa equivalent of a monastery.

Dzogchen

Along with the spiritual life, there are special methods of practising in the pursuit of spiritual perfection. The most highly esteemed practices are those of *the Dzogchen* (rDzogs-chen, “Great Perfection”) traditions.

There are four streams or methods of meditation in Dzogchen, collectively known as A-Dzog-Nyengyud, i.e., A-Tri (A-khrid), the “Teaching on A”, founded in the 11th century by Dampa Meu Gongje Ritro Chenpo (1038–1096); Dzogchen, founded in 1088 A.D. by tertön Zhoton Ngodrub Dragpa (gZhod-ston dNgos-grub Grags-pa); **Nyengyud** (its full title is Zhang zhung sNyan-rgyud, the “Oral Transmission of Zhang-Zhung”) and Yeti tasel, a lineage deriving from Tonpa Shenrab, but passing through India and translated from Sanskrit to Zhangzhung-pa.

The Zhang zhung sNyan-rgyud is the oldest and most important Dzogchen tradition and meditation system in *Bon*. While the other three are terma traditions based on rediscovered texts, the third is an oral tradition based on continuous transmission by an uninterrupted lineage of masters.

The Zhang-Zhung Nyangyud cycle of teachings was first put in writing by the important 8th century master Gyerphung Nangzher Lopo, the foremost disciple of **Tapihritsa** (ta-pi-hra-tsa), revered by Bonpos as the union of all the lineage **masters**.

Chod

There also exists another important system of meditation called Chod (gCod), “Cutting the ego” which is performed by lay practitioners, Ngagpa and monks alike. The purposes of Chod are to generate generosity, dispel fear and overcome attachment. This has been only the briefest of introductions to the rich religious traditions of *Bon*. It is not possible to capture the full depth and breadth of one the world’s great religions, but hopefully the reader will have some taste for what the Bonpos value.

Notes:

(1) The gZer-mig and gZi-brjid are both published by the Bonpo Foundation, Dolanji, 1965 and 1967-69, respectively. Extracts from the gZi-brjid have been edited and translated by D.L. Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, London Oriental Series, vol. 18, London 1967. The first seven chapters of gZer-mig and part of the eighth have been translated into English by A.H. Franke, "A Book of the Tibetan Bonpos", *Asia Major*, Leipzig 1924, 1926, 1927, 1930; *Asia Major (New Series)* 1, London 1949. A summary of the contents of gZer-mig has been made by H. Hoffmann in *The Religions of Tibet*, London 1961, 85-96.

(2) Another classification, in 12 lores or sciences, is examined in great detail in *Drung, Deu and Bon* by Namkhai Norbu (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, India 1995).

(3) The dBu-gter classification is given below, in the Course of Studies section. According to the Zang-zang-ma tradition the Byang-gter consist of:

1. Tho-tho theg-pa,
 2. sPyi-tho theg-pa,
 3. Yang-tho theg-pa,
- are three;
4. sNang-ldan theg-pa,
 5. Rang-ldan theg-pa,
 6. bZhed-ldan theg-pa,
- are three;
7. lha-rtse theg-pa,
 8. sNang-rtse theg-pa,
 9. Yongs-rtse theg-pa,
- are three.

(4) Dran-pa Nam-mkha` is a popular figure in Bonpo history. His biography in 8 volumes was recently published by sPa-tshang Sonam Gyeltsen, Delhi 1983. He is believed to have had twin sons: Tshe-dbang Rig-`dzin, a Bonpo teacher, and Pad-ma Byung-gnas, the famous Buddhist teacher Padmasambhava (see cf. Karmay, *The Treasury of Good Sayings*, Oxford University Press, London 1972: xxxii n.4, for a discussion of this.)

(5) All dates except in the 20th century and unless otherwise stated are taken from *Sangs-rgyas-kyi btsan-rtsis ngo mtshar nor-bu`i phreng-ba zhes bya-ba-bzhugs-so* by Nyima Tenzin in *Tibetan-Zhang Zhung Dictionary*, The Bonpo Foundation, Delhi 1965, 23-40. It has been translated into English by Per Kvaerne, "Chronological table of the Bonpo", *Acta Orientalia*, xxxiii (Paris 1971): 33-48.

(6) For an overview of Bonpo iconography with excellent color reproductions of thankas and statues see Per Kvaerne`s *Bon Religion of Tibet*, Serindia, London, 1995.

Source: Yungdrung Bon

Olmo Lungring: the imperishable sacred land

by John Myrdhin Reynolds

According to the *Bonpo* tradition, although *Yungdrung Bon* is eternal and without an ultimate beginning in time, it originated in the present kalpa or cycle of existence in the country of Olmo Lungring where **Tonpa Shenrab** descended from the celestial spheres and took up incarnation among human beings as an Iranian prince. The mysterious land of Olmo Lungring (‘ol-mo lung-rings) or Olmoling (‘ol-mo`i gling) is said to be part of a larger geographical region to the northwest of Tibet called Tazig (stag-gzig, var. rtag-gzigs), which scholars identify with Iran or, more properly, Central Asia where in ancient times Iranian languages such as Avestan and later Sogdian were spoken. According to the “gZer-mig” the traditional etymology of the name Olmo Lungring is as follows: “‘ol” means “unborn”, “mo” “undermined”, “lung” “the prophetic words of Shenrab”, and “rings” “everlasting compassion”. According to the “gZi-brjid”, Olmo Lungring was also known as Shambhala in Sanskrit and it continues to be known by this name among Tibetan Buddhists even today. Moreover, it is said that in ancient times it encompassed fully one-third of the known world a statement which could apply to the historical Persian empire.

Some modern scholars attempt to identify Olmo Lungring with the area around mount Kailas in West Tibet, anciently known as **Zhang-zhung**, and assert that the holy nine-storeyed mountain in the center of Olmoling is in fact Mount Kailas. These scholars assert that Olmo is quite an ordinary place like other valleys in Tibet and that the name Olmo Lungring simply means “the long valley of Olmo”. Furthermore, the sacred mountain of Yungdrung Gutseg in the center of Olmo Lungring is called a crystal monolith because it is a quite ordinary mountain surmounted by a glacier. Therefore, it is most likely a representation of Mount Kailas where four great rivers of Asia are said to originate. Because Zhang-zhung was an early important center of *Bon*, these scholars conclude that Olmoling was this region and that Olmo Lungring was not some mystical land existing at a spiritual level. Moreover, they assert that Tonpa Shenrab was only some sort of priest whose presence was required at funeral ceremonies. He was living in the seventh century or shortly before. He was born there in West Tibet, a native Tibetan priest or magician and not an Iranian prince, and he was, therefore, a perfectly ordinary and pedestrian figure. There is no mention of Olmo Lungring in Tibetan texts before the tenth century. The coming to Tibet in the eleventh century of Buddhist teachers inspired the Bonpo Lamas to invent and actually fabricate for themselves a supposedly ancient tradition. Since these teachings could not be seen as originating in Tibet which is a quite real and ordinary place on earth, they put the birth of Tonpa Shenrab in distant Tazig, a fabulous land of legend, which recalled the Persian empire which the Tibetans much admired in the seventh century. These scholars conclude that all of the *Bon* tradition is fake, a deceitful invention of unscrupulous Tibetan Lamas in the tenth century and afterwards.

But according to the Bonpo Lamas, this assertion is entirely wrong. In all of the early *Bonpo* texts Olmo Lungring is clearly located to the west and the north of Tibet in Tazig

or Central Asia. Moreover, there are two Tazigs, one of a heavenly nature and one quite physical, located in Central Asia. The Kailas mountain and its adjacent region in West Tibet is only a pale reflection of the real Olmo Lungring, the original archetype, which exists at the center of the world. According to the “gZer-mig” and other texts, the region around Tise or Mount Kailas is only a copy in Zhang-zhung of the original in Olmoling. Furthermore, according to the “gZi-brjid”, Dimpling is the same as Shambhala. It is not necessary to pray and do any meditation practice in order to be reborn in Iran or the Central Asia of the USSR, these are quite ordinary earthly places; but it is necessary to pray and to undergo a purification of mind before one can be reborn in Olmo Lungring, or even enter it in this present life, because it is a pure dimension of existence (dag-pa`i zhing-khams). It cannot be seen easily with the ordinary fleshly eye like Iran or Central Asia or even Tibet can. But simply because we do not see it is no proof that it does not exist, for that is the view of the Lokayatas or materialists.

The *Bonpo* account of the hidden land of Olmo Lungring is found in the “gZer-mig” and the “gZi-brjid”. There it is explained that Olmoling is physically part of our world and is not an imaginary holy land nor a celestial pure realm like the Sukhavati or Dewachan (bde-ba-can) of the Buddha Amitabha. Symbolically Olmo Lungring is the geographical, psychic, and spiritual center of our world of Jambudvipa (`dzam-bu`i gling) and at its center rises the holy mountain of nine levels, known as Yungdrung Gutseg (g.yung-drung dgu-brtsegs), which links heaven and earth. It is a kind of axis mundi connecting three planes of existence- the heaven worlds, the earth, and the nether regions. Therefore, Olmo Lungring possesses a different ontological status than ordinary geographical regions and countries. In terms of our own age, it is a hidden land or “beyul” (sbas-yul), inaccessible to all but realized beings or Siddhas. This land is said to be inhabited by Vidyadharas (rig-`dzin) or holders of esoteric knowledge. It exists on earth, but it is not an ordinary country or nation which could be observed from an orbiting satellite or sighted from a high flying airplane, for it possesses a special reality all its own. It is in this world, but not quite of it. It is part of our physical geographical world because it is located in Tazig, yet it partly exists in another spiritual dimension, and although material, it is in a certain sense imperishable and indestructible. When, at the end of the kalpa, the world will be destroyed and consumed by fire, Olmo Lungring will spontaneously rise up and ascend into the sky and there it will merge with its celestial archetype in the heavens which is called Sidpa Yesang (srid-pa ye-sangs). Olmo Lungring is truly the imperishable sacred land.

Olmo Lungring or Shambhala, this imperishable sacred land, which is the spiritual center of the world, existed on earth from the very beginning of the human race. It was the place where the celestial gods of the Clear Light (`od gsal lha) descended from heaven to earth in order to take up incarnation as human beings and ensoul the physical bodies which had been prepared for them. Since that time of the beginning, Olmo Lungring has been the sanctuary of wisdom and the receptacle of the highest mystical teachings being brought down from above. All of the inhabitants of that land have entered upon the path to enlightenment, and for this reason it is said to be the land of the Vidyadharas beyond the Himalayas, spoken of in the Puranas and other ancient books of India. This

mysterious land at the center has been known by various different names in different ancient traditions throughout the world.

The Lord Tonpa Shenrab was born a prince in Olmo Lungring some 18000 years ago (in 16017 BC according to the traditional *Bonpo* reckoning) and he emerged from there, crossing barriers of hot arid deserts and frigid glacial mountains, to visit briefly Zhang-zhung and Tibet. After his Parinirvana (in 7817 BC), his reign in Olmo Lungring was followed by a successive line of adepts or initiate-priest kings (*rigs-ldan*) who even today are the guardians and custodians of the eternal Wisdom Tradition. Thus Olmo Lungring is not only an earthly paradise filled with shining white cities, multi-storeyed temples and palaces, lush gardens and pleasure groves, but a hidden sanctuary of the Gnosis that holds a precious treasure of greatest price, the Supreme Secret. This is the precise knowledge of who we really are, whence we have come and whither we go. In mystical terms, it is the secret sanctuary hidden in the heart of every living being, the place of Buddhahood.

This land was the primordial source of *Yungdrung Bon* and in later times the sages of Tibet often went to Olmo Lungring in quest of these precious teachings. It is said that they proceeded toward the northwest from Mount Kailas in Zhang-zhung and journeyed for twice as far as Kailas is from the city of Shigatse in Central Tibet. In precise geographic terms, this would put them beyond the Pamirs in Sogdiana. Although no guide books to Olmo Lungring are now extant among the Bonpos, such as exist among Tibetan Buddhists, like the famous “Shambhala`i lam-yig” of the third Panchen Lama (dPal-ldan ye-shes, b. 1739), until 1959 Bonpos would still set out on pilgrimage to that fabled land, although none returned to Tibet to tell the tale. They had passed through the gates into another world. Nevertheless, pious Bonpos still pray to be reborn in that mysterious land at the center.

According to *Bonpo* prophecies, some 1200 years from now, when spiritual values decline and religion is nearly extinct in the outside world, a king and a teacher will emerge from Olmoling in order to revitalize the spiritual teachings of *Yungdrung Bon* in the world. Although the “gZi-brjid” specifically identifies Olmoling and Shambhala, neither in the “gZi-brjid” nor the “gZer-mig” is there any mention of Armageddon or the climactic battle between the forces of the Mlechas from the West and the forces of Shambhala led by the Kulika Rudrachakrin, as is found in the Buddhist recension of the “Kalachakra Tantra”. The *Bonpo* canon also possesses a variant recension of this “Kalachakra Tantra”, but it is said to be incomplete and it is classified as Kriya Tantra rather than Anuttara Tantra, as is the case in the *Buddhist* system.

In ancient and medieval times, and even in modern times, there have been persistent rumors of a secret brotherhood of enlightened beings or Vidyadharas, possessing great knowledge and power, who, in a remote corner of Central Asia, preserve the Ancient Wisdom which was revealed at the very beginning of the human race. This Wisdom was originally brought from beyond the stars, the same celestial home from which the human spirits now comprising humanity migrated to earth in order to incarnate in bodies of earthly flesh. But this mysterious land at the center where the gods first descended

remains perpetually concealed from the profane eyes of the spiritually immature and the merely curious because, without a purification of the individual's impure karmic vision, the land at the center remains imperceptible to the ordinary fleshly eye. To behold this dimension, the individual must possess pure vision (dag snang) and open one's wisdom eye (ye-shes kyi spyan). Habitual thoughts and preconceptions condition how the individual perceives reality. One's impure karmic vision (las snang) inherited from past causes and conditioning creates distortions in the dimension of reality and veils the light which is natural to it. The practitioner must go beyond one's mental conditioning and one's conventional models of reality, so that one sees the world from a different perspective, one which does not deny the power of vision and creative imagination.

If an explorer finding himself in a remote region, but lacking this pure vision and the discriminating eye of wisdom, were inadvertently to stumble upon this fabled land, he would only see a dusty windswept arid plane surrounded by desolate mountains. He would behold an unexceptionable barren landscape, not the fragrant rivers and lush gardens and pleasure groves of paradise. Even if he were to come across some of the inhabitants of this land, he would see only a few nomads living in a dirty impoverished encampment, and failing to recognize where he had arrived in reality, he would press on elsewhere and forever miss his mark. Only a Siddha or adept would recognize the signs and landmarks. Olmo Lungring exists in a dimension parallel to our own conventional reality, but for this reason it is no less real. The concealment and invisibility of Olmo Lungring to ordinary sight is no proof that it does not exist. So argue the *Bonpo* Lamas. According to *Bonpo* tradition, Olmo Lungring fully occupies one-third of our world even now and lies to the northwest of Tibet. The *Bonpo* texts further speak of the three portals or doors of Zhang-zhung and some of these texts assert that Tazig is the middle door (sgo bar-ma). According to Lopon **Tenzin Namdak**, the outer door (sgo phyi-pa) is Zhang-zhung itself, the middle door (sgo bar-ma) is Tazig, and the inner door (sgo phug-pa) is Olmo Lungring. From the innermost gate outwards this represents the movement or progress of the teachings of *Yungdrung Bon* into the outer world and especially Tibet. At that time Tazig was said to have been inhabited by the "sTag-gzig hos rigs", the royal race (rgyal rigs) of the "Hos" or Persians (the Chinese "Hu"). But in an even earlier time the people belonged to the lineage of the "rGyal-bu `thing-ge". And in the "Ma-rgyud" is found the story of the emperor Gyer-wer of Tazig who ruled most of the known world.

In the *Bonpo* texts the land of Olmo Lungring is said to be divided into four concentric regions: the inner region (nang gling), the middle region (bar gling), the outer region (phyi gling), and the border region (mtha` gling). The inner and middle regions consist of twelve districts or islands (gling), the outer region of sixteen, and the border region also of twelve. These regions and districts (gling) are all separated by rivers and lakes and inland seas. The innermost region has the form geographically of an eight petalled lotus blossom and the sky above it corresponds to the form of a wheel or chakra of eight spokes.

At the very center of this innermost land rises the holy nine-storyed swastika mountain of Yungdrung Gutseg (g.yung-drung dgu-brtsegs), a crystal monolith in the shape of a

pyramid. These nine storeys or levels of the sacred mountain signify the Nine Ways of *Bon* (theg-pa rim dgu) into which the teachings leading to liberation and enlightenment are classified. In the *Bonpo* cosmological system, the number nine is especially important and significant. In terms of the mandala, it represents the center and the eight directions, cardinal and intermediate. From the surface of the earth upward there are nine stages or levels of heaven (gnam rim-pa dgu) inhabited by the celestial gods (lha) and downward there are nine successive nether realms (sa `og rim-pa dgu) inhabited by the Nagas (klu) and other chthonic beings. The world-mountain at the center links together these three levels of existence, heaven and earth and underworld. From the mountain the adept way travel freely, ascending upward or descending downward to other worlds and dimensions. This cosmology is shared with ancient North Asian shamanism. In Bonpo symbolism, the swastika or yungdrung (g.yung-drung) corresponds to the vajra or diamond (rdo-rje, "the king of stones") in the Indian *Buddhist* system. Both of them indicate something that is everlasting, indestructible, and pure. As an adjective (g.yung-drung) or as an adverb (g.yung-drung du) the word means eternal, everlasting, perpetual. As die axis mundi, this sacred mountain in the center is imperishable and indestructible (g.yung-drung).

The country is divided by rivers, chiefly nine in number, which flow into the four directions. From the foot of the sacred mountain flow four great rivers of special importance, originating from four springs that issue forth from four rocks having the shapes of symbolic animals. The river Nara arises from a spring in a lion-shaped rock (sen-ge kha `babs) and flows to the east. The river Pakshu arises from a spring in a horse shaped rock (rta mchog kha `babs) and flows to the north. The river Kyim-shang arises from a spring in a peacock-shaped rock (rma bya kha `babs) and flows to the west. And the river Sindhu arises from a spring in an elephant-shaped rock (glang-chen kha `babs) and flows to the south.

The land is filled with a complex pattern of shining cities, temples and palaces, parks and pleasure groves, lakes and bathing pools, like the descriptions of Shambhala found in the *Buddhist* tradition. It is truly an earthly paradise. Around the base of the sacred mountain in the center are literally hundreds of cities, palaces, and temples, but among them there are four, which are especially important. To the east of the mountain is the shining white temple of Shampo Lhatse (sham-po lha rtse). To the south is the great palace of Barpo Sogyad (bar-po so-brgyad) where Tonpa Shenrab`s had lived and he was born. To the west is the palace of Trimon Gyalzhad (khri-smon rgyal-bzhad), where the chief queen of Tonpa Shenrab, Hoza Gyalzhadma (Hos-bza` rGyal-bzhad-ma) had lived and where three of his children were born, namely, Tobu (gTo-bu), Chyadbu (dPyad-bu), and Ne`u-chen. And to the north is the palace of Khong-ma Ne`u-chung where another one of his queens, Poza Thangmo (dPo-bza` thang-mo) lived and three more of his children were born, namely, Lungdren (Lung-`dren), Gyuddren (rGyud-`dren), and Ne`u-chung.

Surrounding this innermost region in every direction is an intermediate region with twelve great cities, four in each of the four cardinal directions. One of these cities located in the west is Gyalag Odma (rgya-lag `od-ma) where the fabled king and

disciple of Tonpa Shenrab, Kongtse Trulgyi Gyalpo (Kong-tse `phrul gyi rgyal-po) lived. He was important for the transmission of astrological and magical teachings coming from the Master. The miraculous temple erected by this king on an artificial island built by the Rakshasa demons in the western sea was also very important since it was here that certain teachings of Tonpa Shenrab were written down and deposited for safe keeping. These texts have been preserved there until this very day. This second region is completely surrounded by two more concentric rings, an outer region and a border region. As said above, these regions and their subdivisions are separated by rivers and other bodies of water. The entire land is in turn surrounded by an ocean called Mukhyud Dalwa (mu-khyud bdal-ba`i rgya-mtsho), “the wide-spreading enclosing ocean”. Again, this sea is surrounded by a mighty wall of snow-capped mountains called Walso Gangri Rawa (dbal-so gangs ri`i ra-ba), causing the imperishable sacred land to be impenetrable to any intrusion from the outside world.

Access and egress to and from Olmo Lungring maybe be had via the arrow way (mda` lam) that was created by Tonpa Shenrab when he shot an arrow from inside the ring of high impenetrable mountains. Piercing through this solid wall, the arrow created a tunnel or passageway. But finding this gateway is no easy task, even for adepts, for it is guarded by precipitous gorges and wild mythic beasts stand sentinel at the entrance. The tunnel is totally dark and it takes a nine full days to traverse its length to the world of light at its end. But there have been those who have succeeded in passing through it into the light... Within the territory of Olmo Lungring there are seven royal races (rgyal rigs) and chief among them is the clan of Mushen (dmu-gshen) from which Tonpa Shenrab descended. Thus the word “gshen” is also the name of a clan, as well as the term for a kind of practitioner. Besides the Mushen, there were six more royal races or clans (rgyal rigs) ruling in Olmo Lungring: “Hos”, “Shag”, “dPo”, “rGya”, “gTo”, and “gNyan”. There are also classes of ministers, merchants, artisans, commoners, and so on. All of the people living in the center and in the districts of the innermost region (nang gling) speak the language of the eternal Swastika Gods (g.yung-dning lha yi skad). In the middle region (bar gling) consisting of twelve islands or districts, there are eight great rivers in different directions and in the valleys along these rivers the peoples speak different languages and dialects. Whereas the language in the inner lands is that of the Swastika Gods, here in the twelve middle lands the people mainly speak and write the eight transformed languages (bsgyur-ba`i skad), each of which is associated with one of the eight great rivers as follows:

1. “gTsang-ma lha skad” along the Na-ra-dza-ra river in the east,
2. “Dag-pa lha skad” along the Pakshu river in the the north,
3. “Samskri lha skad” (i.e., Sanskrit) along the Ma-shang river in the west,
4. “Khri-wer lha skad” along the Sindhu river in the south,
5. “Hor ci `phrul skad” along the Ganga river in the south east,
6. “sPos ci `phrul skad” along the Sita river in the southwest,
7. “Ci gung `phrul skad” along the Seng-ga river in the northwest, and
8. “Cung tshe `phrul skad” along the Serdan (gser-ldan) river in the northeast.

In the middle and outer lands there are ten languages, which are major and some one hundred and sixty-four lesser dialects. The letters used in writing these languages have

both large and small forms and are based on an original “spungs-so” or alphabet. These letters had many different shapes and it is difficult to find examples of these alphabets in our world nowadays. In any event, all of these forms of writing were based on an original celestial prototype and were not a mere earthly invention.

Thus from the times of the very beginning of humanity, Olmo Lungring, where direct communication between heaven and earth has persisted until this very day, has continually been the source of knowledge, guidance, and civilization for the outside world. It is truly the sanctuary and the imperishable sacred land.

Source: John Myrdhin Reynolds

Bon – A Heterodox System

From Chapter 16 of Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism by John Powers

Introduction

Tibetans commonly draw a distinction between three religious traditions: (1) the divine dharma (Iha chos), or Buddhism; (2) Bon dharma (bon chos); and (3) the dharma of human beings (mi chos), or folk religion. The first category includes doctrines and practices that are thought to be distinctively Buddhist. This classification implicitly assumes that the divine dharma is separate and distinct from the other two, although Tibetan Buddhism clearly incorporated elements of both of these traditions.

Bon is commonly considered to be the indigenous religious tradition of Tibet, a system of shamanistic and animistic practices performed by priests called shen (gshen) or bonpo (bon po). Although this is widely assumed by Buddhists, historical evidence indicates that the Bon tradition only developed as a self-conscious religious system under the influence of Buddhism.

When Buddhism entered the country practitioners of indigenous traditions recognized that there were clear differences between their own practices and those of the foreign faith, and in time people who perceived themselves as adherents of the old religion of Tibet developed a separate tradition, but one that incorporated many Buddhist elements. Although later historical works state that the introduction of Buddhism was initially opposed by "Bon," this term is not even used in the early dynastic records to refer to indigenous traditions and practices. Instead, they are called cho (chos), the same term later used to translate the Sanskrit term dharma, which in Buddhist literature refers to

Buddhist doctrine and practice. In inscriptions on the tomb of king Senalek (799–815), for example, the term bon refers to the royal priests whose job was to perform rituals for the Yarlung kings.

In early records, "bon" denotes a particular type of priest who performed rituals to propitiate local spirits and ensure the well-being of the dead in the afterlife. It is only much later, under the influence of Buddhism, that "Bon" comes to designate pre-Buddhist Tibetan religious practices in general. It should also be noted that the rituals performed by these early priests as reported in the old records appear to differ substantially from contemporary Bon. As Per Kvaerne notes, for example, they were by all accounts concerned with taking care of the dead through ceremonies intended to ensure their safe journey to the afterlife and their material prosperity after arrival.¹ The rituals of the bon often involved sacrificing animals (mainly horses, yaks, and sheep), making offerings of food and drink, and burying the dead with precious jewels, the benefits of which were apparently transferred to them in the afterlife through shamanistic rituals. The most elaborate of these were the ceremonies for the kings, each of whom was buried in a specially-constructed tomb, and apparently joined in death by servants, ministers, and retainers. The royal priests then performed special ceremonies, which according to old records sometimes lasted for several years. These were intended to ensure the well-being of the kings in the afterlife and to solicit their help in mundane affairs.

Animism in Tibetan Folk Religion

The Tibetan folk religion encompasses indigenous beliefs and practices, many of which predate the introduction of Buddhism and which are commonly viewed as being distinct from the mainstream of Buddhist practice. These are primarily concerned with propitiation of the spirits and demons of Tibet, which are believed to inhabit all areas of the country. Folk religious practices rely heavily on magic and ritual and are generally intended to bring mundane benefits, such as protection from harm, good crops, healthy livestock, health, wealth, etc. Their importance to ordinary people should not be underestimated, since in the consciousness of most Tibetans the world is full of multitudes of powers and spirits, and the welfare of humans requires that they be propitiated and sometimes subdued. Every part of the natural environment is believed to be alive with various types of sentient forces, who live in mountains, trees, rivers and lakes, rocks, fields, the sky, and the earth. Every region has its own native supernatural beings, and people living in these areas are strongly aware of their presence. In order to stay in their good graces, Tibetans give them offerings, perform rituals to propitiate them, and sometimes refrain from going to particular places so as to avoid the more dangerous forces.

In the often harsh environment of Tibet, such practices are believed to give people a measure of control over their unpredictable and sometimes hazardous surroundings. With the almost total triumph of Buddhism in Tibet, the folk religion became infused with

Buddhist elements and practices, but it still remains distinct in the minds of the people, mainly because its focus is on pragmatic mundane benefits, and not on final liberation or the benefit of others. By all accounts, Tibetans have always been fascinated by magical and occult practices, and from the earliest times have viewed their country as the abode of countless supernatural forces whose actions have direct bearing on their lives. Since Buddhist teachers tend to focus on supramundane goals, Tibetans naturally seek the services of local shamans, whose function is to make contact with spirits, to predict their influences on people's lives, and to perform rituals that either overcome harmful influences or enlist their help.

When Buddhism entered Tibet, it did not attempt to suppress belief in the indigenous forces. Rather, it incorporated them into its worldview, making them protectors of the dharma who were converted by tantric adepts like Padmasambhava, and who now watch over Buddhism and fight against its enemies. An example is Tangla, a god associated with the Tangla mountains, who was convinced to become a Buddhist by Padmasambhava and now is thought to guard his area against forces inimical to the dharma. The most powerful deities are often considered to be manifestations of buddhas, bodhisattvas, Oikinis, etc., but the mundane forces are thought to be merely worldly powers, who have demonic natures that have been suppressed by Buddhism. Although their conversion has ameliorated the worst of their fierceness, they are still demons who must be kept in check by shamanistic rituals and the efforts of Buddhist adepts. Nor should it be thought that Buddhist practitioners are free from the influences of the folk religion. These beliefs and practices are prevalent in all levels of Tibetan society, and it is common to see learned scholar-lamas, masters of empirically-based dialectics and thoroughly practical in daily affairs, refuse to travel at certain times in order to avoid dangerous spirits or decide their travel schedules after first performing divination to determine the most auspicious time. Such attitudes may be dismissed as "irrational" by Westerners, but for Tibetans they are entirely pragmatic responses to a world populated by forces that are potentially harmful.

Types of Spirits

According to folk beliefs, the world has three parts: sky and heavens, earth, and the "lower regions." Each of these has its own distinctive spirits, many of which influence the world of humans. The upper gods (steng lha) live in the atmosphere and sky, the middle tsen (bar btsan) inhabit the earth, and the lower regions are the home of yoklu (g.yog klu), most notably snake-bodied beings called lu (klu naga), which live at the bottoms of lakes, rivers, and wells and are reported to hoard vast stores of treasure. The spirits that reside in rocks and trees are called nyen (gnyan); they are often malicious, and Tibetans associate them with sickness and death. Lu are believed to bring leprosy, and so it is important to keep them away from human habitations. Sadak (sa bdag, "lords of the earth") are beings that live under the ground and are connected with agriculture. Tsen are spirits that live in the atmosphere, and are believed to shoot arrows at humans who disturb them. These cause illness and death. Tsen appear as demonic figures with red skin, wearing helmets and riding over the mountains in red

horses. Du (bdud, mara) were apparently originally atmospheric spirits, but they came to be associated with the Buddhist demons called mara which are led by their king (also named Mara), whose primary goal is to lead sentient beings into ignorance, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of samsara.

There are many other types of demons and spirits, and a comprehensive listing and discussion of them exceeds the focus of this book. Because of the great interest most Tibetans have in these beings and the widespread belief in the importance of being aware of their powers and remaining in their good graces, the folk religion is a rich and varied system, with a large pantheon, elaborate rituals and ceremonies, local shamans with special powers who can propitiate and exorcise, and divinatory practices that allow humans to predict the influences of the spirit world and take appropriate measures. All of these are now infused with Buddhist influences and ideas, but undoubtedly retain elements of the pre-Buddhist culture.

Bon Teachings and Practices

Adherents of Bon view their tradition as being distinct from Buddhism, although it clearly contains many Buddhist elements. The term bon for Bonpos (practitioners of Bon) signifies "truth," "reality," and "the true doctrine" which provides a path to liberation. For Bonpos, bon has roughly the same range of meanings that the term cho(chos, dharma) has for Tibetan Buddhists: it refers to their religion as a whole—teachings, practices etc.—which are believed to have been revealed by enlightened beings who took rebirth in order to lead others to salvation. Bon today has absorbed many Buddhist elements, and many of its teachings are strikingly similar to those of Tibetan Buddhism. David Snellgrove contends that it has incorporated so many Buddhist elements that it has become a form of Buddhism that may fairly be regarded as heretical, in that those who follow it have persisted in claiming that their religion was taught not by Sakyamuni Buddha, but by Shen-rab [Shenrap], likewise accepted as Buddha, and that it came not from India, but from Ta-zig [Taksik] and by way of Zhang-zhung [Shangshung]. Such are the Bonpos, who have managed to hold their own down to the present day against the enormously more powerful representatives of orthodox Buddhism, while they are constantly and quite wrongly identified by other Tibetans ... as the persistent practitioners of pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion.

In Buddhist sources, the Bonpos are commonly portrayed as malicious reactionaries whose manipulations hindered the dissemination of the dharma, who caused Santaraksita to be driven from the country, and who tried to prevent Padmasambhava's arrival. As Snellgrove and Richardson contend, however, such characterizations are probably unfair to Bon and are written from a rather narrow perspective.

Like all national historians, Tibetan writers of history see everything from a Tibetan point of view, and being fervent Buddhists as well, they inevitably see everything from a rather special Tibetan Buddhist point of view. Their view of the world around them is a simple one: in so far as it furthers the interests of their religion in general and their own

religious order and monastery in particular, it is good; in so far as it works against their religion, their order and their monastery it is evil. Intemally the Bon-pos tend to become the scapegoat for everything that had rendered the Buddhist conversion of Tibet at all difficult, while most Tibetan Buddhists themselves remain almost innocently unaware of the great variety of pre-Buddhist beliefs and practices that they have absorbed as an accepted part of their daily thoughts and actions.

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Ancient Tibetan Bonpo Shamanism

by John Myrdhin Reynolds

The roots of Tibetan culture lie deep in the archaic soil of Northern and Central Asian shamanism. This is also true today when most Tibetans are practicing Buddhists-- their Buddhism being a religious culture deriving from ancient and medieval India. In Tibet, however, this Indian Buddhism has been amalgamated with the ancient indigenous shamanism and pagan animism of that country, thus giving Tibetan Buddhism its unique and especially colorful character. The principal function of the shaman is the healing of the illnesses that afflict the members of his or her tribe, and so one can rightly say that ancient Tibetan religious culture centered around the practices of healing. The therapeutic expert or professional in this regard was the Bonpo shaman-healer who treated and cured not only the diseases of the physical body, but more especially the illnesses of the soul, in order to bring the psyche of the afflicted individual back from fragmentation and alienation into wholeness and well-being. Furthermore, the shaman served the clan or tribe not only as a healer, but equally as a guide for the human soul on its journey beyond the present life through the perilous Bardo into its next rebirth. The shaman was able to function as a healer and a guide of souls pre-eminently because of his or her mastery of alternate states of consciousness, "the archaic states of ecstasy", so that one could voluntarily enter the Otherworld of the spirits, a non-ordinary reality parallel to our familiar world of the senses and its conventional reality. The shaman could thus enter into and explore the landscapes of the mind, the collective unconscious psyche, and return thence with treasures of knowledge and power in order to benefit humanity.

As a spiritual and psycho-therapeutic technique, shamanism goes back to the very origin of the human race which itself is lost in the dim mists of time. The presence of the shaman is already well-attested in European cave paintings belonging to the Paleolithic era. Archaic traditions found among primitive tribes throughout the world claim for shamanism a celestial or extra-terrestrial origin, and thus another principal function of the shaman over the course of countless millennia, besides healing and

guiding the dead, was to maintain this direct communication between humanity here below on the surface of the earth with the heaven worlds above. In terms of human evolution in primeval times, the shaman was the first culture hero, bringing humanity out of the nighttime darkness of a purely animal existence into the daylight of true human consciousness. The shaman was the first of all humans to speak with and walk with the Gods. In the pursuit of this knowledge, the shaman ascended into the heavens and descended into the underworld where one encountered certain archetypal figures, both gods and ancestors, who initiate the individual into a death-and-rebirth transformation of one's total being, and confer upon one the wisdom and the power to aid and protect and guide humanity, relieving its ills and suffering.

But the shaman belongs not only to the heavens, but equally to the earth. The shaman's religion is a pagan religion of nature where the human being is seen as a part of nature and not as something existing in opposition to it. The purpose that is taught here is to live in harmony with the natural environment on a very personal and intimate level, as did early humanity generally in the days before our now omnipresent urban-industrial civilization spread across the face of the earth like a corrosive cancer. Thus, besides healing, yet another primordial function of the shaman was insuring the ecological balance by way of inter-species communication. Through ritual magic and clairvoyant knowledge, the shaman could ensure success in the hunt for the tribe, that they might survive to live another season, but no species would be hunted in excess or to the point of extinction. And with regard to the hunt, he negotiated a covenant between his own people and the spirits of the hunted species.

Generally, in the context of shamanic culture, illness or disease was seen as arising from a disharmony or break in the natural order and in the moral order of the world, as well as from an imbalance in and weakening of the personal energy field of the human individual. The energies within the individual and those outside oneself in the natural environment must be brought into balance and into harmonious interaction. This balance and harmony existed primordially, from the time of the beginning, but has been interrupted and shattered by the thoughtless and sinful actions of mankind. To rediscover and re-establish this lost primordial harmony, all obsessive and negative thinking which serves to block the free flow of the energy within the individual must be dissolved. In this way, the individual can come into the realization of his full innate potentiality, manifesting his energy in the world about him without disrupting the natural order of things.

But it is especially due to the destruction of the natural environment by human groups and by individual human beings that diseases have come into manifestation in our world. Humanity is not alone in this world. This planet earth, itself a living organism in its totality, is surrounded by and suffused throughout with an aura of energy that is like an atmosphere or ocean. Nature spirits live in this dimension of the energy of our planet, like fish living in the waters of the sea. Disturbed and offended by the thoughtless destructive actions of mankind, such as the ploughing up the earth, the cutting down of the forests, the damming of streams and rivers, the polluting of lakes, and so on, they inflict illness upon an erring mankind as a terrible retribution. Since these nature spirits

are energy beings, they can directly effect the energy of the individual and that individual's immune system which is correlated with one's personal energy field. In such a case, it was then necessary to call in an expert healer or shaman in order to re-establish the primordial harmony existing between humanity and nature, thereby effecting a cure and a healing.

This ancient Tibetan shamanism and animism, the pre-Buddhist spiritual and religious culture of Tibet, was known as Bon, and a practitioner of these shamanic techniques of ecstasy and ritual magic, the methods of working with energy, was known as a Bonpo. Bonpo is still the designation for a shaman in many tribal regions of the Himalayas. But increasingly, over the centuries, the ecstatic shaman has been replaced by the priestly Lama or ritual expert, and so later Bonpos in Central Tibet also came to fill a role more ritualistic than ecstatic. There exists a parallel here to what occurred in ancient India where the Rishis or ecstasies of the early Vedic period, who communed directly with the celestial gods during ecstatic flights into the heavens, were later replaced by Brahman priests, experts in the performing of rituals and sacrifices in order to invoke the powers of the gods and ensure their cooperation for human benefit and prosperity.

Originally the word Bonpo meant someone who invoked the gods and summoned the spirits. Thus a Bonpo was an expert in the use of mantra and magical evocation. Mantra or ngak (sngags) is sound and sound is energy. Mantra is the primordial sound that calls the forms of all things into being out of the infinite potentiality of empty space which is the basis of everything. Sound or word has a creative power. But this term Bonpo in ancient times appeared to cover a number of different types of practitioner, whether shaman, magician, or priest. Here there seems to be a strong parallel of the role of the Bonpo in ancient Tibet with that of the Druid in ancient pre-Christian Europe. Just as the Druidic order was divided into the three functions of the Bards, the Vates, and the Druids, who were singers, soothsayers, and magicians respectively, so the ancient pre-Buddhist kingdom of Tibet was said to be protected by the Drung (sgrung) who were bards and singers of epics, the Deu (Ide'u) who were soothsayers and diviners, and the Bonpo (bon-po) who were priests and magicians. Another archaic term closely related to Bonpo was Shen or Shenpo (gshen-po), and this term may have originally designated the shaman practitioner in particular. The Shen system of practice was transmitted through family lineages, especially in Western and Northern Tibet, then known as the country of Zhang-zhung, so that Shen also came to designate a particular ancient clan or tribe.

The first shaman, the archetypal shaman, so to speak, who brought the knowledge of shamanizing from the heaven worlds above to a nascent humanity living on the surface of the earth, appears to have been originally known in the Tibetan tradition as Shenrab Miwoche (gShen-rab mi-bo-che), a title meaning "the great supreme human shaman". Of course, in the traditions of the later monastically organized Yungdrung Bon and in the extant Bonpo texts from at least the eighth century of our era, Shenrab Miwoche is represented as being much more than an archetypal shaman; he is a fully enlightened Buddha, comparable in every way to Shakyamuni Buddha who appeared in Northern India in the sixth century before our era. Tonpa Shenrab descended from the heavens,

specifically, from the heaven-world of Sidpa Yesang (srid-pa ye-sangs), in the form of an azure colored cuckoo bird, the herald of spring. This occurred some 18,000 years ago, according to the traditional Bonpo reckoning. He thereupon incarnated as a human being in the country of Olmo Lung-ring which surrounded the holy nine-storeyed cosmic mountain of Yungdrung Gutsek (g.yung-drung dgu-brtseg) in Tazik or Central Asia. In this mysterious land at the center of the world, which was in later Indo-Iranian tradition identified with Shambhala, he combatted and overcame the evil schemes and machinations of the black magician and incarnate demon-prince Khyabpa Lag-ring. Then he instructed humanity, not only in the spiritual path to enlightenment and liberation from Samsara, but in the various techniques of ecstasy in order to communicate with other worlds and invoke the positive energies of the gods (lha gsol-ba), and also in the rites of exorcism (sel-ba) whereby human beings might free themselves from demonic influences (gdon) and the various diseases caused by demons and other hostile spirits.

The history of the development of Bon may be divided into three phases:

1. Primitive Bon more or less corresponds to the archaic shamanism and paganism of ancient Northern and Central Asia. This shamanism is still practiced in its original and unreformed version in remote areas of the Himalayas, as well as on the borders of Tibet and China.
2. Yungdrung Bon or Old Bon (bon rnying-ma) was the high religious culture of the ancient kingdom of Zhang-zhung which centered around Gangchen Tise or Mount Kailas in Western Tibet. This kingdom, which possessed its own culture and language and writing, maintained an independent existence long before the rise of civilization in Central Tibet in the seventh century with the coming of Indian Buddhism to that country. In the next century, the Zhang-zhung kingdom was incorporated into the newly expanding Tibetan empire established by the Yarlung dynasty of Central Tibet, and the Zhang-zhung culture ceased to have an independent existence. However, the teachings of Yungdrung Bon did not solely originate in Zhang-zhung, but were said to have been brought from Tazik, that is, Iranian speaking Central Asia, to Zhang-zhung in Western and Northern Tibet by a number of mysterious white-robed sages long before the political events of the seventh and eighth centuries. Besides shamanism, healing, magical rites of exorcism, astrology, and divination (these practices belong to the four lower or Causal Ways among the Nine Ways of Bon), Yungdrung Bon contained the higher spiritual teachings and practices of Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen. Moreover, due to the spiritual influence of Yungdrung Bon and later Indian Buddhism, many animistic practices have been reformed and the practice of blood sacrifice more or less eliminated in Tibet, although it is still practiced on occasion by the Jhangkri shamans of Nepal. In Yungdrung Bon, Shenrab Miwoche is portrayed as a perfectly enlightened Buddha who is the source of the philosophical, psychological, and ethical teachings of Sutra, the profound methods of psychological transformation and psychic development of Tantra, and the ultimate mystical and gnostic enlightenment of Dzogchen. Yungdrung Bon continues to flourish even today in many parts of Tibet and among Tibetan refugees in exile in India and Nepal.

3. New Bon (bon gsar-ma) was a deliberate and conscious amalgamation of the Bon of

Zhang-zhung with the Buddhism of Indian origin, especially as this spiritual tradition was represented by the Nyingmapa school in Tibet. New Bon greatly revered the luminous figure of Guru Padmasambhava, the Tantric master from the Indo-Iranian country of Uddiyana, who first established the Nyingmapa tradition in Tibet in the eighth century of our era. And like the Nyingmapas, the the New Bon greatly relied upon Termas (gter-ma) or rediscovered "hidden treasure texts", recovered over the centuries by various Buddhist and Bonpo masters and visionaries. These Termas had been concealed in the distant past by illuminated masters of the esoteric tradition, such as Padmasambhava and Dranpa Namkha, because the times were not yet ripe for their revelation and dissemination among the Tibetans, and they were rediscovered in later centuries. In the reformed Bon, one finds a monastic system, philosophy colleges, and a scholastic tradition and curriculum fully comparable to that found in the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism, especially the Nyingmapas. On the other side of the matter, many ancient Bonpo rituals and practices have been accepted into the Buddhist schools of Indian origin in Tibet and, in particular, as the cult of the Guardian spirits, the old pagan pre-Buddhist deities of Tibet who are now the protectors of the Dharma.

Furthermore, shamanism continues to be practiced in Tibet in its archaic form and such a practitioner is generally known as a Pawo (dpa'-bo) or Lhapa. This social function is clearly distinguished from that of the Lama or priest. A Lama is usually, although not always, a monk, whether he is nowadays a Buddhist or a Bonpo. In general, a Lama relates to the higher divine reality as a supplicant, communicating with that dimension through the medium of prayer, meditation, and the performing of offering rituals called pujas. In addition, there exists another kind of practitioner, the Ngakpa (sngags-pa) or Tantric magician and exorcist. Whereas the Lama or priest prays and petitions the higher spiritual order, the Tantrika or magician, by virtue of his magical power and his mastery of mantras, or spells and invocations, commands the spirits to obey his will and to do his bidding. The Pawo or shaman, on the other hand, is characterized by ecstasy, the entering into an altered state of consciousness, in order to have direct personal contact with the spirit world. But in Tibet, the methods of these three types of practitioners of healing-- the Pawo or shaman, the Ngakpa or magician, and Lama or priest-- are not necessarily exclusive. Many Ngakpas, although usually married men and not monks, are called Lamas because they also perform pujas or offering ceremonies, as well as shamanic exorcisms and other magical rituals. In addition, they may be accomplished scholars and teachers, having large followings among both monks and lay-people alike, and are not just simple village sorcerers. They may be either Buddhist or Bonpo in terms of their religion, although nowadays the majority of Ngakpas belong to the Nyingmapa school. Moreover, the most Pawo shamans in Tibet, although their shamanic techniques are of a different origin, now identify themselves as Buddhists in terms of their religious affiliation.

In general, the Pawo is characterized by spirit possession. After entering into an altered state of consciousness or trance induced through drumming and chanting, his or her consciousness principle known as the Namshe (rnam-she) is projected out of the physical body through the aperture at the top of the skull into one of the three symbolic mirrors arranged on the shamanic altar. These three mirrors represent the gateways to

the other worlds of the Lha (the celestial spirits), of the Tsen (the earth and mountain spirits), and of the Lu (the subterranean water spirits), respectively. These three types of spirit correspond to the three zones -- sky, earth, and underworld-- into which the world was divided in the ancient Bonpo shamanic cosmology. The shaman has direct access to these three worlds and their inhabitants by means of an altered state of consciousness. At the moment when one's Namshe leaves the physical body, one's guardian spirit or spirit-guide, also called a Pawo, enters one's now vacated inert body and thereupon speaks through the shaman as a medium. This spirit-guide responds to questions and can diagnose the cause of the illness in question, usually that being some offended spirit. Then he recommends a procedure for effecting a cure and this usually includes the performance of a healing ritual (gto) in order to restore a harmonious balance of energies between the afflicted individual and his natural environment. In this way, a healing or a reharmonization is realized.

With the establishment of Buddhism, together with its monastic system, as the official religion of Tibet in the eleventh century and thereafter, certain among these Pawo shamans came to be employed by the larger monasteries, and even later by the Tibetan government, as oracles. Such an oracle is known as a Lhapa or Sungma (srung-ma). The most famous among these oracles is the State Oracle attached to Nechung monastery, and he is usually possessed by the spirit Pehar, who is said to have been originally a deity of Turkish origin. The State Oracle continues to function in exile at Dharamsala in India, the seat of HH the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in exile.

The Ngakpa, on the other hand, as a Tantrika and an exorcist, is rarely possessed by the spirits. Rather, the Ngakpa is able, by way of certain meditations and other psychic techniques, to enter into an altered state where one's consciousness or Namshe leaves the physical body in a subtle mind-made body (yid-lus) and enters into the dimensions of the Otherworld, where one searches for fragments of the soul of the afflicted person which has been stolen by deceitful spirits or imprisoned there by a black magician. A patient suffering from soul-sickness or loss of soul is characterized by inertia, weakness, depression, and loss of interest in one's surroundings and everyday affairs. If the La (bla) or the soul, this being a subtle energy field that serves as the vehicle for the individual's emotional life, is not recovered and restored to wholeness in the patient within a sufficient period of months, there exists the possibility of physical death. The Ngakpa may also perform a ritual procedure for this purpose known as La-guk (bla 'gug), "recalling the soul". The Ngakpa, by virtue of his power to enter the Otherworld and return with treasures of knowledge and power, is able to diagnose the causes of diseases and prescribe a variety of methods for effecting cures.

These same practitioners among both the Buddhists and the Bonpos have also been responsible for the rediscovery of Termas or "hidden treasure texts" which have contributed so much to the spiritual heritage of Tibet. Because the Tibetan people were thought not yet ready to receive these teachings, or else there was an actual danger of persecution, these Terma texts were concealed in ancient times at various remote places in Tibet by certain illuminated masters of the past, principally Padmasambhava. Then they were rediscovered many centuries later by Tertons (gter-ston) who were the

reincarnations of the original disciples of those ancient masters. Some of these Termas were found as actual physical objects and texts (sa-gter), others came through visions (dag-s nang) and auditions (snyan-rgyud), and yet others were channelled directly through divine inspiration and automatic writing and therefore constitute "mind treasures" (dgongs-gter). Not the least among these Terma texts is the famous Bardo Thodol (bar-do thos-grol), now widely known in the West as the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

The Lama, whether Buddhist or Bonpo, is also profoundly engaged in healing practice. Many Lamas have been specifically trained in the practice of Tibetan medicine at a monastic college. Moreover, the most common ritual performed by Tibetan Lamas at the popular level is the tse-wang (tshe-dbang) or "long life empowerment", a kind of psychic healing that invokes and channels healing energy into the participants in the ceremony, whether they are ill or not. In many ways, the Lama and the Ngagpa have usurped in Tibetan society the archaic function of the shaman, and after the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, many cultural figures such as Guru Padmasambhava and the famous yogi Milarepa, have been assimilated to the archetype of the First Shaman. Thus it came about that the archaic shamanic techniques of the Palaeolithic have now been absorbed into the high spiritual and intellectual culture of both Buddhism and Bon in Tibet. This may be seen, for example, in the Tibetan Book of the Dead, where the Lama or the Ngakpa functions as a psychopomp or guide for the perilous journey of the individual soul through the Bardo experience leading to a new rebirth. Or again, with the practice of the Chod rite, using visualization, as well as chanting and dancing to the accompaniment of the shaman's drum, the practitioner gains mastery over the spirits through offering to them the flesh of one's own body. In many ways this Chod ritual recapitulates the initiatory experience of shamanic initiation, with its motifs of dismemberment and resurrection. The practice of the Chod is said to be particularly effective in preventing the spread of plagues and infectious diseases. Both of these traditional Tibetan practices, the Bardo rituals and the Chod rite, represent a journey from fragmentation to psychic wholeness.

Thus, in Tibetan culture, we find a harmonious integration of the archaic techniques of altered states of consciousness deriving from a primordial North Asian shamanism with the highly sophisticated psychic sciences of Buddhism and Bon. Now that we are on the threshold of the twenty-first century, our urban-industrial technology and rampant unrestrained commercialism threaten to devastate our natural environment world-wide, imperiling the very survival of the human race on this planet. It is this author's belief that the ancient wisdom and profound psychic sciences of Tibet, which emphasize living in a harmonious relationship with the natural environment, as well as with other human beings, will have a profound contribution to make to evolving a new type of global civilization that is both humane and wise.

SHAMANISM IN THE NATIVE BON TRADITION OF TIBET

By Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

Shamanism, an ancient Tradition found in cultures throughout the world, values a balanced relationship between humanity and Nature. Because of the recent alarming increase in pollution and exploitation of the environment, along with the consequential negative ramifications, such as the emergence of new illnesses, it has become even more important for humankind to recover the principle of harmony central to Shamanism in order to repair the damage done to the Earth, as well as to save people and Nature from negativity and illness. There is an ancient Tibetan myth on the origin of negativity that recounts the causes of illness:

From the vast voidness wherein nothing exists, there arose light, Nangwa Oden (Appearance with Light), and also darkness. Male darkness, Munpa Zerden (Rays of Darkness) lay with female darkness, Munji Gyatso (Ocean of Darkness), and by their union they gave birth to a poisonous egg.

This egg was hatched by the force of its own energy and steam issued into the sky, giving rise to the negative energy of space. Thunder, hail and planetary disturbances came into existence. The albumen spilled onto the Earth and polluted it, giving rise to naga-derived illnesses such as physical handicaps, leprosy and skin diseases. The shell gave rise to harmful weapons and infectious diseases, and the disturbances and illnesses of humans and animals came forth from the membrane. From the yolk essence there came forth Chidag Nagpo (Black Life-Stealing Fiend) with bulging wrathful eyes, gnashing teeth, and matted hair with blood rising into the sky like a cloud, holding the black cross (of evil power) in his right hand and the disease-dispensing lasso in his left. It was the negative powers of this egg that produced birth, old-age, sickness and death – the four sufferings which are as vast as the ocean.

Black Life-Stealing Fiend is the demon of ignorance, and he has a retinue of four demons. The white demon of jealousy, like a tiger-headed man, forces one to undergo the suffering of birth; the yellow demon of attachment, with a chusin (crocodile) head, forces one to undergo the suffering of illness; and the black demon of hatred, who wears a kapal (skull cap), forces one to undergo the suffering of death.

These five demons together manifest the poisons of the five passions (ignorance, jealousy, pride, attachment and hatred), that give rise to the 80,000 negativities which they introduced into the six realms of existence of beings: gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hell denizens. These almost completely destroyed the essence of beings and of the Earth.

In that moment the great Bon sage Sangwa Dupa (secret essence) manifested as the wrathful yidam deity Tsochog (Foremost Excellence) and vanquished the five demons. Through the vow the demons were forced by Sangwa Dupa to take on that occasion, his teaching still has the power to communicate with these negative forces. This is the vow

Tibetan shamans recall in rites when they communicate with disturbing spirits, particularly the five great demons, to convince them not to create problems and confusion: "Because of your promise to Sangwa Dupa, you must not disturb my sponsor or my people, for which I pay you with this offering"

In fact in the Tibetan tradition, although the shaman may not see the particular spirit, ordinarily invisible, that is causing a specific problem, it is through the power of the shamanic rite that the shaman contacts the spirit, reminding it of its vow not to disturb humanity. This rite must be performed in the proper way by reciting the myth that recounts the origin of the rite and making appropriate offerings.

This myth comes from the ancient Bon religion of Tibet. According to the teachings of Dzogchen, the highest spiritual path in that tradition, illnesses and disturbances are deemed to be the result of the imbalance caused by the dualistic vision that arises when a person does not remain in the 'natural' state of mind.

Though conceptualising, negative and stressful emotions arise that afflict man with nervous disorders and physical diseases. However, just like the Native American shamans, the shamans of Tibet hold a different view. They believe the source of the illness to be the energy imbalance that humans create between themselves and all existence, where they provoke the spirits of Nature. To heal people, the Earth and space, it is necessary to contact these spirits, in order to restore balance and re-establish harmonious relationship with them.

These spirits (that humans disturb by their various activities) are the spirits of the five elements (space, air, fire, water, and earth), of the four seasons, and the natural spirits of the Earth, (trees, rocks, mountains, rivers, plants, the sky, sun and moon, stars and clouds, etc.,).

People disturb the sadag (Earth spirits), the nye (tree spirits), and the tsen (rock spirits), by digging the ground, cutting down trees and excavating mountains. They provoke the theurang (space spirits) by polluting the air, and they disturb the lu (water spirits) by polluting rivers and lakes.

This pollution affects people's inner being as well as the environment. By polluting space, they pollute their minds; by polluting fire, they pollute their body heat; by polluting external water, people internally pollute their blood; by polluting the earth, they pollute their bodies. Shamans do heal adventitious, mental and physical disturbances, though only at a gross level. According to the Bon teachings, ailments are caused either by nad (physical disease) or by a disturbance of vital energy by a don (spirit). The sick person is diagnosed by a doctor to ascertain if the illness has a physical etiology, through urine and pulse tests. However, if it is found to be due to a provocation of energy by a spirit, then it will be necessary to call a shaman healer. Through divination or astrology, or sometimes through meditation, the shaman will discover the nature of the disturbing spirit and the way to remove it, such as by payment of a ransom.

The founder of the native Tibetan Bon religious tradition was Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche, and a follower of his teachings is called a Bonpo. An ancient term for a master practitioner of Shenrab's teachings is Shen. Bonpos classify the spiritual teachings and practices Shenrab expounded, in nine ways or vehicles. These are divided into four causal and five resultant ways. Tibetan Shamanism is found in the first four causal ways. Shamans in Tibet take a very earthy and dualistic approach to life, healing the disturbances and illnesses in this life without being concerned about the next life. Although their motivation is the altruistic ambition to relieve others' suffering, it lacks the generation of universal compassion that is found in the resultant ways. It is the absence of the cultivation of compassion for all sentient beings, and the aspiration to realise Buddhahood as the inspiration for practice, that is the major difference between the causal and resultant ways.

These first four causal ways of the native Tibetan shamans' paths, are called: Chashen (The way of the Shen of Prediction), Nangshen (The Way of the Shen of the Visible World), Trulshen (The Way of the Shen of 'Magical' Illusion), and Sichen (The way of the Shen of Existence). Chashen, the first way, comprises medical diagnosis and healing, as well as various ancient divination and astrological rites performed by the shaman to determine whether the person who needs to be healed has an energetic imbalance, or is being provoked by a demonic spirit, or negative energy (as mentioned above). Nowadays these rites are still widely practised in Tibetan communities.

The second way, Nangshen, comprises various rituals for purification to summon energy and enhance prosperity, to suppress and liberate negative forces, and to invoke and make offerings to powerful deities and pay ransoms to demonic spirits. These practices are very widespread in Tibet. Families perform small ones, while large scale ones are usually performed collectively in towns, villages and monasteries. In ransom rites, an effigy is prepared which represents the beneficiary of the rite, or the shamanic practitioner who is performing it. I remember when my mother had been ill for a long time we tried to heal her by means of different medical treatments, but nothing helped. We then performed several minor rites, but these did not work either. So finally we invited some shaman monks, who performed a big ransom rite, in which they prepared a large effigy of her (in fact, people often make life-size effigies) and we dressed it in her clothes, so that it was very lifelike and resembled her closely. Then we performed the ritual, offering the effigy in her place to repay her karmic debt to spirits. She was given a new name, Yehe Lhamo, in place of her old name, Drolma, as a kind of new birth into the world, and she recovered from her illness.

Shamans of the third way, Trulshen, go where there is strong, wild energy, where they perform practices to conquer the spirits and demons that inhabit those places, subjugating them into their service. One achieves this through practising mantra (words of magic power), mudra (meaningful hand gestures to communicate with gods and spirits), and samadhi (meditation), while performing sadhanas (devotional practices) to engage various wrathful goddesses such as Walmo and Chenmo. The aim of these

wrathful practices, which are directed against enemies of the teaching, are to protect the practitioners and the teaching against danger and threats.

It is very important to perform these actions with an attitude of love and compassion towards other beings, and should not be performed solely for the shaman's benefit. Working with the soul of the living and the dead, is the most important feature of the fourth way, Sichen, which contains a detailed explanation of the principle of the la (soul), yid (mind), and sem (thinking mind). "The la is the karmic trace, which is stored in the kunzhi namshe, (or base consciousness). The sem follows the karmic trace and produces blissful, painful and neutral experiences which are experienced by the yid."

When a living person's soul is lost, shattered, or disordered, there are practices to recall and reinforce its energy, such as soul retrieval. In relation to the dead, there are explanations of 81 different types of death, such as accidental death, suicide, murder, and sinister death. Following these kinds of death, it is very important to perform appropriate rites, especially if the death occurs in a place which is energetically disturbed (for instance, a place where untoward events such as accidents regularly occur).

A particular specific method found in this way, is that of the 'four doors', to vanquish negative spirits, using 360 different methods. There are also funeral rites to guide the soul immediately after death, communicating with the ghost of the deceased and feeding it until its next rebirth.

One of the most important practices performed by Tibetan shamans of the sichen path is soul retrieval – Lalu (literally redeeming, or buying back the soul), and Chilü, (redeeming the life-energy). These practices are widespread in the Bon tradition and also in all Tibetan Buddhist schools. One could discuss the soul and life-energy philosophically at great length; but in brief, life energy is the force that keeps mind and body together and the soul is the vital energy of the person. External negativities can cause these two forces to decline, be disturbed, or even lost. Through the lalu and chilü rites, these forces can be recalled, repaired and balanced. To recall the life force in the chilü ritual, the shaman sends out energy as light rays, like a hook, to catch the blessings of the Buddhas; the power of all the protectors, protectresses and guardians; the magic power of all the spirits and eight classes of beings; and the vital energy of the life force of the beings of the six realms. He summons this powerful energy from all the corners of the universe and condenses it into syllables, which he introduces into the disturbed person's heart through his crown chakra, reinforcing his life force.

Shamans perform several different soul retrieval rites. In one rite, a deer – that will recall the soul – is placed on a plate floating in a vase of milk. The shaman then stirs the milk with a dadar (auspicious long life arrow), in order to determine whether the soul has returned. In fact if the deer is facing the house altar when the plate stops turning, the rite has been successful; if it faces the door it has not, and the rite has to be repeated.

In another rite, the beneficiary has to cast white dice on a white cloth, betting against a person of the opposite sign (according to Tibetan astrology), who casts a black dice on a black cloth. When the beneficiary wins this means the rite has been successful.

One of the principle ways of reinforcing the life force is recitation of the mantra of the life deity. The texts say that through this power, the shaman recalls the life force wherever it has strayed. If it is finished, he prolongs it; if it has declined, he reinforces it; if it is torn, he sews it; if it has been severed, he fastens it.

Lalu soul retrieval is performed in a similar way: the shaman summons the spirit which has stolen, or disturbed the person's soul, and offers it a torma (offering cake) representing the union of the five sense pleasures – completely satisfying it with the visualised object, so it will immediately give back the soul it has taken.

There also seems to be a strong connection between the practice of soul retrieval and the popular lungta practice, which is performed to reinforce fortune and capacity, by 'raising the wind-horse'. This is a very powerful rite, performed by large groups of Tibetans, on top of mountains on the first, or third day of the New Year. The participants arouse and invoke the mountain spirits by making smoke offerings, putting up prayer flags and throwing five-coloured cards bearing mantras into space in order to reinforce prana (vital air), which is the support of the la. In this way the la is also healed and reinforced, and consequently the participants' capacity, fortune and prosperity increase, and whatever venture they undertake becomes successful. These healing rites, in which Bon masters and shamans communicate (either fully conscious or through out-of-the-body experience) with spirits and demons, are widely practiced in all Tibetan Buddhist schools.

It is interesting to note that one of the ways the Buddhist schools attempted to suppress Bon, was by accusing Bon practitioners of being 'intellectually uncivilized' – of being mere primitive shamans. However, in the deepest sense, shamanic belief is the Tibetans' very lifeblood. Tibetans of any religious school who get ill will enact rituals, such as putting up prayer flags, to invoke their guardian spirits and perform ransom rites to remove disturbing spirits, without a moment's hesitation.

Shamanism contains much wisdom that is used to harmonise imbalances, by working on re-establishing good relationships with spirits. The work of Native American shamans in contacting guardian animals for guidance, strength and knowledge, is of great value for healing and for restoring a harmonious relationship with animals, the elements, the sky and the whole environment. A practitioner of the Bon ways, however, might warn contemporary western shamans about the dangers inherent in certain of the practices they perform. The drum journey, is one such example, used for finding the 'guardian' animal (which they then trust completely) and collaborate with in healing. It is by no means certain that the 'guardian' animal that the shaman meets during the drum journey will be beneficial. In that kind of journey, or out-of-body experience, one can meet hundreds of different beings, just as a non-human being, coming into the human world, will meet hundreds of humans.

The shamanic experience is very important, so it is crucial to have the right guardian, which must be found through real awareness and realisation. In Tibet most locations, towns and mountains have their own guardian protectors, just as the various religious schools share protective guardian deities. Yet it was yogis, lamas and realised masters who recognised, subjugated and initiated these powerful beings as dharmapalas, or guardians, of the teachings. Until meeting these masters, many of these beings were wild and untrustworthy spirits or the ghosts of evil or confused people, just as the guardian animals the shaman meets may be evil.

In conclusion, it seems to me that many shamans now active in the West focus on working with the emotions and problems of this life, relating with spirits through shamanic drum journeys to heal themselves and others. This practice is very beneficial in curing mental and physical disturbances, and certainly the work shamans do is also very important to restore ecological balance, but it should not remain at that level. Rather, their work could be enhanced by deepening their knowledge, to obtain comprehension of the nature of mind, and generating the aspiration to engage in contemplative practice to realise Buddhahood.

In similar fashion, if the causal means of shamanism were practiced widely in the world, it would be of great benefit for the environment and the world community. It would be of even greater benefit if all nine vehicles were practiced.

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The condensed meaning of an explanation of the teachings of Yungdrung Bon

by Lopön Tenzin Namdak

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Introduction

Here, with reference to the Yungdrung gBon, we must first consider its essence and then its divisions. As for the essence of the teachings, having relied upon proper conduct and practice, there will arise qualities of a virtuous aspect and these will become the means for exhausting the obscurations which afflict the individual.

Second, with respect to the divisions of the teachings, there is first the subject matter or what is to be expressed, that is, the Yungdrung Bon which is encompassed by the meaning; and second, its expression, that is, the Yungdrung Bon which is encompassed by the words.

With respect to the first (the subject matter of Bon), this may be divided into three as follows:

- I. The path of Renunciation (spong lam),
- II. The Path of Transformation (sgyur lam), and
- III. The Path of Liberation (grol lam).

And with regard to what is expressed in words, there are two divisions; the Word itself (that is, the authoritative Word of the Buddha), and that which relies upon the Word. First, in terms of the Word (bka'), there are four divisions:

1. Sutra (mdo-sde)
2. Prajnaparamita ('bum-sde),
3. Tantra (rgyud-sde), and
4. Kosha (mdzod-sde), i.e., Dzogchen.

The Path of Renunciation

When we subdivide the Path of Renunciation, we find here three ways or vehicles to enlightenment (theg-pa):

1. Theg-pa chung-ngu: The Lesser Way or Hinayana
2. Theg-pa 'bring-po: The Intermediate Way and
3. Theg-pa chen-po: The greater Way of Mahayana

In terms of the Lesser Way, we have there the Base, the Path and the Fruit to be considered. The Base derives from an understanding of the lack of emptiness of an independent self in persons. The path consists on one practicing according to the threefold training of morality, meditation and wisdom. The Fruit is the attaining of the status of an Arhat.

Within the Intermediate Way, we also speak of the Base, the Path and the Fruit. As above, the base consists in the realization of the emptiness of an independent self in persons. And having systematically established oneself in this absence of a self in the phenomena of a subject, the Path consists of the threefold training of morality, meditation and wisdom, and practicing by means of the method of reversing the system of the twelve links of interdependent origination. The Fruit is also the attaining the status of an Arhat.

Within the Greater Way of the Mahayana there are also two divisions:

- A. Thugs-rje sems-dpa'i theg-pa: the Way of the Compassionate Bodhisattvas, and
- B. gyung-drung sems-dpa'i spros med-pa'i theg-pa; the Way of the Bodhisattvas which is without conceptual elaborations.

First, with regard to the system of the Compassionate Bodhisattvas (the Cittamatra system), there are three considerations: the Base, The Path and the Fruit. The Base consists in understanding the emptiness of any independent existence or substance in external phenomena. Having established oneself in this emptiness by means of realizing its meaning, the Path consists of practicing the ten paramitas of generosity, morality, patience, diligence, meditation, strength, compassion, commitment, means and wisdom. The Fruit is attaining of the perfect Buddhahood of the Trikaya.

Within the system of the Great Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas which is without conceptual elaborations (the Madhyamaka system), there are also three considerations: the Base, the Path and the Fruit. The Base is systematically establishing oneself in the understanding that all phenomena lack any inherent nature. The Path consists in practicing the unsurpassed ten paramitas and the four collections: generosity, friendly speech, practicing according to the meaning, and teaching in harmony with the meaning according to the intellectual capacity of students. The Fruit is the realization of the perfect Buddhahood of the Trikaya.

The Path of Transformation

Second, within the Way of the Path of Transformation, there are four divisions:

1. Bye-ba gtsang spyod ye bon gyi theg-pa: the Way of Primordial Bon of pure conduct and ritual activity,

2. rNam-pa kun ldan mngon-shes kyi theg-pa: the Way of the clear Knowledge which knows all aspects,
3. dNgos bskyed thugs-rje rol-pa'i theg-pa: the Way of the manifestation of Compassion as actual visualisation and
4. Shin tu don ldan kun rdzogs kyi theg-pa: the Way wherein everything is perfect and very meaningful.

With regard to the first (the Kriya Tantra) which emphasizes pure conduct, there are the Base, the Path and the Fruit to be considered. The Base is systematically establishing oneself in the natural state where one remains in one's own original condition without modification. For the Path, by way of looking upon the Knowledge Being (ye-shes-pa) among the three beings as manifesting in the manner of a Lord, one practices the ten paramitas, and so on. The Fruit is the realization of the Buddhahood of the Trikaya.

Second, with regard to (the Charya Tantra) possessing all aspects, there are also these three, the Base, the Path and the Fruit. First, as for the Base, one systematically establishes oneself in the natural state which remains in its own original condition without modification. The Path consists of looking upon the Knowledge Being in the manner of a brother or a friend, and then practicing by way of the ten paramitas, and so on. The Fruit is the realization of the Buddhahood of the Trikaya.

Third, with respect to (the Higher Tantra) where there is an actual visualisation process (bskyed-rim), there are the three considerations of the Base, the Path and the Fruit. The Base is the systematically establishing oneself in the Absolute Truth which is the higher view wherein one remains in the natural state in one's original condition without modification. The Path principally emphasizes the practice of the visualization process (bskyed-rim); and by way of the two stages (bskyed-rim and rdzog-rim), one arrives at the Fruit which is the realization of the Buddhahood of the Trikaya.

Fourth , within the Way of (the Higher Tantra) where everything is perfect and very meaningful, we also have the three considerations of the Base, the Path and the Fruit. First, as for the Base, one systematically establishes oneself in the view of one's own original condition without modification (i.e., the natural state) wherein space and awareness are inseparable. The Path principally emphasizes the practice of the perfection process (rdzog-rim); and by way of the two stages one arrives at the Fruit which is the realization of the Buddhahood of the Trikaya.

The Path of Liberation

Third, within Dzogchen which is the Path of Liberation, there are three divisions of the teachings:

1. The Semde or Mind series (sems-sde),
2. The Longde or Space series (klong-sde), and

3. The Manngagde or Secret Instruction Series (man-ngag-sde).

Furthermore, with respect to the condition of the natural state just as it is, there are three special dharmas or qualities: ist Essence which is emptiness, ist Nature which is clarity, and ist aspect which is compassionate Energy (thugs-rje) which represents the non-duality of the first two. Since there exists these three wualities, by way of practicing intensively and systematically establishing oneself (in the natural state), there originate these three methods of Semde, Longde and Manngagde.

According to the Manngagde, the Base is the unification of clarity and emptiness, the Path consists of the practice of Thekchod and of Thodgal, and the Fruit is the attaining of the Buddhahood of the Trilkaya.

The Cycle of Teaching

Furthermore, having considered the meaning above, we shall now look at the means for expounding this meaning and this consisted of the promulgation of three successive cycles of precepts by the victorious One and Perfect Buddha Shenrab Miwo Kunle Nampar Gyalwa; (1) At first he expounded the Nine Successive Ways (theg-pa rim dgu), (2) in the middle he taught the Four Doors and the Treasury which is the fifth (sgo bzhi mdzod lnga), and (3) finally at the end he revealed the outer, the inner and the secret teachings (phyi nang gsang gsum).

In accordance with the meaning of the subject matter, he at first expounded the Relative Truth, in the middle he expounded the Two Truths equally and finally he expounded the absolute Truth. Correspondingly, these were expressed in words: At first he taught the Nine successive Ways, in the middle he taught the Four Doors and the Treasury as the fifth, and at the end he taught the outer, inner and secret teachings.

The five Science

From among these three above,, at the very beginning he also taught the sciences and the doctrines of bon. It was said that the first precepts he taught are subsummed under the five sciences (rig-gnas lnga) and that the second among these first precepts are subsummed under the Nine Successive Ways (theg-pa rim dgu). As for the first of these in brief, they are as follows :

1. outer science (phyi rig-pa)
2. inner science (nang rig-pa)
3. arts and crafts (bzo rig-pa)
4. medical science (gso rig-pa), and
5. linguistic science (sgra rig-ap)

The Nine Ways- the First Cycle

As for the Nine Successive Ways, after spreading of the teachings of the Gyalwa Shenrab Miwo in the country of Tibet, there occurred the two earlier persecutions of Bon. Certain individuals who had previously attained both learning and realization made definitive divisions within the entire body of Bon teachings, including the categorizing of the rites, and thereafter they concealed these teachings as hidden treasures. Subsequently, the system of Termas as which was extracted from Brig-mtshams mtha' dkar in the south of Tibet and from spa-gro on Bhutan became known as the Southern Treasures (lho gter). Those Termans which were extracted from Zang-zang lha dag and from Dwang-ra khyung rdzong in the north of Tibet became known as the Northern Treasures (byang gter). Finally, those teachings extracted as Terma texts from bSam-yas and from Yer-pa'i brag in Central Tibet became known as the Central Treasures.

As for the names of the Nine Ways according to the system of the Southern Treasures, they are as follows:

1. Phywa gshen theg-pa: The Way of the Shen of Prediction,
2. sNang gshen theg-pa: The Way of the Shen of Visible Manifestation,
3. 'Phrul gshen theg-pa: The Way of the Shen of Magical Power,
4. Srid gshen theg-pa: The Way of the Shen of Existence,
5. dGe-bsnyen theg-pa: The Way of the virtuous Lay practitioner,
6. Drang-srong theg-pa: The Way of the Sages,
7. A-dkar theg-pa: The Way of the white A,
8. Ye-gshen theg-pa: The Way of the primordial Shen, and
9. bLa-med theg-pa: the Unsurpassed Way (i.e., Dzogchen).

Second, as for the names of the Nine Ways according to the Northern Treasures, such as the System of Zang-zang-ma:

1. Tho-tho, 2. SPyi-tho and 3. Yang-tho are three;
4. sNang-ldan, 5. Rang-ldan, and 6. BZhed-ldan are three and
5. Lha-rtse, 8. SNang-rtse , and 9. Yong.rtsse are three

Third, as for the enumeration of the names of the Nine Ways according to the system of the Central Treasures:

1. Lha mi gzhan bsten gyi theg-pa: the Way of Gods and Men where one relies upon another,
2. Rang rtogs gshen rabs kyi theg-pa: the Way of those who understand by themselves and of those who are the followers of Shenrab,
3. Thugs-rje sems-dpa'i theg-pa: the Way of the Compassionate Bodhisattvas, and
4. gYung-drung sems-pa' spros med-pa'i theg-pa: the Way of the Bodhisattvas which is without any conceptual elaborations.

These four are known as the causal ways (rgyu'i theg-pa)

5. Bya-ba gtsang spyod ye bon byi theg-pa: the Way of the primordial Bon of pure conduct and ritual action,
6. rNam-pa kun-ldan mngon-shes kyi theg-pa: the Way of the Clear Knowledge which knows all aspects,
7. dNgos bskyed thugs-rje rol-pa'i theg-pa: the Way of the Manifestation of Compassion as actual visualization,
8. Shin to don-ldan kun rdzog kyi thog-pa: the Way wherein everything is perfect and very meaningful, and
9. Ye nas rdzog chen yong rtse bla-med kyi theg-pa: the unsurpassed Way of the highest peak which is the Primordial Great perfection.

These four above are known as the fruitional ways ('bras-bu'i theg-pa) of the Secret Mantras, and they are together with the ninth.

The Four Doors and the Treasury the Second Cycle

As for the intermediate cycle of precepts, they were expounded as the Four Doors and the Treasury as the fifth:

1. Chab dkar drag-po sngags kyi bon: the Bon of the Fierce Mantras,
2. Chab nag srid-pa rgyud kyi bon: the Bon of worldly legends,
3. 'Phan-yul rgyas-pa 'bum gyi bon: the Bon of the extensive Prajnaparamita,
4. mTho thog spyi rgyug mdzod kyi bon: the Bon of the Treasury which is highest and
5. dPon-gas man-ngag lung gi bon: the Bon of the agamas and upadeshas of the Mantras.

The Final Cycle

As for the final cycle of precepts, they were expounded as three: the outer, the inner and the secret.

1. The outer is the Path of Renunciation, that is, the Pramana or philosophy series.
2. The inner is the Path of Transformation, that is, the Secret Mantras series, and
3. The secret is the Path of Liberation, that is to say, the Bon of the Great Perfection or Dzogchen.

The four Causal Ways

These four causal ways belong to the system of the Southern Treasures and they contain the folk customs of Tibet and an extraordinary educational system. These methods may be described as follows:

1. Within the Phywa gshen theg-pa, divination (mo), astrology (rtsis), ritual (gto) and medical diagnosis (sman dpyad) are expounded. Having relied upon divination, we can recognize the primary and secondary causes of benefit or harm with respect to fortune, long life and abundance. Performing the rituals may counteract various kinds of negative influences which cause harm. By means of diagnosis we can understand the primary and secondary causes of illness, and in terms of benefit these may be healed by medicines.
2. In the sNang gshen theg-pa, there is the invoking of the gods who grant protection and the expelling of demons who cause harm by way of rites such as summoning prosperity and good fortune for people, and also by rites for protecting the life force and for long life.
3. In the 'phrul gshen theg-pa, there is the magical activity of suppressing, burning and expelling demons, evil spirits and wrong guides who cause harm to living beings and to the teachings.
4. In the Srid gshen theg-pa, one guides the deceased to a happy realm of rebirth and one prevents evil spirits from disturbing the deceased. One also engages in ritual methods to ensure good fortune and health for the living. These methods have become known throughout the country of Tibet and represent the folk customs of the Tibetan people.

* * * * *

The Mother Tantras of the Bon Tradition

by Marco Alejandro Chaoul

The Mother Tantras "represent an important esoteric tradition of Bon belonging to the system of A dkar ba [the way of the white A], the seventh in the [stages of] Nine Ways of Bon (theg pa rim dgu)(110) Among the Bon Tantras, the Mother, and the Father Tantras (pha rgyud) comprise the highest classes (111). Their method of practice is transformation (bsgyur ba), and whereas in the Father Tantras the generation stage (bskyed rim) is emphasized (including intricate visualizations of deities and their mandala), in the Mother Tantras the completion stage (rdzogsrim) is stressed.

The Mother Tantra is attributed "within the [root] texts themselves to Kuntu Zangpo (Kun tu bzang po [Samantabhadra, "Totally Good One"]), the Primordial Buddha

Himself;"¹¹² a characteristic that is shared with other Bon and Nyingma high tantra and dzogchen texts. And has the quite unique characteristic that the male aspect represents the emptiness quality and the female aspect the clarity of the Natural State, which is usually inverted in other tantric texts. Furthermore, "[t]he Mother Tantra is also unique among the Higher Tantras as a whole because, whereas it does employ the transformational process of the Kyerim [generation stage] and the Dzogrim [completion stage], its overall view is that of Dzogchen." (113) Dzogchen is the highest teaching in this tradition, and its method of practice is of self-liberation (rang grol) into the non-dual single essence (thig le nyaggtig).

According to the Bon tradition, the Root Texts of the Secret Mother Tantra are said to be originated in the dimension of Bon (ban sku), shared by the male and female Primordial Buddhas in the "Eternal Divine language" (gyung drung lha'i skad), then transmitted in Sanskrit to a retinue of skygoers amongst whom the principal was Zangza Ringsun (bZang za ring btsun, "Goodwife Longexcellence"), an emanation of the great Cham Ma (Byams ma, "Loving Mother"). The Teachings of the Mother Tantra were revealed by her to three teachers who propagated the Mother Tantra in three different among the Nagas in the netherworld, and Milu Samlek (Mi lus bsant legs) among humanity on earth (114).

According to the Secret Mother Tantra texts, Milu Samlek then composed three commentaries in order to elucidate their meaning, and transmitted the teachings to his disciple Mushen Namkha Nangwa Dogchen (dMu gshen nam mkha' snang ba'i mdog can). The latter, after practicing on the slopes of Mount Kailash, bestowed the initiation and instructions to the Bon pandit Anu Tragtak (A nu 'phrag thag) who in turn handed this teachings down to Sene Gau (Sad na ga'u) of Zhang Zhung. Sene Gau translated the teachings from Zhang zhung to Tibetan. It was during his time that the first persecution of Bon teachings and practitioners took place, under the reign of the Tibetan Buddhist king Drigum Tsenpo (Gri gum btsan po, ca. 683 B.C.E.), and therefore, "the custodianship of these texts of the ma rgyud was delivered by Sad ne ga'u into the hands of the six Dakinis of the Path, the Jarama (bya ra ma) or watchers,"¹¹⁵ "who served as the 'treasure protectors'." (116) Under king Trisong Detsen (Khri srong lde btsan, 790–848 C.E.) the Bonpos suffered a second persecution, and it was not until the twelfth century that the Secret revelation of the Mother Tantras were rediscovered by Guru Nontse (Gu ru non rise) in the rock of Dungpor (Dung phor bkra shis) near the village of Tanag (rTa nag) in the central province of Tsang, "[h]ence this collection of Terma became known by the name of the Dung phor ma." (117) Guru Nontse then gave this collection of teachings to Zhonu (gZhon nu). But the Secret Mother Tantra Cycle was not the only Mother Tantra Cycle.

Within the Bon tradition, there are three cycles of Mother Tantras: Outer, Inner, and Secret. For each, there is a root text or texts with a body of exegetical and liturgical works subordinate to the root text. (118) Milu Samlek wrote separate commentaries for each of the three cycles, but this study will focus on the Secret cycle (gsang skor). The Outer Cycle (phyi skor) and Inner Cycle (nang skor), named rNam dag padma klong gi dkyil 'khor and Kun gsal byams ma chen mo'i rgyud respectively, were discovered at

different times by different people. For example the Inner Mother Tantra texts were excavated earlier—Namkhai Norbu places it in 956 C.E.— by the Tertön Trotsang Druglha (Khro tshang brug lha).¹¹⁹ It is interesting to note that, [t]hree generations after their rediscovery, the Laming Mother [Inner Mother Tantra] texts were given to gZhon nu and were then passed along the same lineage with the Secret Mother Tantra literature (120).

Also Guru Nontse, who was the rediscoverer of the Secret Mother Tantra, "may be identified as an incarnation of one of the members of the earlier lineage."¹²¹ The lineage, as Martin says, is more than the mere passing down the oral tradition, but is also the "transference of the 'charisma' (byin brlabs) [or blessings] of the institutor of the lineage."¹²² This acknowledges not only an intimate connection among the lineage-holders, but also opens a window into an understanding beyond the purely historical.¹²³ Guru Nontse "was known in the Buddhist histories as Aya Bonpo Lhabun (A ya bon po lha 'bum), for he discovered many Nyingma Termas as well as Bonpo ones."¹²⁴ The Secret Mother Tantra text, like many of such discoveries, was discovered by "accident."¹²⁵ Guru Nontse, who was a hunter and a potter,¹²⁶ had hunted an antelope in the mountain, and was chopping its bones on a rock when suddenly the rock broke apart. To his amazement inside the rock he found a white silk cloth written on both sides and wrapped on a stick. The story goes that Zhonu, who was from Kham (East Tibet), had a dream where the skygoers prophesied that he was to receive an important text. Some time later, he was in fact handed the Secret Mother Tantra silk cloth directly from Guru Nontse. He told Zhonu that he had already transcribed many texts, and "[s]ince you have transferred from a divine status, your thoughts are pure and you are very quiet and relaxed. So copy the texts without anyone seeing them."¹²⁷ Then Zhonu went to Kham and copied the texts, but some time later Guru Nontse appeared unexpectedly and asked for the silk cloth, alleging that the skygoers wanted the cloth to be returned. Asking Zhonu, "Did you see the five loose open-mouthed tigresses pass by at Dung phor?,"¹²⁸ Guru Nontse took the roll back.

Now, according to Martin, Zhonu had copied all the Secret Mother Tantra: the three root texts (of Base, Path, and Fruit), and the three commentaries of them by Milu Samlek (the short and medium commentaries were on one side of the roll and the detailed commentary on the other side); but then could not find the most detailed commentary. But according to Lopon and Reynolds (who was probably also informed by Lopon), Guru Nontse appeared before Zhonu could finish copying the whole roll, so that Zhonu never got to the side of the longer commentary nor had time to copy down the short commentary. Thus, Lopon states that Zhonu was only able to copy the medium length commentary.¹²⁹

All versions coincide in that the silk roll which Guru Nontse gave to Zhonu contained the three Root Tantras together with the three sets of Commentaries: the Meaning Commentary: Solar Essence (don 'grel nyi ma 'i snying po), which is the abridged commentary;¹³⁰ the Meditation Commentary: Mandala of the Sun (sgom 'grel nyi ma'i dkyil 'khor), which is the intermediate length commentary; and the Explanation Commentary: Solar Rays (bshad 'grel nyi ma'i 'od zer), which is the extended

commentary, containing word by word explanation of the three root texts of the Secret Mother Tantra. Martin agrees with Karmay in thinking that even when it is stated that Milu Samlek composed all three commentaries, it is not very clear which one we are dealing with. The commentary in hand [the {Secret} Mother Tantra: Root Commentary of the Three Buddhahood Tantras (ma rgyud sangs rgyas rgyud gsum rtsa 'grel)] states at the beginning (p. 207) that it is the Meditation Commentary: The Solar Essence, but on p. 208 it indicates that it is the Meditation Commentary: The Mandala of the Sun.¹³¹

As Martin points out "there is some confusion in the titling of the texts," since Solar Essence is supposed to be the abridged or Meaning Commentary, and not the Meditation Commentary.¹³² Lopon Tenzin Namdak, and John Reynolds following him, do not view this as a problem. The discrepancy might arise from what it is believed Zhonu was able to copy down before hearing that the "five Dakinis riding on tigers had just appeared uttering dire prophecies."¹³³ According to Lopon, Zhonu was able to copy down the three root texts and only the intermediate length commentary. At that time, Guru Nontse asked Zhonu to give him the silk roll back no matter how much was copied, since he had to return it to where he found it. The silk cloth was never found again, consequently the Meditation Commentary: Mandala of the Sun is the only extant commentary. Karmay and Martin's confusion may derive from the inclusion of the enumeration of the forty five wisdom spheres (ye shes thig le zhe /nga), which is pretty much all the abridged commentary — in the introduction of the extant text. There is no doubt that it is the Meditation Commentary; as seen in the above citation, whether it is called Solar Essence or Mandala of the Sun, it is Meditation Commentary in both cases. I can think of two possible answers to this dilemma, and propose them only as speculations.

Limiting myself to the 1971 edition that Martin and Karmay were mainly working from, it is possible that giving the introduction the same name as the abridged commentary was a way of acknowledging that the medium length commentary included the abridged one. But working from a later edition, not included in Karmay's catalogue since it is from 1985,¹³⁴ that same chapter 4 (or nga in the 1971 edition)—the first three chapters being the Root Texts—is actually called Meditation Commentary: Mandala of the Sun, which would then seem to resolve the conflict.¹³⁵ Martin acknowledges this and says that "[m]ost likely M [which is how he terms the 1971 edition] is mistaken, and the correct title of the set of commentaries available to us should be Solar Mandala [or Mandala of the Sun]."¹³⁶ Where the biggest difference seems to lie is in what is comprised under the other part of the title, namely, Meditation Commentary. Martin seems to follow Karmay in considering it to include not only chapter nga, where the title is presented, but all the Commentary of the Tantra of the Base (chapters nga to no). While I see this as true, I only see it as partially so. Karmay states that there is "no title" for the Commentary of the Path (chapters pa to 'a), and so Martin seems to assent.¹³⁷ I believe that in fact the same title extends all the way from chapters nga to 'a, and that the Meditation Commentary: Mandala of the Sun is the medium length Commentary of Base, Path, and Fruit (even though Milu Samlek's Commentary of the Fruit is no longer extant), and not just of the Base.¹³⁸

Lopon also said that when Guru Nontse appeared to Zhonu in Kham, and the latter wanted to finish copying the material, Guru Nontse told him not only that the five tiger-like skygoers had come asked for it, but also that copying the long commentary was of no use because, in Tibet, there were no suitable students to receive this teaching. Guru Nontse said that Tibetan people had a deluded base, misunderstood the path and therefore the fruit would be spoiled.¹³⁹ As far as Zhonu himself, Guru Nontse told him to practice what he had already copied and keep it for himself, since other people would not understand it properly. The original copy was then returned.¹⁴⁰

The structure of the Secret Mother Tantra

The three root texts of the Secret Mother Tantras (M) are collectively known by two different titles: 1. The Three Buddhahood Tantras (Songs rgyas rgyud gsum), and 2. Compassion Sun [Sun of Compassion] (Thugs rje nyi ma).¹⁶⁰

Lopon Tenzin Namdak says there are not two different titles, rather, like most Tibetan texts, one is the title and the other the subtitle, or explanation of what the text contains. In other words, the Secret Cycle of the Mother Tantra is known as Mother Tantra: The Tantric Cycle of the Sun of Compassion (Ma rgyud thugs rje nyi ma'i rgyud skor), which is "The Three Root Buddhahood Tantras with Commentaries."¹⁶¹ Interestingly enough, the 1985 edition uses the former name, while the 1971 edition uses the latter (Ma rgyud songs rgyas rgyud gsum rtsa 'grel). In content both editions are the same, but here I will use the most recent one, which as seen earlier, may also prove to be more reliable. The Sun of Compassion is divided in two manners: as the Forty-five Wisdom Spheres which the introduction enumerates, and as the Three Buddhahood Tantras, of base, path, and fruit. The cho practice is found in the Second Tantra (i.e., the Path), and is the twenty-second wisdom sphere: the Sphere of Accumulation, the Completion with Respect to the Accomplishment of Wisdom (Tshogs kyi thig le ye shes grub la rdzogs). An overview of the outline for all Three Tantras will be helpful in order to understand the structure of the Bon Secret Mother Tantra Cycle as a whole and the place of cho in it.¹⁶²

The Bon Secret Mother Tantra is first divided into three parts: base (gzhi), path (lam), and fruit ('bras), which are subdivided into six parts each, altogether making eighteen steps that the practitioner should pursue in order to attain liberation. In the 1985 edition, the first three chapters are the three Root Tantras, and chapter four (nga), as was discussed earlier, is what Martin calls the historical preface. Then, the text is divided as follows:

I- The commentary of the six facets of the base:

- 1- "The Total-base of the spontaneously-manifested wisdom teachings" (Kun gzhi ye shes lhun grub bstan pa), which is an explanation of the introduction to the natural state (chapter 5).
- 2- "The Appearing-base of the spontaneously-manifested three [enlightened] dimensions" (Snang gzhi sku gsum lhun grub), of truth dimension (ban sku,

dharmakaya), perfected dimension (rdzogs sku, sambhogakaya), and manifested dimension (sprul sku, nirmanakaya)¹⁶³ (ch. 6).

- 3- "The Empty-base of the spontaneously-manifested four [enlightened] dimensions" (Stong gzhi sku bzhi lhun grub), where the four dimensions are explained in four different chapters in terms of channels (rtsa, nodi), vital breath (rlung, prana), [essential] sphere (thig le, bindu), and performance (spyod pa, bhoga or carya), each explained in a different chapter (ch. 7 to 10 respectively).
- 4- "The Scriptural-base of the spontaneously-manifested four empowerments" (Lung gzhi dbang bzhi lhun grub): external (phyi bo), internal (nang ba), secret (gsang ba), and esoteric or ultra-secret (yang gsang ba) (ch. 11).
- 5- The Meaning-base of the spontaneously-manifested view and conduct" (Don gzhi Ita spyod lhun grub), where instructions for familiarizing oneself with methods for stabilization practice (zhi gnas) are given (ch. 12).
- 6- The Activity-base of the spontaneously-manifested deed (Las gzhi 'phrin las lhun grub) (ch. 13).

Chapter 14 relates the history of the lineage.

II- The six parts of the path are:

- 1- The path of Accumulation (Tshogs lam,) (ch. 15).
- 2- The path of Union (sByor lam) (ch 16).
- 3- The path of Seeing (Thong lam) (ch. 17).
- 4- The path of Meditation (sCom lam) (ch. 18 to 22).

The path of meditation comprises six methods or "six principles of expediency" (lam khyer drug), which are "only with some difficulty compared with the Six Dharmas of Naropa."¹⁶⁴ The six principles of expediency are:

- The expedient use of Means, devoted mainly to the channels and vital breath, which corresponds to "the sphere of the Elements" (Byung ba'i thig le) (ch. 18).
- The expedient use of Dream (rmi lam) which corresponds to "the sphere of Self-ness" (bDag nyid thig le) (ch. 19).
- The expedient use of Fear, which is the practice of cho or practice of fearful places (gnyan sa lam), which corresponds to "the sphere of Accumulation" (Tshogs gyi thig le) (ch. 20).
- The expedient use of Projection ('pho ba) which corresponds to "the sphere of Accomplishing" (Grub pa'i thig le) (ch. 21).
- The expedient use of Death which explains the after-death intermediate states (bar do) and corresponds to "the sphere of Abiding" (gNas gyi thig le). Its commentary has been missing since its re-discovery by Guru Nontse.
- The expedient use of Sleep (gnyid pa lam khyer) which corresponds to "the sphere of Clarity" (gSal ba'i thig le) (ch. 22).

Some of the six methods correspond to the ones of Naropa and others do not, cho is not part of the six dharmas of Naropa.¹⁶⁵

5- The path of Freedom (Thar lam,) (ch 23).

6-The path of Ripening and Liberation (sMin grol lam) (ch 24 and 25).

This six parts of the path of meditation are also the second to the seventh grounds (sa, bhumi) of the path of a bodhisattva, where the path of seeing is the first, the path of freedom the eight, the path of ripening the ninth, and the path of liberation the tenth.

HI- The six parts of the fruit¹⁶⁶ are:

1- The fruit of Excellence (mChog 'bras).

2- The fruit of Meaning (Don 'bras).

3- The fruit of [Practice] Session (Thun 'bras).

4- The fruit of Nature (Ngang 'bras).

5- The fruit of Space (kLong 'bras).

6- The fruit of Non-existence (Med 'bras).

The eighteen together are the deep teachings of exalted liberation (rnam grol). As seen above, cho is the third practice among the six principles of expediency: the expedient use of fear. When divided as the forty-five wisdom spheres, cho is the twenty-second, the sphere of accumulation, where wisdom is perfected in accomplishment or realization (thig le ye shes grub la rdzogs).¹⁶⁷ The inclusion of cho within the six methods seems to be unique to the Bon system. Cho is also found in an abbreviated form in the main practice of the Secret Mother Tantra, the Threefold Practice of the Authentic Wisdom¹⁶⁸ (dGongs spyod rnam gsum), which refers to the practice of the teacher (bla ma), tutelary deity (yi dam) and skygoer. In the third, the skygoer (as an aspect of oneself) comes out and chops one's body, liberating the meditator "from the bonds of all grasping at reality," while the latter performs the chopping gesture (phyag rgya, mudra).¹⁶⁹ This practice is found in the chapter of the path of Freedom.

The base represents the view, the path the practice, and the fruit the result. The importance of the path lies in the explanation of how and what practices should be done. In particular, the path of meditation offers the six methods corresponding to the six skygoers who guard the practices of the path, among which cho is the third, and is represented by the red skygoer Tshog gyi Dagmo.

Notes:

110 S. Kannay, A Catalogue of Bonpo Publications, p. 20. Note that Karmay is referring here to the nine ways as classified in the Southern treasure system (see ft. 90).

111 Among the three modes of classifications of the nine vehicles in the Bon tradition, the Central treasure is the most elaborate regarding the classes of tantra (see K. Mimaki, "Doxographie tibétaine et classifications indiennes" (in Actes du colloque franco-japonais de septembre 1991, Ed. by Fumimasa Fukui and Gerard Fussman, Paris, France: ?cole française d'Extreme-Orient, 1994}, pp. 126-132).

112 J. Reynolds, "The Threefold Practice of the Primordial State of the Mother Tantra," p. 2. It is important to note that when most of the authors quoted in this thesis refer to the Mother Tantra, they are actually referring to the Secret Mother Tantra. This should become clear later.

113 id, p.2. Italics are mine.

114 Ibid, p.3 (italics, non-capitalized syllables and the lack of hyphenation in the Tibetan transliteration is mine, as well as highlighting in bold).

115 Ibid, p. 7.

116 D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, p. 28.

117 J. Reynolds, "The Threefold Practice of the Primordial State of the Mother Tantra," p. 7. The lack of hyphenation in the Tibetan transliteration is mine.

118 D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, p. 32.

119 N. Norbu, *The Necklace of gZi*, p. 19.

120 D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, pp. 54–55 (the modification of capitalized letters and the lack of hyphenation in the Tibetan transliteration is mine). He also directs the reader to S. Karmay, *The Treasury of Good Sayings: A Tibetan History of Bon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 125–6, and N. Norbu, *The Necklace of gZi*, p. 19. As for the External Mother Tantra, it was rediscovered by Shenchen Luga (gShen chen klu dga), also in the tenth century.

121 Ibid, p. 27.

122 Ibid, p. 27.

123 See D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, pp. 51 ff. Later in this thesis I will briefly explore the historical and the traditional understandings, and how they may complement each other.

124 J. Reynolds, "The Threefold Practice of the Primordial State of the Mother Tantra/" p. 7. Martin adds that there is another chronology which "actually dates Lha "bum before the first rab-'byung (beginning in 1027 A.D. [C.E.]), but according to Kvaeme (in 'Chronological' no. 97), he was born in 1136 A.D." (D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, p. 27, lack of hyphenation is mine). The latter is also the date found in the English Preface to the 1985 edition of the Secret Mother Tantra text; while the one of the 1971 edition places Guru Nontse in some unspecific time after the texts' burial in the eighth century.

125 Lopon Tenzin Namdak, personal communication, Houston, June 1996 and reiterated in Kathmandu, June 1997. It is interesting to note that many of the Bon treasures were discovered in this accidental manner, after they were hidden because of the persecutions. This differs from the Buddhist tradition where the treasures were discovered by people who were considered reincarnations of disciples of Guru Rinpoche, who had hidden those teachings because the people were not ready for them. While the Bon discoverers (gter ston) were usually ordinary, and often illiterate people, the Buddhist discoverers were considered great masters that brought forth those teachings because it was the time when people were ripe for them. In that sense the Buddhist discoveries were predetermined, i.e., who was going to discover what text, and when, were foretold by Guru Rinpoche or other great masters or deities (especially skygoers). The Bon tradition claims that many of its treasure discoveries were not predetermined but accidental—sometimes even robbers would be the discoverers. However, they too have some treasures that were discovered by great masters or people like Guru Nontse, who may be "charismatically" related to the institutors of the lineage. The topic of discovered treasures is very interesting, and the accidental (or seemingly accidental) vs. predetermined models might bring forth some further information about the similarities and differences between Bon and Buddhism.

126 Lopon affirms that even though Guru Nontse is often considered to be a teacher and scholar, in actuality he was no scholar (Lopon Tenzin Namdak, personal communication, Kathmandu, June 1997).

127 D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, p. 28.

128 Ibid, p. 29. The lack of hyphenation in Tibetan transliteration is mine.

129 Martin acknowledges to be confused as to "which texts, precisely, were supposed to be 'missing' because they weren't successfully copied, because of inconsistency in the attribution of titles to the different commentarial cycles" (D. Martin, electronic correspondence, November 1998).

130 "This version is just a little longer than an outline; it merely mentions and very succinctly describes, the forty-five wisdom spheres (ye shes thig le zhe Inga) which will be mentioned below.

131 S. Karmay, *A Catalogue of Bonpo Publications*, p. 20. I modified the quote by using the English titles instead of the Tibetan ones.

132 D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, p. 29. He states that the Meditation Commentary indicates this on pp. 418–19.

133 J. Reynolds, "The Threefold Practice of the Primordial State of the Mother Tantra," p. 9. Martin also adds that, "[i]t seems that some missing parts were subsequently aurally revealed, by Dmu-ryal [Mushen Nyima Gyaltzen], which complicates matters still a bit more" (D. Martin, electronic correspondence, November 1998).

134 Ma rgyud thugs rje nyi ma'i rgyud skor, published by Tshultrim Tashi, Dolanji, India: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Community, 1985.

135 *ibid*, index page. As for the contents of each of the chapters of the 1971 edition, see S. Karmay, *A Catalogue of Bonpo Publications*, pp. 19–21. Below I will provide a brief summary of it as well, and later, a structure according to the 1985 edition. Since there is nothing said about Zhonu not having copied the brief commentary, it could be that it is included in the medium-length one.

136 D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, p. 13. In an electronic correspondence (in November 1998), he confirmed that the historical preface (bdu chad), is "rather confusingly simply titled sGorn 'grel nyi ma'i snying po in the version I originally used [the 1971 edition] (but then this title 'properly' belongs to a much larger collection of texts than just the preface)."

137 *s. Karmay, A Catalogue of Bonpo Publications*, p. 20; and Martin directs the reader to it as well (D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, p. 29).

138 Lopon Tenzin Namdak told me that *Meditation Commentary: Mandala of the Sun* includes the *Commentary of Base and Path*. He is not sure about the *Commentary of the Fruit* since it does not exist (Lopon Tenzin Namdak, telephone conversation, August 1998). Martin made clear to me that "[w]hen I say 'Meditation Commentary' in this context, I mean nothing more than the historical preface [ch. 4 or nga depending on the edition!," and adds that "version G [the 1985 edition] is explicit about [that] initial text being a preface" (D. Martin, electronic correspondences, November 1998). But as seen in ft. 136, Martin affirms that the title 'properly' encompasses "a much larger collection of texts than just the preface."

139 Lopon Tenzin Namdak, personal communication, Kathmandu, June 1997. Also see J. Reynolds, "The Mandala of the Sun," p. 34. Here the idea of people not being yet ripe to hear the teachings is seen within the Bon context. This could be linked with the study of treasure discoveries in both traditions, as suggested in an earlier footnote. Reynolds adds that there was one other yogi by the name of Bucni (Bu ci) that Guru Nontse considered ready for this teaching (J. Reynolds, "The Mandala of the Sun," p. 34).

160 *Ibid*, p.32. The change in capitalization and lack of hyphenation in Tibetan transliteration is mine.

161 Sun of Compassion (Thugs rje nyi ma) represents the name of the main deity: the King of Compassion (Thugs rje rgyal po) also called The Great Secret King (gSang mchog rgyal po), which is so for being in the Secret Cycle. Lopon Tenzin Namdak, personal communication, Mexico, June 1998.

162 As for the list of the forty-five wisdom spheres, see J. Reynolds, "The Mother Tantra from the Bon Tradition," pp. 5–7.

163 in the Buddhist texts the Truth Dimension is chos sku, and the Perfected or Enjoyment Dimension is longs sku.

164 Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, pp. 32–3.

165 See D. Martin, *Mandala Cosmogony*, p. 33.

166 Since there were no extant commentaries by Milu Samlek on the six parts of the fruit, no chapter enumeration is available, although the name and sequence follow the root text. Shardza Rinpoche wrote a commentary on the Root Text of the Fruit entitled *Bras bu rdzogs sangs rgyas pa'i rgyud kyi dgomgs 'grel rnam par nges pa gsang ba mthar thug nyi zer drwa ba zhes by a ba bzhugs so*.

167 J. Reynolds, "The Mother Tantra from the Bon Tradition," p. 6.

168 Note that this is the same text which J. Reynolds translates as "The Threefold Practice of the Primordial State of the Mother Tantra."

169 J. Reynolds, "The Threefold Practice of the Primordial State of the Mother Tantra," p. 17.

A Short Biography Tapihritsa

Here is "The Story of Tapihritsa" as told by Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche (excerpted from the edited transcript of his oral teachings translated by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche). Knowing the details of Tapihritsa's very real life makes the "Invocation of Tapihritsa," an offering composed and sung by Nangzher Lopo, Tapihritsa's student, all the more inspiring!

Tapihritsa was an ordinary person from a nomadic family in the country of Zhang Zhung. The main teacher of Tapihritsa was Dawa Gyaltzen. Tapihritsa practiced for nine years before he attained illumination. The place where he practiced is a holy place outside Mount Kailesh, a place called Senge Tap. After nine years of practice there, Tapihritsa achieved the rainbow body. Tapihritsa was a contemporary of the king of Zhang Zhung, Ligmincha, and the king of Tibet, Tritson Detsun, and other famous yogis of Bon.

Nangzher Lopo was a very famous master, a knowledgeable and very accomplished practitioner, famous at that time in Zhang Zhung. Later he became the main student of Tapihritsa. Even though Tapihritsa had been taught by Nangzher Lopo before, Nangzher Lopo had had a problem with pride and had not been fully realized. Therefore, at this time, Tapihritsa emanated as a young boy and came down to the village where a rich man, Yungdrung Gyal, the main sponsor of Nangzher Lopo, lived. Tapihritsa came in the form of a young boy seeking employment in the family of Yungdrung Gyal, and he served them for a number of years. Nangzher Lopo was meditating on a mountain where there were bushes, and Tapihritsa was taking care of the family's animals. These very places can be identified today in the Western part of Tibet. Today when people go to these powerful places they have a lot of experiences and visions. Some people who don't know the history of the place think they are seeing ghosts or something.

Tapihritsa was carrying a lot of wood in his bag for cooking food. He went to visit Nangzher Lopo to pay respect. Nangzher Lopo hesitated when he saw the behavior of this young boy. The way he was paying respect seemed special and mature, and he thought, "Who is this guy?" So Nangzher Lopo said to the boy that it looked like he had worked through some doctrines and tenets. He asked him, "Who is your teacher and what is your practice? What are you carrying? Why are you behaving this way?" The young boy said, "My teacher is this vision. Visions are my teacher. My practice is thought-less, my meditation is all sentient beings. What I am carrying is my thoughts. I am behaving like this because I am a servant of the family of samsara." Since the young boy answered in that way, Nangzher Lopo was surprised and they entered into a debate. Nangzher Lopo said, "If these visions are your master, it probably means you don't have a master; if your meditation is thought-less, you don't need food; if you are meditating on sentient beings, that means you are enlightened; if you are carrying thoughts, you don't have desire; and if you are a servant of samsaric beings, you don't suffer!"

The young boy answered again (and in this debate the teachings have already begun). "If you don't realize that vision is your master, who taught Samantabhadra?" asked the

young boy. "My practice is thought-less because in the base there is no thought, and when there is a thought, there is no practice. I am meditating on all sentient beings because I don't separate or discriminate among others, because if one is discriminating there won't be meditation. I am carrying thoughts. That means I don't have thoughts. Because I don't have thoughts, I don't have desire. I realize that everything is illusion. I help all sentient beings because I don't make a distinction between suffering and not suffering."

Then the debate continued. "If you are that good," says Nangzher Lopo, "we need to go in front of the king and debate. If you win, you will become my master. If I win, you will be punished by the king." Tapihritsa had a big laugh. "All karma and conditions, causes and results are false." Basically, he was teasing Nangzher Lopo, saying, "All these meditators are prisoners of thoughts; they keep thoughts in a prison and are prison guards! All these intellectuals who debate don't realize they cast a net in the darkness. All these discussions are like a joke and a play, a weapon of words. All the sacred tantras are merely elaborations of one's mind. All these knowledgeable persons are meaningless – they know and have no experience." So he was teasing, saying, "These great views are bubbles of words – all these things are meaningless and make no sense. The real condition cannot be changed. The real essence cannot be practiced. Self-arising wisdom cannot be obscured. When you realize, you cannot re-realize or try to realize again. So what is the matter? Who is complaining?"

Now Nangzher Lopo was getting a bit irritated and realized this was not just a boy, but a special person. He was shocked and could almost not speak. In that moment of shock and surprise, he looked at the young boy who was sitting up in space and that is how we draw him – in space and in the rainbow. So Nangzher Lopo was really sad, realizing all this bad karma he had created by having the wrong view. He did prostrations and confession, realizing the boy was a manifestation of his teacher. Then he requested the teaching. Right at that moment, the owner of all the animals, Yungdrung Gyal, came and saw this discussion. He said, "What are you doing there all this time? Where are all the animals?"

So immediately Nangzher Lopo – who knew Yungdrung Gyal very well – said, "What bad karma we created! You put the master as a servant and I said all these things to him!" Yungdrung Gyal went into shock. Those shocks are good. When you wake up, you are in a different place. So the young boy went up into space and said, "I am Tapihritsa and I came especially for you."

So this is the story. Then Tapihritsa began teaching Yungdrung Gyal and Nangzher Lopo. He said, "Listen carefully and do not be distracted." So both were clearly listening. Do you understand who Tapihritsa is now? This is not just a story; it is a fact; it happened. It happened during the seventh or eighth century. The teachings are the Dzogpa Chenpo, the Great Perfection. The result is the rainbow body. There is no doubt. If there is doubt in you, it is your karma. (Actually, Tapihritsa asked them to listen carefully, but at the same time he was speaking to all beings, and Lopon is saying that basically he is talking to all of you.)

The Nine Ways of Bon

by D.L. Snellgrove

The following text is from "The Nine Ways of Bon: Excerpts from Gzi-brjid". Edited and Translated by D.L. Snellgrove, pp.1-23 London Oriental Series , Vol 18, Oxford University Press 1968.

INTRODUCTION

The bonpos

To practising bonpos – and nowadays it has become comparatively easy to meet them if one knows where to look among the many tens of thousands of Tibetans who have arrived as refugees in India and Nepal–BON simply means the true religion of Tibet. To the far greater number of other Tibetans, who are not Bonpos, BON refers to the false teachings and practices that were prevalent in Tibet before Buddhism finally succeeded in gaining a firm hold on the country.

Bonpos are regarded as pagans –and as such they have suffered serious hostility in the past– and nowadays others take as little account of their existence as possible. By western scholars BON is generally understood as referring to the pre–Buddhist beliefs and practices of the Tibetans. Several scholars have discussed the actual meaning of this term. By the few Bonpos who know their texts well BON is explained as the Tibetan equivalent of the Zhang–Zhung term gYer which means 'chant'. Textual evidence can be shown for this in the titles of works said to be translated from the language of Zhang–Zhung into Tibetan. Here bon is regularly glossed by gYer. This is the original meaning they say, for they know that bon now covers all the meanings of the Tibetan Buddhist term chos .

As is well known, chos simply translates Sanskrit dharma in all its Buddhist meaning. There is no word for 'Buddhism' in Tibetan. Tibetans are either chos–pa (followers of chos) or bon–po (followers of bon). They both use the term sanyg–rgyas (literally:'amply purified') to define a perfected sage, a buddha. Thus in translation of bonpo texts there continues to be such terms as 'buddha' and 'buddhahood'. Any readers who are new to the subject will therefore assume that BON is a form of Buddhism, and that it has certainly developed as such there is no doubt. In this work we are bound to understand BON in the full bonpo sense and that includes all their

gradual adaptation of Buddhist doctrine and practice. They themselves do not acknowledge these Buddhist elements as adaptations. Lacking the necessary historical sense, they persist in claiming that all their teachings and doctrines are the true original BON, particularly promulgated directly in Tibet by gShen-rab , their founder, but mainly received the rough translations from the language of Zhang-Zhung of ancient western Tibet.

The ultimate source of their teachings is sTag-gzigs , a country situated rather vaguely still further to the west. They would claim that it is the chos-pa, the 'Buddhists' of Tibet, who are the adapters and the plagiarists. Without accepting their claims, we are nevertheless bound to accept their interpretations of terms in presenting an account of their teachings and practices, and this is the primary intention of the present volume. In giving an account of any religion we cannot ignore what the practisers have to say about themselves. Thus in giving an historical account of Buddhism itself, we cannot ignore, for example, the eighty-four Siddhas, however different their doctrines and practices may be from those of the early Buddhists. We cannot deny the term Buddhist to the Newars of the Nepal Valley, however much they seem to be influenced by Brahmanical practice. We can merely observe that their form of Buddhism represents a very special development of this religion. Likewise in the case of the Bonpos we have to accept them and understand them as they are, while still trying to unravel the historical developments of their religion. An understanding of them on their own terms is all the more important nowadays, because we need the assistance of their few remaining scholars in order to understand something of their early texts.

Tibetans who can help with these texts are now very rare indeed. Educated bonpo monks are brought up in the dGe-lugs-pa ('Yellow Hat') Way, trained in conventional Buddhist philosophy and logic and receiving after examination by debate the academic degree of dGe-bshe . They know their monastic liturgies and the names of their own bonpo gods, but very rarely indeed are they at all experienced in reading the sort of bonpo texts in which we most need assistance, namely material which represents 'pre-Buddhist' traditions. This lack of familiarity on the part of present-day bonpos with what Western scholars would regard as real bon material, may come as a disappointment. It also explains why there still remain terms and ideas not yet properly interpreted in this present work.

Among the three bonpo monks who accompanied me to England in 1961 was Tenzin

Namdak, once Lopön (slob-dpon), best translated as 'Chief Teacher', at sManri (3). Tenzin Namdak, who has now returned to India after three years in England, is a devoted Bonpo, firm in his doctrines as well as his vows. Initiated primarily in a threefold bon tantra, the Ma-rgyud sngs-rgyas rgyud gsum , he was practised in the meditations and teachings of the VIIIth Way. Remaining celibate, he continued to adhere to the rules of the Vith Way, or rather he adhered to them as far as possible in a foreign western setting. We have read through many texts together and it was on his suggestion that we set to work to produce a concise account of the 'Nine Ways on Bon', and it was he who selected the extracts which serve as the substance of the present account.

The Source of the 9 Ways of Bon

The source of these extracts is a work entitled hdus-pa-rin-po-che dri-ma med-pa gzi-brjid rab tu hbar-bahi mdo 'The precious compendium the blazing Sutra Immaculate and Glorious', in short referred to simply as gZi-brjid 'The Glorious'. This work seems to be quite unknown outside Tibet. gShen-rab 's 'biography' is written in three versions, one long, one of medium length and one short. gZi-brjid in twelve volume is the long version. gZer-mig in two volume is the medium version. mDo-hdus in one volume is the short one. gZer-mig is known of by Western Scholars since A.H. Francke edited and translated the first seven chapters, which are published in Asia Major, 1924, 1926, 1927, 1930, and 1939. Professor Hoffmann has also used gZer-mig for the brief account that he gives of gShen-rab 's life in his „The religions of Tibet" (pp. 85-97). mDo-hdus remains unknown in the West, although there may be a copy somewhere in India.

These three works are all classed by the bonpos as 'Kanjur' (the term is borrowed from the Buddhists), that is to say as the inspired word of their early sages as translated from the languages of Zhang-zhung. gZi-brjid is further classed as 'oral-tradition' (snyan-rgyud). It is believed that rTang-chen mu-thsa-gyer-med , a disciple of the sage Dran-pa nam-mkhah (eight century), transmitted it in a vision to Blo-ldan snyin-po , who compiled it in its present form.

The 'Great Incarnation' (mchog-sprul) Blo-ldan snyin-po of Khyung-po in Khams is a well-known literary figure of the bonpos . He was a close contemporary of Tsong-kha-pa , for he was born about A.D. 1360. He is said to have died in his twenty-fifth year.

Thus gZi-brjid would seem to have been compiled towards the end of the fourteenth century, and the contents of the work bear out this tradition. By that time the bonpos had absorbed the vast variety of Indian Buddhist teachings, and so were able to restate them as the substance of their higher doctrines of the 'Nine Ways' with the conviction that can only come from that experience and knowledge that is based upon well learned lessons combined with practical experience. At the same time they had preserved through their own oral and literary traditions large quantities of indigenous material

which goes back to the eighth century and earlier. But by the fourteenth century bonpos had long since forgotten the meanings of many of the earlier names and terms.

From the manner in which he orders his material in the first two 'Ways', it is clear that the compiler was by no means sure of himself as when he was dealing with the later Buddhist material.

The copy of gZi-rjid used by us came from Samling monastery in Doplo. According to its brief colophon, the lama responsible for our manuscript was Yan-ston Nam-mkah rin-chen and it was written at Klu-brag. Fortunately, he writes more about his family in the 'preface' (dkar-chags) to the manuscript. He praises his nephews Sri-dar rnam-rgyal, Rin-chen and hKhro-ba, and especially his elder brother Yang-ston Tshul-hkrims rnam-rgyal , who consecrated the finished manuscript.

Thus despite the difference in name, these relationships identify him firmly with Lama Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan , who is referred to in the genealogy of the lamas of Samling as a great producer of books. gZi-brjid is specifically mentioned. 'It was the measure of an arrow (in size), and as a sign of (this lama's) phenomenal powers each time the pen was dipped in the inkpot a whole string of words was written.' Unfortunately, the scanty references to dates in this genealogy leave the period uncertain. It is, however, possible to calculate that this Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan belonged to the ninth generation from Yang-ston rGyal-mtshan rin-chen , the founder Lama of Samling, who must have lived in the thirteenth century.

Thus, our manuscript is probably about 400 years old. It was copied from an existing manuscript at Lu-brag and then brought to Samling.

The Chapters of the gZi-brjid

The gZi-brjid is an enormous work, totalling in our manuscript 2,791 folios. There are twelve volumes numbered ka to da with a final volume a . The text is arranged in sixty-one chapters, and a list of these chapters will give some idea of the scope of this composite work:

- 1 'The teacher descends from the gods of pure light'
- 2 'The teacher turns the Wheel of Bon for the non-gods'
- 3 'The sutra of the coming of the doctrine of the buddhas'
- 4 'The sutra of gShen-rabs taking birth'
- 5 'The sutra of the young prince's playful sport'
- 6 'The sutra of the prince's enthronement'
- 7 'The sutra of the prince's law-giving'
- 8 'The sutra of the IInd Way of the Shen of Illusion'
- 9 'The sutra of the IIIrd Way of the Shen of Existence'
- 10 'The sutra explaining the Way of the Shen of Existence'

- 11 'The sutra that teaches the meaning of mandala of the five universal (buddha-)bodies'
- 12 'The sutra explaining the Way of the Virtuous Adherers'
- 13 The sutra explaining the Way of the great ascetics
- 14 The sutra of the VIIth Way of pure sound
- 15 Thw sutra of the VIIIth Way of the primaeval Shen
- 16 The sutra of the IXth and supreme Way
- 17 The sutra explaining the bon of the various translations
- 18 The sutra of spreading the doctrine by converting those who are hard to convert
- 19 The sutra of the mandala of the Loving Conqueror
- 20 The sutra of the very form and precious doctrine
- 21 The sutra of the three tenets taught by the teacher
- 22 The sutra of the spreading reays that convert sentient beings
- 23 The sutra explaining cause and effect
- 24 The sutra of the teacher drawing beings to salvation
- 25 The sutra of the light of the Blessed All-knowing
- 26 The liturgy of the All-Good the Ocean of Victory
- 27 The sutra of the washing away of the sind of King Gu-wer
- 28 The sutra of the teacher's taking the most glorious of wives
- 29 The sutra of the teacher's producing the offspring of method and wisdom
- 30 The sutra of the Teacher's assumption of royal power
- 31 The sutra of the producing of offspring who convert sentient beings
- 32 The sutra of the Teacher teaching Bon to the gods
- 33 The spell of the Fierce Destroyer
- 34 Mandala of the liturgy of the God of Medicine
- 35 The sutra of the pure prayer of good conduct
- 36 The sutra of the Teacher teaching bin to the serpents
- 37 The sutra of Mara's magical display to the teacher
- 38 The secret spell the Destroyer of Mara
- 39 The sutra of the Teacher establishing the realm of Mara in salvation
- 40 The sutra of removing obstructions and subduing Mara
- 41 The sutra of producing offspring for continuing the family-line of royal sway
- 42 The sutra for establishing the teaching of the IXth Way
- 43 The sutra for establishing the teaching about relics
- 44 The sutra of the acquisition of the way of salvation of thr supreme order
- 45 The Mother sutra the Great Way of the Word of the Perfection of Wisdom
- 46 The sutra of the mandala of the Great Way of the Mother
- 47 The spell of the Sacred Light of Vaidurya
- 48 The liturgy of the basic mandala of the goddess Loving kindness
- 49 The sutra in praise of the twenty-one forms of the goddess Loving Kindness
- 50 The sutra establishing the three forms of the doctrine
- 51 The sutra of the Teacher leaving his home and becoming a religious wanderer
- 52 The sutra of the perfecting of austerities, the actions of a Shen
- 53 The sutra of the manifestations of the four spoked wheel of Bon
- 54 The sutra of pure disciplinary rules
- 55 The basic sutra of the pure regulations of the Shen
- 56 The sutra of the sections of the regulations of the Shen
- 57 The sutra of the pure virtuous conduct of the Shen
- 58 The sutra of removing the hellish evils of King 'Kong'
- 59 The sutra of the Teacher leaving his entourage and practicing in solitude
- 60 The sutra explaining the meanings of the names, marks and qualities of the buddhas
- 61 The sutra of the Teacher handing the Bon doctrine over into the care (of others)

The titles of these chapters will indicate at once to any (non-Tibetan) Buddhist scholar the dependence of this work upon Buddhist material. Although the study of the gZer-mig remains incomplete, there has never been any doubt that the inspiration and the framework for the legend of gShen-rab have been derived from the life of Shakyamuni. Yet this framework has been filled with indigenous Tibetan legendary material which still awaits serious study.

In this present work we have made a very restricted use of gZi-brjid, extracting excerpts relevant to the bonpo doctrines of the 'Nine Ways'. The Tibetan term theg-pa, as all Buddhist scholars of Tibetan will know, simply represents the Sanskrit Buddhist term yana, and I translate it sometimes as 'Way', and sometimes as 'Vehicle'. However, there are very few Tibetans, however well educated, who know the original meaning of theg-pa (as connected with the verb hdegs-pa and its various roots, meaning 'raise' or 'sustain'), and who thus understand it in the meaning of 'vehicle'. No Tibetan Buddhist would think of accusing the bonpos of having appropriated terms that were originally Buddhist. To all Tibetans, whether Buddhist or bonpo, their religious vocabulary is just part of their own language to be used as they please. But the non-Tibetan Buddhist scholar readily recognizes those terms which were once specially coined as the Tibetan equivalents of Indian Buddhist technical terms. He is thus able to pass judgement on bonpo material in a way which no Tibetan has yet thought of doing.

Remarks On The 9 Ways Edition

Chaps., 9 Ways, and Remarks

The brief extracts here edited have been taken from Chapters 7,8,9,12,13,14,15 and 16. In editing we have not hesitated to emend the text as seemed desirable. The original manuscript spellings are shown in the case of all 'main word' (ming) changes, but we have not recorded every 'particle' (tshig-phrad) emendment. Connecting particles (kyi, gyi , etc.) are often written instead of the corresponding instrumental particles (kyis, gyis , etc.) and vice versa. The particles te, ste, de are sometimes used incorrectly (e.g. yin-ste instead of yin-te), and la is written for las and vice versa. It would be tedious and misleading for any student to follow the text from

the translations if such corrections were not made. The text is written in dbu-med and abbreviated compounds are quite frequent. Numerals are normally written in figures and not in letters, and since I have spelt out the numerals in every case, it will no longer be obvious how for example 'eight' may be safely corrected to 'two'. After final vowels (not only after a) h is regularly added, as in gtoh, dbyeh , etc. In conformity with later Tibetan practice, I have omitted h except after final a. Generally, the manuscript is clear and remarkably accurate. Some 'mistakes' tend to be regular. For example gnyan 'a fury' is regularly written as gnyen, klung-rta is regularly written as srungs-rta . Certain spellings, which may appear unusual to other scholars, we have, however, preserved, for example, sgra-bla for dgra-lha.

I present the translation in the hope that interested reader will assist me in identifying the associations that may be apparent to them in much of the materia, for I do not pretend to have solved all the problems. A brief survey of the 'Nine Ways' may assist comprehension.

I. THE WAY OF THE SHEN OF THE PREDICTION (*phyva-gshen theg-pa*)

This describes fairly coherently four methods of prediction:

- (a) sortilege (*mo*)
- (b) astrological calculation (*rtsis*)
- (c) ritual (*gto*)
- (d) medical diagnosis (*dpyad*).

II. THE WAY OF THE SHEN OF VISUAL WORLD (*snang-gshen theg-pa*)

This is the longest and most difficult section of our work. It is concerned with overpowering or placating the gods and demons of this world, and I suspect that even the original compiler if the work was already unfamiliar with many of the divinities and rites to which he refers. Thus the account is not really coherent, but it makes quite sufficient sense. The various practices are arranged into four parts:

1) The lore of exorcism (employing) the 'great exposition' of existence (I have written on 'exposition' smrang . The rite is clearly described in the translation). The text then goes on to describe various types of divinities, the thug-khar , the wer-ma , and other. Some are described in great detail, and some, such as the cang-seng, and shug-mgon , scarcely mentioned except by name. Finally, we are told the 'lore of stream of existence' (srid-pahi rgyud gzhung). This is presumably all part of the 'exposition' (smrang) of the officiating priest.

2) This deals with demons (hdre) and vampires (sri), their origin, nature, and the ways of suppressing them.

3) This deals with ransom of all kinds. Their extraordinary variety testifies to their importance in early Tibetan religion. Tenzin Namdak can identify very few of them, and I doubt that any other living Tibetan can do much better. My translations of the many unfamiliar terms are as literal as possible, but they do not pretend to be explanatory.

4) This deals with fates (phyva) and furies (gnyan) and local divinities generally (sa-bdag, gtog, lha, dbal , etc.) and the offerings due to them.

III. THE WAY OF THE SHEN OF ILLUSION (hprul-gshen theg-pa)

This is concerned with rites for disposing of enemies of all kinds. The rites described here are to be found in the bon tantras, e.g. those of dBal-gsas and the khro-bahi rgyud drug , which we have on microfilms. Similar practices are referred to in Buddhist tantras, e.g. Hevajra -Tantra.

IV. THE WAY OF THE SHEN OF EXISTENCE (srid-gshen theg-pa)

This deals with beings in the 'Intermediate state' (bar-do) between death and rebirth, and ways of leading them towards salvation.

V. THE WAY OF THE VIRTUOUS ADHERERS (dGe-bsnyen theg-pa)

dGe-bsnyen is the normal Tibetan term for upasaka which in India referred to the Buddhist layman. Similarly, here it refers to those who follow the practice of the ten virtues and the ten perfections, and who build and worship stupas.

VI. THE WAY OF THE GREAT ASCETICS (drang-srong theg-pa)

drang-rong translates rsi which in India refers to the great seers of the past. Drang-rong is used by bonpos to refer to fully qualified monks, corresponding to the buddhist term dge-slong (= bhiksu). This is the way of strict ascetic discipline. The whole inspiration is Buddhist, but many of the arguments and even the substance of some rules are manifestly not Buddhist.

VII. THE WAY OF PURE SOUND (a-dkar theg-pa)

This deals with higher tantric practices. It gives a very good account of the tantric theory of 'transformation' through the mandala. (I have already summarized these ideas in my introduction to the Hevajra -Tantras). It then goes on to refer briefly to the union of Method and Wisdom as realized by the practiser and his feminine partner. This anticipates VIII. The section ends with concise lists of nine 'reliances', eighteen 'performances' and nine 'acts'. The 'reliances' comprise a list of primary needs, the 'performances' resume the whole process of ritual of the mandala, and the 'acts' represent the total power that accrues to one from mastering all the Nine Vehicles.

VIII. THE WAY OF THE PRIMEVAL SHEN (ye-shen theg-pa)

This deals with the need for a suitable master, as suitable partner, and a suitable site. The preparation of the mandala is then described in detail together with important admonitions not to forget the local divinities (sa-bdag). The process of mediation (known as the 'Process of Emanation'-in Sanskrit utpattikrama) is recounted (10). The last Part of this section describes the 'Process of Realisation' (Sanskrit nispannakrama), which is the 'super-rational' state of the perfected sage. His behaviour might often be mistaken for that of a madman.

IX. THE SUPREME WAY (bla-med theg-pa)

This describes the absolute, referred to as the 'basis' (gzi corresponding to Sanskrit alaya), from which 'release' and 'delusion' are both derived. 'Release' is interpreted as the state of fivefold buddhahood, and 'delusion' as the false conceptions of erring beings in the 'Intermediate State' (bar-do). 'The Way' is then described as mind in its absolute state, as the pure 'Thought of Enlightenment'. The 'Fruit' or final effect is then finally described in terms of the special powers of the perfected sage. The whole subject-matter is then resumed under the four conventional headings of insight, contemplation , practice and

achievement. The categories and ideas elaborated in this IXth Vehicle are usually referred to as the teachings of the 'Great Perfection' (rdzog-chen).

Bon – Classification of Ways

What is remarkable about the 'Nine Ways of Bon' is the succinct manner in which they resume the whole range of Tibetan religious practices:

- methods of prediction to which Tibetans of all religious orders and of all ranks of society are addicted
- placating and repelling local divinities of all kinds of whose existence all Tibetans, lay and religious, are equally convinced
- destroying enemies by fierce tantric rites practices in which Buddhists and bonpos are equally interested
- guiding the consciousness through the 'Intermediate State' powers claimed equally by the older orders of Tibetan Buddhism and by the bonpos
- moral discipline of devout believers and strict discipline of monastic orders ways that have followers in all orders of Tibetan religion
- tantric theory and ritual fundamental to the iconography and the worship of all Tibetan religious communities
- tales of perfected wonder-working sages typical again of the older orders of Tibetan Buddhism as well as bonpos.

All that is missing out of this list is the religious life of academic learning which is now typical of educated monks of the dGe-lugs-pa ('Yellow Hat') order. This is only omitted because when the list of 'Nine Ways' was elaborated, the dGe-lugs-pa way had not yet come into existence. But nowadays the bonpos have this, too, with their scholars of philosophy and logic and their academic honours and titles. Nor are they just dresses in other's plume. They really have developed the practices of all these diverse ways over the last thirteen centuries or so, and they have produced a very large literature of their own in support of all the various ways of their practice. Much of this literature, e.g.

some of their sutras and especially the 'Perfection of Wisdom' teachings, has been copied quite shamelessly from the Buddhists but by far the greater part would seem to have been absorbed through learning and then retold, and this is not just plagiarism.

In classing the four lower ways as 'Bon of cause' and the five higher ways as 'Bon of effect', they were trying sincerely to relate the old ways of magic ritual to the new ways of morality and meditation. If one practices even the rites of the 1st Way intent on the 'Thought of Enlightenment', benefit will come to all living beings. Likewise the 2nd Way is something for delighting living beings with benefits and happiness, but it is important to have as basis the raising of one's thought (to enlightenment). The 3rd Way, if practised properly, reaches out towards the 8th Way, achieving the effect where Method and Wisdom are indivisible. The practiser of the 4th Way, concerned as he is with rescuing others who wander in the 'Intermediate State', is effectively preparing himself for Buddhahood.

Conversely, the rites of the lower ways are still indispensable even when one has reached the higher ones. 'Fertile fields and good harvest, extent of royal powers and spread of dominion, although some half (of such effects) is ordained by previous actions (viz. Karmic effect), the other half comes from the powerful „lords of the soil"– so you must attend to the „lords of the soil", the serpents and the furies'.

Now every Tibetan, whatever religious order, believes this, but –to my knowledge– only the bonpos have formulated this belief as doctrine.

* * * * *

The Way of The Shen of Protection

The following text is from "The Nine Ways of Bon: Excerpts from Gzi-brjid". Edited and Translated by D.L. Snellgrove, pp.24-41 London Oriental Series , Vol 18, Oxford University Press 1968.

For the four subjects of (i) sotilege, (ii) astrological calculation, (iii) ritual, and (iv) diagnosis, there are explanations in general and in particular – an explanation of general lists and a concentration on particulars. These are the two matters of consideration.

First we deal with general lists:

- In characterizing sortilege, which is the divining of prognostics, there are 360 sortilege prognostics.
- In characterizing astrological calculation, which perceives so sharply, there are 360 horoscopes. In characterizing rites of curing illness, there are 360 methods.
- In characterizing diagnosis, which provides ransoms (1) for death, there are 21.000 methods of diagnosis.

Such indeed are the lists explained in general.

As for concentrating on particulars, there are four kinds of sortilege:

- the knot-sortilege (2) of Ye-srid-hphrul,
- the clairvoyance of Ye-mkhyen sgra-bla,
- the dream of Ye-rje smon-pa
- the soothsaying of Ye-dbang-lha.

So they are to be known as of four kinds.

There are four kinds of astrological calculation:

- the mirror of mysterious horoscopes (3)
- the sPar-kha and sMe-ba circle,
- the Time Wheel of the Elements
- calculations of combinations and effects by (the method known as) ju-zhag (4).

Thus they are known as of four kinds.

There are four kinds of ritual:

- the 'Awry' Rite for the elements in disorder
- the 'Striking' Rite using a combination of devices
- the 'Harrying' (5) Rite for overcoming evil influences,
- the 'Exchange' Rite of transposing two equal things.

Thus they are known as four kinds.

There are four kinds of diagnosis:

- Diagnosis by seeing the chief and subsidiary causes,
- Identification by examination of the connecting channels,
- Diagnosis of the urine (to discover) what will be of use and what is causing harms,
- Diagnosis of (the patient's) appearance (to discover) whether he will die or be cured.

Thus they are known as four kinds.

Of these four, sortilege, calculation, ritual and diagnosis, sortilege comes first as the foremost.

The three (gods) Ye-srid-hphrul-gyi rgyal-po, Kun-shes-hphrul-gyi drang-mkhan, and mNjon-shes phyahu gyang-dkar arranged this divination of prognostics for the phenomenal world, making a straight-forward distinction of true and false effects.

Make an examination from what is seen and what is not seen. On the basis of this diagnosis, make an estimate. Having made an estimate, fix your calculations, take stock of (the patient's) former, future, and present state, his disadvantages and his advantages. Count up the good and bad points, the beneficial and the harmful ones. Having counted them up, fix your calculations. Relying on your sortilege and calculation, you next act by means and of the rite the conditions (necessary) for the cure. Being for non-being, filling where there was emptiness, increase for decrease, production for destruction, wealth for poverty, recovery instead of death, benefit instead of harm, by thus accounting (to him) whatever is required, by these means you cure the person concerned. Finally as the end of the effects he is integrated by means of the diagnosis. As the end of unhappiness he is integrated in happiness. As the end of sickness he is integrated in recovery. As the end of harm he is integrated with what benefits. As the end of death he is integrated in being raised up. As the end of poison he is integrated with elixir. If anything is broken by his karmic effects, it is now integrated by being brought into union. (All this) is just reliance on methods which refer to relative truth. Phya-gshen, keep in your mind !

Again the Teacher (Shen-rab) said: Listen, Legs-rgyal Thang-po, listen ! Those items have been ordered in lists. Now secondly as for setting to work and practising, at the start of the process of setting to work raise your Thought towards Enlightenment and keep compassion as your basis, and with your mind intent on benefiting living beings,

whatever you learn of sortilege, calculations, rites and diagnosis, be clever and learn so as to know it! A clever man should turn harmful things to good use. If others would condemn you, stay stern. If people agree with you, take a right measure in their regard. If some show devotion, instruct them well. If some oppose you, cut off future trace with them. If there are arguments, be long-suffering. If others would vie with you, be indifferent to them. Although you benefit others, avoid pride. Although you cause harm, get rid of despondency. If things turn out ill, find a method to avoid them. Do not turn your face away from an angry man. Do not show a smiling countenance to one who comes with deceiving words. Do not laugh in wonderment at a man who deceives. Do not reply to one who tempts you. Do not conceal your words from a man who speaks honestly. Do not give reply to deceiving words. Do not follow after false rumours. Although you reach a high position, protect lowly people. Although you are great, protect lowly people. Although you are clever, guide those who do not know. Although you are experienced, watch your own measure. Although large offerings are made to you, do not act the big man. Although they are small, raise your Thought towards Enlightenment in the proper way. Where no one is patient (6) continue to act kindly. Apply yourself suitably in due measure and with skill. Do not do too much. Treat (your learning) as precious. But do not do too little. Explain things truly. If as a general rule both in the Bon of Cause and the Bon of Effect, you do not raise your Thought towards Enlightenment as your basic intent, you will not gain anywhere the (higher) effects of the (wordly) causes (7). So how should one obtain the highest truth ? Although one is concerned here with the Bon of Cause, keep going all the time with the Thought of Enlightenment. Thence benefit will come to living beings. Avoid unskilful precipitancy. Avoid the self-esteem of thinking one knows. Avoid the pride of thinking one is clever. Avoid pricking thorns in others. Avoid the relaxation of being pleased with yourself. Avoid the insolence of one who does not know. Avoid acts which do not fit the occasion. Avoid ritual items which are unsuitable. Avoid untruths of things unseen. Avoid ignorant gossip. Avoid ignorant 'big talk'. Avoid news of where you have not been. Avoid techniques in which you are unexperienced. Avoid unsuitable activities. Avoid desiring what you do not possess. In all things be free from deceit. In the company of fools a clever man (appears) foolish. To those who do not know he seems quite ordinary. To the ignorant gold may seem as stone. Therefore it is good for a clever man to be among clever man.

Sortilege, calculation, ritual, diagnosis, whichever of these you do, you must follow the required order, avoiding or accepting (as occasion demands) in starting (this works) and in the order of instruction. Thus by being skilled and accomplished, experienced and

self-reliant, clever in method and skilful, such a man will be honoured for this skill. As for what spreads forth from this, he acts thereby as guide in the Way of the Shen of Prediction, producing happiness in the phenomenal world and causing it to spread wide and boundless.

Again he said: Listen, Legs-rgyal Thang-po, listen ! The way of setting about this work is as above. Now next we deal with the order of operation. Of sortilege, calculation, ritual and diagnosis, first we consider the prognostics of sortilege. On a piece of white felt which serves as the basis one place the 'sprinklings' of green barley, and one sets up the 'symbol of life', the bronze-tipped arrow, to which is attached a turquoise ornament. There are wafts of smoke from incense-wood, marking the way taken by the sweet-smelling incense. Worship with an offering of the sacrificial heap of barley-flour and butter. Worship with the sacrificial offering of consecrated chang. The officiating priest (8) should recite the exposition (9). Worship the great god Phu-wer dka-po. Invoke the knot-sortilege of Ye-srid-hphrul. Produce (within yourself) the clairvoyance of Ye-mkhyen sgra-bla. Reflect upon the dream of Ye-rje smon-pa. Effect the soothsaying of Ye-dbang-lha. Name everything that has happened in the past (of your client). Set in order everything referring to the future. Write down evils and benefits (to come) and the length of his life. Distinguish in a straightforward way the good and the bad, the fair and the foul. Truth and falsehood there may be, but make true distinction. Such is the way of benefiting people, according as each may require.

Secondly for calculating the horoscopes, on a cloth (made) of a piece of brocade silk one must set the squared calculating board, arrange the white and black pieces. Worship the Ye-srid lha-dbang rgyal-po. Requite the goddesses of the Elements and Time-Periods. Pray to dBan-chen bdag-po. Then make an estimate and calculate. Look in the mystic mirror of the horoscope. Work the sPar-kha sMe-ba Circle. Calculate the cycles of the Elements and the Time Periods. Examine the combinations occurring by (the method) ju-zhag. Examining them, identify and distinguish them knowledgeably: the former, past and present state, the way it comes about from major and minor causes, the way events and prayers have corresponded, ways of change in Time, Existence and the Elements, the way these influence former combinations, way of change in the Four Seasons, Strength and weakness of gods, demons and klung-rta (10) avoiding and accepting the effects of evils and benefits, an estimate of good and bad and of length of life, the characteristics of increase and decrease of the years, the months, the days, the hours, a wise man must do this and calculate it quietly. He must identify harm wherever it is, and explain benefits wherever they are, and arrange whatever combinations can be

brought into accord. He must write down whatever will happen, and so bring benefit to living beings.

Thirdly as for making cures by means of rites for living beings, ignorant creatures, when sPar-kha, Year-Cycle, the sMe-ba sphere, and antagonistic elements are in disarray, one must perform the 'Awry' Rite for the Universe in disarray. Draw a magic circle with clean sand, a circle drawn with sand of five colours. (Set up) twigs with coloured wools and silk of five colours.

Make a first offering of a pure sacrificial cake made from different grains, and of the three milk and the three sweet substances. Worship the goddesses of the Elements and the Time-Periods. Recite as a prayer some true expositions of the Conqueror. Thus the completely disarrayed elements will be quietened, And everything disarrayed will be put in place.

In order to produce long life, happiness and good fortune for those creatures wretched men, Perform the 'Striking' Rite, combining use of ritual devices. On some clean place as working-base draw a swastika in grain. Prepare the devices for the rite, the implements and talismans. Offer libations, gifts and consecrated chang. Worship the eight gods of Prediction and Good Fortune And bring all phenomenal elements into interrelation. Pronounce the blessing of interrelationship, and beings will be cured with benefits and happiness. When beings of the Six Spheres Are struck with an impediment and come near to death, in order to save them from impediments and reverse this evil, (use) the 'Stinging' Rite which works by knowledge of prognostic signs. For devils (bdud), fiends (btsan), she-demons (ma mo), spirits of death (gshin-rje) devils which attack man's length of days, sprites which cause impediments, and devils which attack life-force, (against these) establish life-ransoms, life-pledges and amulets. Pay debts of evil with life-ransoms as payment for life. Worship the eight gods who preserve life and happiness. Reverse the troubles that befall men and save them from their impediments. Thus he is ransomed from death and fixed up with an amulett, and so you produce benefits, joy and happiness for living beings. For all living beings, afflicted with attacks by the eight kinds of sprite, b yhating and consuming gods and demons, you must perform the 'Exchange' Rite of transposing two equal things. Prepare the ritual devices (mDos) (11) and ritual items, the right sized figurine as ransom for the patient's body, the sky symbol, the tree symbol, the arrow, distaff, and ritual stakes, the male figure, the female figure, the rock plant mtshe, and mustard-seed, (a model of) the house and its wealth, the things one desires. If they are exchanged as equal things, the

ransom will be good. If they are transposed as equivalents, they will be chosen as payment. To the hosts of noble buddhas make salutation, offerings and prayer for refuge. Then offer the items of ransom, explaining them truly. Although (your patient) is about to die, you can delay his death for the space of three years. In order to benefit beings, profit them by means of these rites. They will make you happy with offerings and fees. So the benefits of ritual have now been explained.

Fourthly in caring (for others) by means of diagnosis, when the ignorant beings of the Six Spheres suffer from diseases (arising from) molestations (klesha), in order to benefit them in their illness by diagnosis, the physician with the Thought set on Enlightenment, should raise his thought to the four immeasurable virtues, take refuge in the hosts of buddhas, and offer a mandala in thanksgiving and worship. He should worship the King Be-du-rgya-'od (Vaidurya) and his eight fellow buddhas, gods of medicine. Then he should diagnose the major and minor causes in all that can be seen, and identify the disease by diagnosis of the connecting channels. Diagnose from the urine what is of benefit and what is of harm. Diagnose from the appearance all signs of death and signs of cure. Thus identifying the disease, Heat or cold, phlegm or bile, or some combination, the medicine is then applied, cooling, warming, equalizing, powder, pills or syrup, potion, ointment or butter-mould. Medicine for every man must fit with the disease. All feverish conditions are counteracted by the cooling kind, all cold conditions by the warming kind, all phlegmatic conditions by the dispersing kind, conditions of bile by the uniting kind, combination disturbances by the equalizing kind.

For the 21.000 types of combinations one applies 21.00 types of medicine, and so expels the afflicted conditions of ignorance.

Treatment is of four main kinds:

- treatment with medicine of elixier,
- treatment with medicine for bodily cure,
- treatment with method and practice,
- treatment in unprescribed ways.

Curing is of four main kinds:

medicine, bleeding and branding, tranquillizing with method and spells.

Whatever is required must accord with the type of disease.

After absorbing (the medicine) come taste and effect, pleasance of taste and force of effect. After absorption it is gentle and pleasant. For the disease vomiting and purifying by excretion, and the after-state is tranquil and pleasant. Food may be suitable, harmful, or indifferent. Keep to what is suitable and avoid what is harmful, taking the right measure of the part that is indifferent. In diagnosis we have the connecting channels, the urine and the general appearance. Watch the channels, examine the urine, and diagnosis from the general appearance, let the result coincide. If you are sure you see signs of death, urge him to practice of virtue. If he is cut off by karmic effects, ritual and diagnosis are useless. If it is certain his time of death has come, Even food which should nourish the body may be his life's enemy. But if it is not such a case, and he suffers from an accident or a sudden disease, you will save him by treatment and medicine. If your skill and cleverness of method have not been perfected by practice, you will not produce medicine, but poison. You will not cure the sick man and he will die before long. So skill and cleverness of method are very important. So by practising, setting about and understanding these four, sortilege, astrological calculations, ritual and diagnosis, living beings must be benefited. Keep this in mind, O Phya-gshen Legs-rgyal. This is what he said.

BON - AS A PRE-BUDDHIST RELIGION OF TIBET

Buddhist ideas certainly pervade BON throughout:

- the definition of truth as absolute and relative (this was a useful idea for the bonpos as it could provide a justification for the lower ways of magic ritual)
- the realization of the 'Thought of Enlightenment' as the coalescence of Method and Wisdom
- the whole conception of living beings revolving through the six spheres of existence
- the notion of buddhahood as fivefold
- the whole gamut of tantric theory and practice

Some might be tempted- when there is still so much else of interest in Tibetan civilization that awaits investigation - to neglect this developed and elaborate BON as mere second-hand Buddhism.

But there have been also serious scholars who conversely would regard Buddhism in Tibet as little more than demonological priestcraft. Waddell's remarkable book, *Lamaism*, which contains so much precise information about Tibetan Buddhism practices of all kinds, provides evidence enough that Bon and Buddhism in Tibet are in their theories and practices one and the same. What Wadell perhaps failed to appreciate is that Tibetan Buddhism –and for that matter BON too– is often sincerely practised by Tibetans as a moral *and* spiritual discipline.

We are thus concerned not only with pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion, but with Tibetan religion regarded as one single cultural complex. The bonpos merely pose the problem nicely for us by having arranged all types of Tibetan religious practice within the framework of their 'Nine Ways'. Regarded in this way, BON might be indeed claim to be the true religion of Tibet.

Accepting everything, refusing nothing through the centuries, it is the one all-embracing form of Tibetan religion. Its few remaining educated representatives seem to be still motivated by its spirit.

Western scholars of Tibetan well know how difficult it is to persuade an indigenous Tibetan scholar to take any interest in forms of Tibetan literature that lie outside his particular school. Normally a dGe-lugs-pa ('Yellow Hat') scholar would be ashamed at the idea of reading a work of any other Tibetan Buddhist order, let alone a bonpo work. Yet educated bonpo monks clearly have no such inhibitions. They will learn wherever they can, and given time they will absorb and re-adapt what they have learned.

BON - HOW IT CAME TO TIBET AS A RELIGION

Regarded in this way Bon is a strange phenomenon, and what we really want to know is how it began to develop in its early stages. The bonpos themselves concede that their religion as practised in Tibet consisted in the first place of little more than ritual magic, and they believed that gShen-rab himself established these practices there.

A clear account is given of the story in chapter XII of *gZer-mig*, which recounts how the demon Khyab-pa -lag-ring sends his followers who steal the seven horses of gShen-rab from the sacred city of hol-mo lung-ring. In the previous chapter it was related how this demon had carried off gShen-rab's daughter, gShen-bzah ne-chung, and forcibly married her. Their two children were then abducted by gShen-rab and

concealed at hol-mo lung-ring . At the beginning of chapter XII the demon sends his followers to see where the children are. They cannot be found, so he gives orders for the theft of the horses as a form of reprisal. Rather than keep the horses in his own realm (bdud-yul min-pahi glin), he plans to keep them in rKong-po, and he sends messengers to make arrangements with the two rulers of rKong-po , named rKong-rje dkar-po and rKong-rje dmar-po . gShen-rab himself together with four followers comes after them, not (as he explains) in order to get the horses only, but because the time has come to spread the doctrine in Zhang-Zhung and Tibet. The demons block his way with snow, then fire, then water, and then sand, but he disperses them and reaches Zhang-Zhung.

gShen-rab gave to the bonpos of Zhang-Zhung as bon (doctrine) the 'inspired teaching' (lung) about bombs and spells , and as ritual items he instructed them in the 'Divine Countenance of the Celestial Ray' and in black and white 'thread-crosses'. Then he went in to Bye-ma lu-ma dgu-gyes ('The ninefold Spreading of the Desert Spring') in gTsang , where he pronounced this prayer: 'Now it is not the occasion for establishing the doctrine among all the bonpos of Tibet, but may „Bon of the Nine Stage Way" spread and be practised there some time!' As he said this, a group of demons were subjected to him. gShen-rab gave to the bonpos of Tibet as bon (doctrine) the 'inspired teaching' concerning prayers to the gods and the expelling of demons, and as ritual items he showed them various small aromatic shrubs, the use of barley as a sacrificial item and libations of chang.

Nowadays the bonpos of Tibet, summoning all gods and demons by means of bon, get their protection, and by worshipping them send them about their tasks, and by striking them prevail over them. This is the proof of gShen-rab 's having subdued them when they beheld his countenance.

In historical terms this account simply means that before Indian religious ways spread to Tibet, Tibetan religion consisted of magical rituals (of the kind enumerated in the Second Way of BON) performed by priests known as bon and as gShen. The full doctrine (referred to as the 'BON of the Nine Stage Way') came later and -except for the rituals that were already practised in Tibet- through translations- The bonpos were certainly impressed by the need for translations.

Thus BON teachings, they claim, were translated into 360 languages and taught throughout the known world, which for them consisted of India generally, the states of north-west India in particular, Central Asia states and peoples, Nepal, and China. Lastly, it reached Tibet, again from the West through translations from the language of Zhang-Zhung.

This Bon that spread west, south and north of Tibet was of course Buddhism, and it is quite conceivable that the Tibetans of western Tibet, whose ancestors first made contact with the forms of Buddhism popularly practised in Jalandhara (za-hor) and Kashmir (kha-che), in Uddiyana (o-rgyan) and Gilgit (bru-sha), were unaware of its direct connection with the Buddhism officially introduced into Tibet in the eighth century

by King Khri-srong-lde-btsan.

The bonpos are insistent that their teachings came from the west, and there are good reasons for believing that Buddhist yogins and hermits, and probably Hindu ascetics as well, had already familiarized the villagers of western Tibet with Indian teachings and practices before Buddhism was formally introduced by the Tibetan religious kings. Moreover, these 'informal' contacts continued over several centuries. Perhaps the main original difference between bonpos and rNyingma-pas (Tibetan Buddhist of the 'Old order') consists in the fact that the rNyingma-pas acknowledged that their doctrines, despite the earlier promulgation, were nevertheless Buddhist, and that the bonpos never would make this admission. Fundamental to an elucidation of this interesting problem is a comparative study of the tantras and the rDzog-chen ('Great Perfection') literature of these two oldest 'Tibetan Buddhist' groups.

The organizing of their religious practices into the 'Nine Ways' must have come somewhat later, perhaps by the tenth century. The rNyingma-pa set of nine begins with the three 'ways' of conventional Indian Buddhism, the sravalaana, the pratyekabuddhayana, and the bodhisattvayana. The other six ways are even higher stages of tantric practice, viz. Kriyatantra, upayatantra, and yogatantra, and finally, the mahayogatantra, anuyogatantra and atiyogatantra. Thus the rNyingma-pas, recognizing their connections with the newly established official religion, were content to organize themselves as tantric adepts of Buddhism. The bonpos, despite their ever increasing cultural and literary contacts with the official religion, persisted in claiming that this religion had really been theirs from the start.

Drawn very early, certainly already in the eighth century, into a position of opposition, they set to work to organize a full-scale religion of their own, using all their own remembered indigenous resources and all they could acquire from their opponents. The magnitude of the task was really astounding, if judged only by the vast bulk of literature which they so speedily accumulated. The 'Nine Ways of BON' is a mere summary of their achievements.

The four Portals and the Treasury as Fifth

The bonpos often refer to their full complement of doctrines and practices not only as the 'BON of the Nine Stage Way', but also as the BON of the 'Four BON Portals and the Treasury as Fifth':

bon sgo bzhi mdzod lnja dang theg pa rim dguhi bon.

This term sgo bzhi mdzod lnja has no easy explanation. The four 'portals' are dpon-

gsas, chab-nag, chab-dkar, and hphan-yul. The first, dpon-gsas, may be safely translated as 'Master-Sage'. It is the term used for the hermit sages of the Zhang-Zhung snyan-rgyud. As one of the four 'portals' of bon it refers to their teachings of the 'Great Perfection' (rdzog-chen).

As for chab-dkar and chab-nag, chab remains uncertain in meaning. Tenzin Namdak accepts these names as technical terms without any proper meaning, and so, while he and other educated bonpo know what the terms refer to, they remain quite uninterested in the origin of the terms themselves.

Chab has two meanings: (i) royal sway of power and (ii) the honorific term for water. The compound chab-sgo means an 'imperial portal' and perhaps this might encourage us to choose the first meaning. The 'White Sway' and the 'Black Sway' would make quite good translations. But in our selected texts chab is clearly interpreted as though it meant 'water'. I have therefore taken the term provisionally in this meaning. The term is used only as a label in any case. The 'White Waters' refer to higher tantric practice and the 'Black Waters' to magic rites of all kinds.

European writers have often referred to 'White Bon' and 'Black Bon', but clearly without any intended reference to chab-dkar and chab-nag.

hPhan-yul is a well-known place-name in Central Tibet, but once again my bonpo helpers insist that this term which refers to their 'Perfection of Wisdom' teachings, has nothing to do with the hPhan-yul Valley. But I think they are mistaken. The name hPhan-yul often occurs in bonpo texts both as a place name and as a term referring to particular doctrines. Before the 'Teacher gShen-rab' spread the teachings in the world of men he is supposed to have taught hPhan-yul texts in the realms of the serpents (klu), furies (gnyan), mountain-gods (sa-bdag), and rock-gods (gtod). One wonders if there is some connection here with the well-known story of Nagarjuna's visit to the nagas (=Tibetan klu) to obtain his 'Perfection of Wisdom' teachings. There is no doubt that in bonpo usage hPhan-yul means 'Perfection of Wisdom' texts and therefore it might have seemed suitable to give this name to texts which gShen-rab was supposed to teach to serpents and others. I mention this possibility merely since I suspect that it is just such a haphazard association of ideas that often accounts for the use of many terms in bonpo material, and we may well be wasting our time looking for more scholarly associations.

As for the special meaning that the bonpos give to hPhan-yul , perhaps it was here in this place, which was certainly important in the early spread of Buddhism in Tibet, that they first learned and studied 'Perfection of Wisdom' literature. It is perhaps fair to add that Tenzin Namdak discounts such an idea altogether. As for the special bonpo meanings of these terms, he has kindly drawn my attention to some very good definitions occurring in gZer-mig :

The 'Master Sage' belongs to the BON of precepts and inspired teachings. It purifies the stream of knowledge, avoids word and concentrates on the meaning.

The 'Black Waters' belong to the Bon of the stream of existence. It purifies the stream of knowledge. By means of many verbal accounts which arise there, much is accumulated for the good of living beings under three (headings): the outer stream of death rites and funereal rites , the inner stream of sickness rites and ransom rites, and the middle stream of diagnosis rites and rituals.

The vast hPhan-yul belongs to the BON of the Hundred Thousand (Verse Text) in the Sutras. It purifies the stream of knowledge. It tells of monastic discipline and vows. This BON has two aspects, as a series (Sanskrit: parivarta) and as recitation. Again the series has two aspects, the series of the phenomenal world and the series of passing from sorrow (Skr. Nirvana). The recitation is of two kinds again, recitation that enunciates and originates in the words of enunciation, and enunciation that is consecrated to the food of living beings and serves for ceremonies. Being read and recited, it accumulates much (merit) for living beings, and it should be used only for ceremonies.

The 'White Waters' belong to the BON of potent precepts and spells. It purifies the deep stream of knowledge. It embraces the profound 'reliance' and 'performance'. As for this BON, when one has been consecrated, one becomes of the self-nature of fivefold buddhahood. As effect one has in the Body the five symbolic gestures of the self-nature (of buddhahood): as effect in the Speech one recites spells continuously: as effect in the Mind one practises the profound meditation of the 'Process of Emanation' and the 'Process of Realization'. As effect in one's Accomplishments, one accumulates and delights in ritual items. As effect in one's acts one praises the buddha-names in recitation.

Defined in this way, the 'Four Portals' cover all the types of religious practice included in the 'Nine Ways'.

- The 'Master Sage' Portal represents the Ninth Way.
- The 'Black Waters' Portal represents the First, Second and Fourth Ways.
- The hPhan-yul Portal represents the Fifth and Sixth Ways.
- The 'White Waters' Portal represents the Seventh and Eight Ways. It also includes the Third Way in so far as this is directed towards the 'Bon of effect'.

Thus these 'Four Portals' seem to represent an earlier and quite coherent attempt by the bonpos to arrange their accumulated religious materials into four groups:

I. Precepts and teachings of sages and hermits, e.g. Zhang-Zhung snyan-rgyud and other rdzog-chen literature.

II. Ways of prediction, death ceremonies and magical rites of all kinds (viz. The 'original bonpo material')

III. Texts and practices connected with monastic religion. (One may observe that the reading of 'Perfection of Wisdom' literature as a meritorious rite was as popular then as now).

IV. Text and practices of the tantras.

As for the 'Treasury which makes the Fifth', this is the 'Pure Summit' (gtsang mtho thog), which once again is best defined by a quotation from gZer-mig:

As for the 'Pure Summit', it goes everywhere. As insight it belongs to the BON which is a universal cutting off. It unifies the stream of knowledge in all the 'Four Portals'. It simply involves that insight into the non-substantiality of appearances. It understands the deluding nature of the 'inner essences'. In terms of absolute truth non-substance, too, is an absurdity.

<http://www.angelfire.com/ga2/stepstoinanity/bon9wintro.html>

THE BONPO TRADITIONS OF DZOGCHEN

by John Myrdhin Reynolds

The Bonpo and Nyingmapa Traditions of Dzogchen

In general, the Dzogchen teachings are found only in the old unreformed Tibetan schools of the Buddhist Nyingmapas and the non-Buddhist Bonpos. In both cases, these teachings are substantially the same in meaning and terminology, and both traditions claim to have an unbroken lineage coming down to the present time from the eighth century and even before. Both of these schools assert that Dzogchen did not originate in Tibet itself, but had a Central Asian origin and was subsequently brought to Central Tibet by certain masters known as Mahasiddhas or great adepts. There thus would appear to exist two ancient and authentic lineages for the Dzogchen teachings, the Buddhist and the Bonpo. As I have previously discussed the Nyingmapa Buddhist tradition of the origin of Dzogchen in my book *The Golden Letters*, here I shall present a preliminary survey of the Bonpo tradition of Dzogchen known as the Zhang-zhung Nyan-gyud. This Bonpo tradition is especially important for research into the historical origins of Dzogchen because it claims to represent a continuous oral tradition (snyan-rgyud) from the earliest times coming from Zhang-zhung in Western Tibet. [1] Although some medieval and modern Tibetan histories written by cloistered Buddhist monks portray the ancient pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet called Bon as a nefarious mixture of sorcery, black magic, shamanism, and bloody sacrifices, this appears to be just so much anti-Bonpo propaganda providing a melodramatic effect. The principal aim of these Buddhist historians was to glorify the role of Indian Mahayana Buddhism in Tibetan history, suggesting that there was no culture nor civilization in Tibet before the coming of Indian Buddhism to Central Tibet in the seventh century of our era. India, the birthplace of the Lord Shakyamuni Buddha, was looked upon, not only as the source of all genuine religion and spirituality, but as the source of civilized culture generally, and even the lineage of Tibetan kings was traced back to an Indian origin by such native Tibetan historians as Go Lotsawa, Buton, and others. [2]

Another problem is that the Tibetan term bon, probably deriving from the old verb form 'bond-pa, meaning "to invoke the gods," [3] has two different cultural referants. In the first usage, Bon does indeed refer to the indigenous pre-Buddhist shamanistic and animistic culture of Tibet, a culture that possessed many characteristics in common with other shamanistic tribal cultures of Central Asia and Siberia. Although these cultures involved various types of religious practice and belief, the central role was occupied by a practitioner known as a shaman. The activity of the shaman was definitively characterized as entering into an altered state of consciousness by way of chanting, drumming, dancing, and so on, whether this altered state of consciousness or "ecstasy" was understood to be soul-travel, as an out-of-the-body experience, or a form of spirit possession. [4] The principal social function of such a practitioner was healing. A traditional form of Central Asian shamanism involving spirit possession continues to be practiced widely in Tibet even today among both Buddhist and Bonpo populations, as

well as among Tibetan refugees living elsewhere in Ladakh, Nepal, and Bhutan. Such a practitioner is known as a lha-pa or dpa'-bo. [5] Elsewhere on the borders of Tibet in the Himalayas and along the Sino-Tibetan frontiers, among certain Tibetan speaking and related peoples, there exist shamanic practitioners known as Bonpos, as for example among the Na-khi in China [6] and among the Tamangs in Nepal. [7]

But there exists a second type of religious culture also known as "Bon" whose adherents claim to represent the pre-Buddhist civilization of Tibet. These practitioners of Bon assert that at least part of their religious tradition was not native to Tibet, but was brought to Central Tibet sometime before the seventh century from the previously independent country of Zhang-zhung, west of Tibet, and more remotely from Tazik (stag-gzig) or Iranian speaking Central Asia to the northwest. [8] This form of Bon is known also as Yungdrung Bon (g.yung-drung bon), "the Eternal Teaching," a term which could be reconstructed into Sanskrit as "Svastika-dharma," where the swastika or sun-cross is the symbol of the eternal and the indestructable, corresponding in most every respect to the Buddhist term vajra or diamond (rdo-rje). In addition to ritual texts relating to shamanic and animistic practices, this ancient tradition possesses a large corpus of texts, also claiming to be pre-Buddhist in origin, relating to the higher teachings of Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen (mdo rgyud man-ngag gsum). The Bonpo Lamas, instead of looking back to the North Indian prince, Siddhartha Gautama, as their Buddha and as the source of their higher teachings of Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen, look back even further in time to another prince, Shenrab Miwoche (gShen-rab mi-bo-che), born in Olmo Lungring ('Ol-mo lung-ring) in remote Central Asia, as their Buddha (sangs-rgyas) and as the source of their teachings. Hence, the latter is given the title of Tonpa or Teacher (ston-pa), literally "the one who reveals". Modern scholars may question the historicity of this figure and Tonpa Shenrab is indeed given a rather fabulous date by the Bonpo tradition, asserting that he flourished some eighteen thousand years ago. [9] Futhermore, he is given a hagiography in Bonpo sources in no way inferior to that of Shakyamuni Buddha, as found, for example, in the Lalitavistara. [10] Along with the fabulous hagiographies of Padmasambhava found in the extensive literature of the Nyingmapa school, such as the Padma bka'-thang and the bKa'-thang gser-phreng, the career of Tonpa Shenrab represents one of the great epic cycles of Tibetan literature. [11]

To the outsider this Yungdrung Bon nowadays appears little different from the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism in terms of their higher doctrines and monastic practices. Contemporary Bon possesses a monastic system much like the Buddhist one and a Madhyamaka philosophy fully comparable with the other Tibetan Buddhist schools. According to the Bonpo Lamas themselves, the main difference between Bon and the Buddhist schools is one of lineage rather than of teaching or doctrine, since the Bonpos look to Tonpa Shenrab as their founder and the Buddhists look to Shakyamuni. Indeed, both of these numenous figures are manifestations of Buddha enlightenment in our world, an epiphany that is technically known as a Nirmanakaya (sprul-sku). H.H. the Dalai Lama has now recognized Bon as the fifth Tibetan religious school, along side the Nyingmapas, the Sakyapas, the Kagyudpas, and the Gelugpas, and has given the Bonpos representation on the Council of Religious Affairs at Dharamsala. [12]

The Historical Development of Bon

Some Tibetan historians and scholars, on the other hand, were aware of this distinction between the two kinds of Bon referred to above [13], and certainly the Bonpo Lamas themselves were aware of it. According to one leading native-born Bonpo scholar, Lopon Tenzin Namdak [14], the history of the development of Bon may be divided into three phases:

1. Primitive Bon was the indigenous shamanism and animism of Tibet and adjacent regions in ancient times. Indeed, according to Bonpo tradition, some of these practices such as invoking the gods (lha gsol-ba) and rites for exorcising evil spirits (sel-ba) were actually taught by Tonpa Shenrab himself when he briefly visited Kongpo in Southeastern Tibet in prehistoric times. [15] Such rites were later incorporated into the classification of the teachings and practices of Bon known as the nine successive ways or vehicles (theg-pa rim dgu). These shamanistic types of practices are now known as "the Causal Ways of Bon" (rgyu'i theg-pa). Teaching and practice found in the Causal Ways are considered to be dualistic in their philosophical view, that is, the gods (lha) representing the forces of light and order called Ye and the demons (bdud) representing the forces of darkness and chaos called Ngam have an independent existence, and the concern of the practitioner is principally with the performing of rituals that invoke the positive energies of the gods and repel the negative influences of the demons and evil spirits (gdon). [16] An examination of the ritual texts in question reveals them to be largely of non-Indian origin. [17] However, like Buddhism generally, Yungdrung Bon is totally opposed to the practice of blood sacrifice (dmar mchod), for the origin of such practices are attributed to the cannibalistic Sinpo (srin-po) demons and not to Tonpa Shenrab. Thus, Bonpo Lamas are loath to identify even the Causal Ways of Bon with the shamanism of the Jhangkris or shamans still flourishing in the mountains of Nepal who continue even today to perform blood sacrifices. [18]

2. Old Bon (bon rnying-ma), or Yundrung Bon (g.yung-drung bon) as such, consists of the teachings and the practices attributed to Shenrab Miwoche himself in his role as the Teacher or the source of revelation (ston-pa), and, in particular, this means the higher teachings of Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen. He revealed these teachings to his disciples in Olmo Lungring on earth and elsewhere in a celestial realm in his previous incarnation as Chimed Tsugphud ('Chi-med gtsug-phud). [19] These teachings of Tonpa Shenrab, already set down in writing in his own time or in the subsequent period, are said to have been brought at a later time from Olmo Lungring in Tazik to the country of Zhang-zhung in Western and Northern Tibet where they were translated into the Zhang-zhung language.

Zhang-zhung appears to have been an actual language, distinct from Tibetan, and apparently related to the West Himalayan Tibeto-Burman dialect of Kinauri. Thus, it was not some artificial creation fabricated by the Bonpos in order to have an ancient source language corresponding to the Indian Sanskrit of the Buddhist scriptures. [20] Beginning with the reign of the second king of Tibet, Mutri Tsanpo, it is said that certain Bonpo texts, in particular the Father Tantras (pha rgyud), were brought from Zhang-

zhung to Central Tibet and translated into the Tibetan language. [21] Thus the Bonpos assert that Tibetan acquired a system of writing at this time, based on the sMar-yig script used in Zhang-zhung which would, therefore, have been ancestral to the dbus-med script now often used for composing Tibetan manuscripts, especially among the Bonpos. [22] The Bonpos subsequently experienced two persecutions in Central Tibet, the first under the eighth king of Tibet, Drigum Tsanpo, and later the second under the great Buddhist king of Tibet, Trisong Detsan in the eighth century of our era. According to the tradition, on both occasions, the persecuted Bonpo sages concealed their books in various places in Tibet and adjacent regions such as Bhutan.

These caches of texts were rediscovered beginning in the tenth century. Thus they are known as rediscovered texts or as "hidden treasures" (gter-ma). [23] Certain other texts were never concealed, but remained in circulation and were passed down from the time of the eighth century in a continuous lineage. These are known as snyan-rgyud, literally "oral transmission", even though they are usually said to have existed as written texts even from the early period. One example of such an "oral tradition" is the Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud, which, in the eighth century, the master Tapihritsa gave permission to his disciple Gyerpungpa to write down in the form of his pithy secret oral instructions (man-ngag, Skt. upadesha). Or else, the texts were dictated during the course of ecstatic visions or altered states of consciousness by certain ancient sages or certain deities to Lamas who lived in later centuries. One such example of this was the famous lengthy hagiography of Tonpa Shenrab known as the gZi-brjid, dictated to Lodan Nyingpo (bLo-ldan snying-po, b.1360) by certain mountain spirits. This classification is rather similar to the Nyingmapa classification of its scriptures into bka'-ma and gter-ma. [24] This form of Old Bon flourished in Western and Central Tibet down to our own day.

The teachings of Bon revealed by Tonpa Shenrab are classified differently in the three traditional hagiographical accounts of his life. In general, Tonpa Shenrab was said to have expounded Bon in three cycles of teachings:

- I. The Nine Successive Vehicles to Enlightenment (theg-pa rim dgu);
- II. The Four Portals of Bon and the fifth which is the Treasury (sgo bzhi mdzod lnga);
and
- III. The Three Cycles of Precepts that are Outer, Inner, and Secret (bka' phyi nang gsang skor gsum).

These Nine Ways or Nine Successive Vehicles to Enlightenment are delineated according to three different systems of hidden treasure texts (gter-ma) that were put into concealment during the earlier persecutions of Bon and were rediscovered in later centuries. These treasure systems are designated according to the locations where the hidden treasure texts were discovered.

1. The System of the Southern Treasures (lho gter lugs): These were the treasure texts rediscovered at Drigtsam Thakar ('brig-mtsham mtha' dkar) in Southern Tibet and at Paro (spa-gro) in Bhutan. Here the Nine Ways are first divided in to the Four Causal

Ways, which contain many myths and magical shamanistic rituals, and which are principally concerned with working with energies for worldly benefits. Then there are the five higher spiritual ways known as the Fruitional Ways. Here the purpose is not gaining power or insuring health and prosperity in the present world, but realization of the ultimate spiritual goal of liberation from the suffering experienced in the cycles of rebirth within Samsara. The final and ultimate vehicle found here in this nine-fold classification is that of Dzogchen. [25]

2. The System of the Central Treasures (dbus gter lugs): These treasure texts were rediscovered at various sites in Central Tibet, including the great Buddhist monastery of Samye. In general, this classification of the Bonpo teachings is rather similar to the system of the Nine Vehicles found in the traditions of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Some of these Bonpo texts are said to have been introduced from India into Tibet by the great native-born Tibetan translator Vairochana of Pagor, who translated works from both the Buddhist and the Bonpo traditions. [26]

3. The System of the Northern Treasures (byang gter lugs): These treasure texts were rediscovered at various locations north of Central Tibet. However, according to Lopon Tenzin Namdak, not much is currently known regarding this system. [27]

The Four Portals of Bon and the Treasury which is the fifth (bon sgo bzhi mdzod lnga) represent another and probably independent system for the classification of the Bonpo teachings into four groups known as the Four Portals (sgo bzhi), together with an appendix known as the Treasury (mdzod). These groups or classes of teachings are as follows:

1. The Bon of "the White Waters" containing the Fierce Mantras (chab dkar drag-po sngags kyi bon): This collection consists of esoteric Tantric practices focusing the recitation wrathful or fierce mantras (drag sngags) associated with various meditation deities. Within this class are included the Chyipung cycle or "General Collection" (spyi-spungs skor), that is to say, the practices associated with the Father Tantras (pha rgyud). [28]

2. The Bon of "the Black Waters" for the continuity of existence (chab nag srid-pa rgyud kyi bon): This collection consists of various magical rituals, funeral rites, ransom rites, divination practices, and so on, necessary for the process of purifying and counteracting negative energies. This collection would seem to correspond, by and large, to the Four Causal Ways described above. Here the term "black" refers not to the practitioner's intention, but to the expelling of negativities, which are black in color symbolically.

3. The Bon of the Extensive Prajnaparamita from the country of Phanyul ('phan-yul rgyas-pa 'bum gyi bon): This collection consists of the moral precepts, vows, rules, and ethical teachings for both monks and ordained lay people. In particular, the focus is on the philosophical and ethical system of the Prajnaparamita Sutras which are preserved in the Bonpo version in sixteen volumes known as the Khams-chen. This collection basically represents the Sutra system, whereas the Chab dkar represents the Tantra system. [29]

4. The Bon of the Scriptures and the Secret Oral Instructions of the Masters (dpon-gsas man-ngag lung gi bon): This collection consists of the oral instructions (man-ngag) and the written scriptures (lung) of the various masters (dpon-gsas) belonging to the lineages of transmission for Dzogchen. 5. The Bon of the Treasury which is of the highest purity and is all-inclusive (gtsang mtho-thog spyi-rgyug mdzod kyi bon): This collection contains essential material from all Four Portals of Bon. The Treasury which is the fifth (mdzod lnga) is described in the gZer-myig, "As for the highest purity (gtsang mtho-thog), it extends everywhere. As insight, it belongs to the Bon that is universal (spyi-gcod). It purifies the stream of consciousness in terms of all four Portals." [30] The Three Cycles of Precepts that are Outer, Inner, and Secret (bka' phyi nang gsang skor gsum) are as follows:

1. The Outer Cycle (phyi skor) contains the Sutra system of teachings (mdo-lugs) relating to the Path of Renunciation (spong lam).

2. The Inner Cycle (nang skor) contains the Tantra system of teachings (rgyud-lugs) relating to the Path of Transformation (sgyur lam), otherwise known as the Secret Mantras (gsang sngags).

3. The Secret Cycle (gsang skor) contains the Upadesha teachings (man-ngag) relating to the Path of Self-Liberation (grol lam), otherwise known as Dzogchen, the Great Perfection.

3. New Bon (bon gsar-ma) arose since the fourteenth century, relying upon the discoveries of a different Terma system than the above. As a whole, this system is quite similar to the Nyingmapa one and here Padmasambhava is also regarded as an important figure. Indeed, some Tertons, such as Dorje Lingpa, discovered both Nyingmapa and Bonpo Termas. In a text such as the Bon-khrid, rediscovered by Tsewang Gyalpo, it is asserted that Padmasambhava went to Uddiyana and received the Dzogchen teachings directly from the Sambhogakaya Shenlha Odkar (gShen-lha 'od-dkar) himself. Later he transmitted these teachings in Tibet, concealing many of them as Termas meant for the use of the future generations of Bonpos. According to Shardza Rinpoche also, the New Bon Movement began in the fourteenth century and continues until today. The Termas revealed to such masters as Lodan Nyingpo, Mizhik Dorje (otherwise known as Dorje Lingpa), Kundrol Dragpa, Dechen Lingpa, Sang-ngag Lingpa, Khandro Dechen Wangmo, and so on, are all considered Tersar (gter-gsar) or recent treasure text discoveries. The New Bon has flourished mainly in Eastern Tibet. [31]

The Origin of Dzogchen

Just as in the case of the Nyingmapas among the Tibetan Buddhists, the Bonpo tradition possesses as its highest teaching the system of contemplation known as Dzogchen, "the Great Perfection," (rdogs-pa chen-po). These teachings reveal in one's immediate experience the Primordial State (ye gzhi) of the individual, that is to say, the individual's

inherent Buddha-nature or Bodhichitta, which is beyond all time and conditioning and conceptual limitations. This Natural State (gnas-lugs) is spoken of in terms of its intrinsic primordial purity (ka-dag) and its spontaneous perfection in manifestation (lhun-grub). Both the Buddhist Nyingmapas and the Bonpos assert that their respective Dzogchen traditions were brought to Central Tibet in the eighth century, the Nyingmapa transmission from the Mahasiddha Shrisimha in living in Northern India and the Bonpo transmission from a line of Mahasiddhas dwelling around Mount Kailas and the lake country of Zhang-zhung to the west and north of Tibet. Thus there appear to exist two different historically authentic lineages for the transmission of these teachings.

Subsequently, the Nyingmapa transmission of the Dzogchen precepts was brought to Central Tibet principally due to the activities of three teachers: the great Tantric master Padmasambhava from the country of Uddiyana, the Mahasiddha and Mahapandita Vimalamitra from India, and the native-born Tibetan translator Vairochana of Pagor. According to tradition, the latter came originally from a Bonpo family. [32] It is said that he and Vimalamitra were responsible for the first translations of the texts belonging to the Semde (sems-sde) or "Mind Series" and the Longde (klong-sde) or "Space Series" of Dzogchen teachings. However, some scholars, both Tibetan and Western, dispute that Vairochana actually made the many translations attributed to him. [33] Moreover, some contemporary scholars assert that the Dzogchen Tantras, which represent the literary sources for the Dzogchen teachings, were actually fabricated in the tenth century by certain unnamed unscrupulous Bonpo and Nyingmapa Lamas who then anachronistically attributed them to earlier numinous figures like Padmasambhava and Tapihritsa in order to win their acceptance as authentic scriptures.

They therefore represent a kind of Buddhist and Bonpo Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Modern critics cite the fact that, with the exception of two short Dzogchen texts, the Rig-pa'i khu-byug and the sBas-pa'i sgum-chung, the texts of the Dzogchen Tantras have not been found in the Tun Huang library on the borders of Western China, which was sealed in the tenth century. But simply noting that these texts were not discovered at Tun Huang does not prove that they did not exist elsewhere at the time or that they must have been composed after the closing of that library. On the basis of the extant evidence and in view of the lack of a thorough analysis of all the texts in question, it would appear that this conclusion unwarranted. [34]

It has also been asserted by some scholars that Padmasambhava, although he may have been an actual historical figure, certainly did not teach Dzogchen, but only the Tantric system of the sGrub-pa bka' bgyad, the practices of the eight Herukas or wrathful meditation deities. This system forms the Sadhana Section (sgrub-sde) of Mahayoga Tantra. [35] However, eminent Nyingmapa Lama-scholars, such as the late Dudjom Rinpoche, reply that although Padmasambhava may not have taught Dzogchen as an independent vehicle to enlightenment, he did indeed teach it as an Upadesha (man-ngag), or secret oral instruction, to his immediate circle of Tibetan disciples. This private instruction concerned the practice of Dzogchen and the interpretation of the experiences arising from this practice of contemplation. In the context of the system of Mahayoga Tantra, Dzogchen is the name for the culminating phase of the Tantric

process of transformation, transcending both the Generation Process (bskyed-rim) and the Perfection Process (rdzogs-rim). In this context, Dzogchen would correspond in some ways to the practice of Mahamudra in the New Tantra system (rgyud gsar-ma) of the other Tibetan schools.

An old text, the Man-ngag lta-ba'i phreng-ba, traditionally attributed to Padmasambhava himself, does not treat Dzogchen as an independent vehicle (theg-pa, Skt. yana), but only as part of the system of the Higher Tantras. [36] When taught as an independent vehicle, Dzogchen practice does not require any antecedent process of Tantric transformation of the practitioner into a deity, and so on, before entering into the state of even contemplation (mnyam-bzhag). [37] So it would appear that, according to the Nyingmapa tradition at least, Dzogchen originated as an Upadesha that elucidated a state of contemplation or intrinsic Awareness (rig-pa) that transcended the Tantric process of transformation alone, both in terms of generation and of perfection. Therefore, it became known as the "great perfection," that is to say, the state of total perfection and completion where nothing is lacking.

According to Nyingmapa tradition, the Dzogchen precepts were first expounded in our human world by the Nirmanakaya Garab Dorje (dGa'-rab rdo-rje, Skt. *Prahevajra) in the country of Uddiyana and were later propagated in India by his disciple Manjushrimitra. The latter transmitted them to his disciple Shrisimha who, in turn, conferred them upon Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, and Vairochana the translator. These three brought the precepts to Tibet in the middle part of the eighth century. Thus, this teaching was originally a secret oral instruction restricted to a small group of Tantric initiates. The tradition claims that it originally came from the mysterious country of Uddiyana to the northwest of India. Therefore, it appears most likely that it is to the Indo-Tibetan borderlands of the northwest that we should look for the origins of Dzogchen. [38]

This seems equally true for the historical origins of Bonpo Dzogchen, for this second authentic lineage of the Dzogchen teachings also did not originate in India proper, but was brought to Central Tibet in the ninth and tenth centuries from Zhang-zhung in Northern Tibet by the disciples descending from Gyerpung Nangzher Lodpo. [39] Until the eighth century, the country of Zhang-zhung had been an independent kingdom with its own language and culture. It lay in what is now Western and Northern Tibet and the center of the country was dominated by the majestic presence of the sacred mountain of Gangchen Tise or Mount Kailas. Examining the available evidence, it now appears likely that before Indian Buddhism came to Central Tibet in the seventh and eighth centuries, Zhang-zhung had extensive contacts with the Buddhist cultures that flourished around it in Central Asia and in the Indo-Tibetan borderlands. Just to the west of Zhang-zhung there once existed the vast Kushana empire which was Buddhist in its religious culture. It was an area in which Indian Buddhism interacted with various strands of Iranian religion-- Zoroastrian, Zurvanist, Mithraist, Manichean, as well as Indian Shaivism and Nestorian Christianity.

This was also true of the oasis cities of the Silk Route to the northeast of Zhang-zhung such as Kashgar. Some scholars have seen this region beyond India as playing a key role in the development of certain aspects of Mahayana Buddhism, and later also in the development of Tantric form of Buddhism known as Vajrayana. [40] For example, the revelation of the Guhyasamaja Tantra is said to have occurred to king Indrabhuti in Uddiyana and was later brought to India proper by the Mahasiddhas Saraha and Nagarjuna. [41] Moreover, the Kalachakra Tantra is said to have been brought from Shambhala in Central Asia to Nalanda in India in the tenth century by the Mahasiddha Tsilupa. [42] The Bonpos came to identify this Shambhala with Olmo Lungring itself. [43] All this suggests that certain trends within Yungdrung Bon, rather than being later plagiarisms and imitations of Indian Buddhism concocted in the tenth century, actually do go back to a kind of syncretistic Indo-Iranian Buddhism that once flourished in the independent kingdom of Zhang-zhung before it was forcibly incorporated into the expanding Tibetan empire in the eighth century. This "Buddhism", known as gyer in the Zhang-zhung language and as bon in the Tibetan, was not particularly monastic, but more Tantric in nature and its diffusion was stimulated by the presence of various Mahasiddhas in the region such as the illustrious Tapihritsa and his predecessors dwelling in caves about Mount Kailas and about the lakes to the east in Northern Tibet. Even into this century, Kailas remained an important site of pilgrimage drawing Hindu sadhus and yogis from India. [44]

Such a mixed "Buddhist" culture, being both Tantric and shamanic, was suppressed in the eighth century when, at the instigation of the Tibetan king Trisong Detsan, the last king of independent Zhang-zhung, Ligmigya, was ambushed and assassinated when he left his castle of Khyung-dzong on the Dang-ra lake in Northern Tibet. Zhang-zhung and its people were absorbed into the Tibetan empire and disappeared as an independent entity. The Zhang-zhung-pas were pressed into the service of the Tibetan army as it expanded westward into Ladakh and Baltistan. [45] Today the Zhang-zhung-pas survive as the nomad people of Western and Northern Tibet, often possessing the same ancient clan names. But having been converted to the Drigung Kagyudpa school of Buddhism, they have forgotten their ancient heritage. The old caves, once the dwelling places of the Bonpo Mahasiddhas, are now thought to be the domain of ghosts, places to be shunned and avoided. Yet ancient ruins, believed to antedate the Tibetan empire, are still to be seen at Khyung-lung (Khyung-lung dngul-mkhar) west of Kailas and on the shores of the Dang-ra lake to the east in Northern Tibet. [46]

In response to the urgings of the Indian Buddhist monk-scholar Bodhisattva, who thoroughly rejected these Bonpo heretics, [47] and failing to recognize the ties of doctrine and practice between the "Buddhism" of Zhang-zhung known as Gyer or Bon, with the monastic Buddhism recently imported from India into Central Tibet, the Tibetan government actively suppressed the indigenous religious culture of Zhang-zhung. Moreover, the persecution of the Bonpos by the Tibetan king Trisong Detsan may have had a political motive and not just a religious one. At that time, the Bonpos in Tibet were certainly not organized into a rival church or sect that could effectively oppose the Indian monks financially supported by the Tibetan government. This picture was a later anachronism created in the accounts of the medieval Buddhist historians. Rather than a

conflict of rival religious doctrines, a parallel might be the suppression and subsequent annihilation of the Druids by the Romans in Gaul and Britain, where the Druids represented an ever-present source for Celtic nationalism and rallying point for resistance against Roman rule. In the same way, the Bonpos may also have been suppressed because they represented a possible source of Zhang-zhung-pa rebellion against the rule of the Yarlung dynasty of Tibet. Just as the Druids were accused of making human sacrifices and the Romans used this accusation as an excuse to exterminate them, so the Bonpos were accused of making blood sacrifices and this represented another excuse for expelling them from Tibet.

The Three Traditions of Bonpo Dzogchen

In general, within the Bon tradition, there exist different lines of transmission for the Dzogchen teachings which are collectively known as A rdzogs snyan gsum. The first two of them represent Terma traditions based on rediscovered treasure texts, whereas the third is an oral tradition (snyan brgyud) based on a continuous transmission through an uninterrupted line of realized masters. These three transmissions of Dzogchen are as follows:

1. A-khrid

The first cycle here of Dzogchen teachings is called A-khrid (pronounced A-tri), that is, the teachings that guide one (khrid) to the Primordial State (A). The white Tibetan letter A is the symbol of Shunyata and of primordial wisdom. The founder of this tradition was Meuton Gongdzad Ritrod Chenpo, who was frequently just known as Dampa, "the holy man." [48] He extracted these Dzogchen precepts from the Khro rgyud cycle of texts. Together with the Zhi-ba don gyi skor, these texts formed part of the sPyi-spungs yan-lag gi skor cycle of teachings that belong to the Father Tantras (pha rgyud) originally attributed to Tonpa Shenrab in the guise of Chimed Tsugphud ('Chi-med gtsug-phud). To this collected material, Meuton added his own mind treasure (dgongs gter) and organized the practice of the cycle into eighty meditation sessions extending over several weeks. This was known as the A-khrid thun mtsham brgyad-cu-pa. The instructions were divided into three sections dealing with the view (lta-ba), the meditation (sgom-pa), and the conduct (spyod-pa). Upon a successful completion of the eighty session course, one received the title of Togdan (rtogs-ldan), that is, "one who possesses understanding."

The system was later condensed by his successors. In the thirteenth century Aza Lodo Gyaltsan [49] reduced the number of sessions to thirty and subsequently in the same century Druchen Gyalwa Yungdrung wrote a practice manual in which the number of sessions in retreat (thun mtsham) was further reduced to fifteen. This popular practice manual is known as the A-khrid thun mtsham bco-nga-pa. [50] And in the present century, the great Bonpo master Shardza Rinpoche wrote extensive commentaries on the A-khrid system, together with the associated dark retreat (mun mtshams). [51] The A-khrid tradition, where the practice is very systematically laid out in a specific number

of sessions, in many ways corresponds to the rDzogs-chen sems-sde of the Nyingmapa tradition. [52]

2. rDzogs-chen

Here the term rDzogs-chen does not mean Dzogchen in general, but the reference is to a specific transmission of Dzogchen whose root text is the rDzogs-chen yang-rtse'i klong-chen, "the Great Vast Expanse of the Highest Peak which is the Great Perfection," rediscovered by the great Tertön Zhodton Ngodrub Dragpa in the year 1080. This discovery was part of a famous cycle of treasure texts hidden behind a statue of Vairochana at the Khumthing temple at Lhodrak. This root text is said to have been composed in the eighth century by the Bonpo master known as Lishu Tagring. [53]

3. sNyan-rgyud

The third cycle of transmission of the Dzogchen teachings within the Bon tradition is the uninterrupted lineage of the oral transmission from the country of Zhang-zhung (Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud), which is the subject of the present study. Because this tradition has a continuous lineage extending back to at least the eighth century of our era, and so does not represent Terma texts rediscovered at a later time, it is of particular importance for research into the question of the historical origins of Dzogchen. [Excerpted from *Space, Awareness, and Energy: An Introduction to the Bonpo Dzogchen Teachings of the Oral Tradition from Zhang-zhung*, by John Myrdhin Reynolds, Snow Lion Publications forthcoming in 2001.]

Notes:

- (1) See John Myrdhin Reynolds, *The Golden Letters*, Snow Lion, Ithaca 1996, pp. 199-286.
- (2) For example, see the Deb-ther sngon-po of 'Gos lo-tswa-ba gZhon-nu dpal (1392-1481), translated in *The Blue Annals* by George Roerich, Part I, Book I, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi reprint 1979; pp. 35-37. See also Tarthang Tulku, *Ancient Tibet*, Dharma Publishing, Berkeley 1986; pp.102-106, 140-148.
- (3) See Geza Uray, "The Old Tibetan Verb Bon," in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 1964, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 323-34.
- (4) Shamanism, now recognized to be a world-wide religious and cultural activity of great antiquity, has been extensively described by Russian and other anthropologists, as well as by scholars of the History of Religions such as Mircea Eliade and others. See especially Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Pantheon Books, New York 1964.
- (5) On Tibetan shamanism generally, see Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, Mouton, The Hague 1956, pp. 538-553, as well as Per-Arne Berglie, "Preliminary Remarks on Some Tibetan Spirit Mediums in Nepal," in *Kailash* 4 (1), Kathmandu 1976, pp. 85-108. For an account of a contemporary Tibetan shaman from Ladakh and practicing in Kathmandu, see Larry G. Peters, "The Tibetan Healing Rituals of Dorje Yudronma: A Fierce Manifestation of the Feminine Cosmic Force," in *Shaman's Drum* 45, Ashland OR 1997, pp. 36-47.
- (6) See Joseph Rock, "Contributions to the Shamanism of the Tibetan-Chinese Borderland", *Anthropos* LIV (1959), pp. 796-818
- (7) See Larry Peters, *Ecstasy and Healing in Nepal*, Udena Publications, Malibu 1981. See also Stan Royal Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1989.
- (8) On the relations of the old Tibetan kingdom with Central Asia generally, see Christopher Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ 1987. In view of this connection,

as suggested by Beckwith, the term *bon* might possibly be a borrowing from the Central Asian Iranian language of Sogdian, where the word *bwn* means "dharma." This word also occurs as the first element in the title of the Zoroastrian book dealing with the process of creation, the *Bundahishn*. Beckwith has also pointed to a possible Indo-Iranian substratum in the Zhang-zhung language. See Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, op. cit., pp. 3-36. The Sogdians were a major trading people along the Silk Route to the northwest of Tibet and many Buddhist texts in the Sogdian language have been recovered from Central Asia. On Zhang-zhung in particular, see Tsering Thar, "The Ancient Zhang Zhung Civilization," in *Tibet Studies*, Lhasa 1989, pp. 90-104.

(9) According to the *bsTan-rtsis* of Nyima Tenzin, translated by Per Kvaerne in "A Chronological Table of the Bon-po: The *bsTan rcsis* of Nyi-ma bstan-'jin," in *Acta Orientalia* XXXIII, Copenhagen 1971, pp. 205-282.

(10) There exist three principal biographies or hagiographies of Tonpa Shenrab in the Bon tradition: 1. *mDo 'dus* or *Dus gsum sangs-rgyas byung-khungs kyi mdo*, 2. *gZer-myig* or '*Dus-pa rin-po-che'i rgyud gzer-myig*, and 3. *gZi-brjid* or '*Dus-pa rin-po-che dri-ma med-pa gzi-brjid rab tu 'bar-ba'i mdo*.

A summary of the hagiography of Tonpa Shenrab, drawn from the *gZer-myig*, will be found in Helmut Hoffman, *The Religions of Tibet*, George Allen and Unwin, London 1961, pp. 84-98. A brief version of the hagiography may be found in Richard Gard and Sangye Tandar, *The Twelve Deeds: A Brief Life Story of Tonpa Shenrab, the Founder of the Bon Religion*, LTWA, New Delhi 1995. Although the monastic career of Tonpa Shenrab in his later life bears many resemblances to the account of Shakyamuni Buddha's Great Renunciation and subsequent teaching activities, as found, for example, in the *Lalitavistara*, his life story is otherwise of an origin quite independent of anything remotely Indian Buddhist. Indeed, the noted Russian scholar Kuznetsov sees Tonpa Shenrab as being of Central Asian or Iranian origin. See B.I. Kuznetsov, "Who was the Founder of the Bon Religion," in *Tibet Journal*, Vol. I, No. 1, Dharamsala 1975. Certain contemporary Tibetan scholars see Tonpa Shenrab as being a native-born Tibetan, rather than a prince or priest coming from Central Asian origin. See Namkhai Norbu, *The Necklace of gZi: A Cultural History of Tibet*, LTWA, Dharamsala 1981. Karmay also appears to suggest this. See Samten G. Karmay, "A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon," in *The Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, No. 33, Tokyo 1975, pp. 171-218. Lopon Tenzin Namdak, following Bonpo tradition, is adamant in asserting that Tonpa Shenrab was not a Tibetan, but originated in '*Ol-mo lung-ring*, which he identifies with Shambhala. In that case, '*Ol-mo lung-ring* was a mystical domain and not a precise geographical location somewhere northwest of Tibet in historical times. On the significance of '*Ol-mo lung-ring* and Shambhala, see Edwin Birnbaum, *The Way to Shambhala: A Search for the Mythical Kingdom beyond the Himalayas*, Anchor Press/ Doubleday, New York 1980, pp. 12-13, 44, 79-81, 102. On the significance of mystical geography in general, see Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Harcourt Brace & World, New York 1957, and also Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1977.

(11) On the bard and the epic generally in the Tibetan tradition, see R.A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, Faber and Faber, London 1972, pp. 272-281. Also see his more detailed study, *Recherches sur l'epopee et le barde au Tibet*, *Annales du Musee Guimet*, Paris 1959.

(12) This does not mean that the Dalai Lama considers the Bonpos to be Buddhists. According to most Tibetan Lamas, the Buddhists follow *chos* and the Bonpos follow *bon*. Nevertheless, both Buddhists (*chos-pa*) and Bonpos are considered "Insiders" (*nang-pa*), as opposed to "Outsiders" or Non-Buddhists (*phyi-pa*), such as Hindus, Jains, Muslims, and Christians.

(13) For example, see the *Grub-mtha' legs bshad shel kyi me-long* by Chos kyi nyi-ma dpal bzang-po (1674-1740). The section of this text dealing with Bon has been translated by Sarit Chandra Das in *Contributions on the Religion and History of Tibet*, Manjusri Publishing House, New Delhi 1970, pp. 1-19; reprinted from *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1881. The author, a Gelugpa scholar, distinguished three phases in the historical development of Bon: '*jol bon*, '*khyar bon*, and *bsgyur bon*. Although this is not how the Bonpos see their own history, the text is useful in indicating how the other Buddhist schools saw them. The account found here may be summarized as follows:

1. Revealed Bon ('*jol bon*): During the reign of the sixth king of Tibet, Tride Tsanpo (Khri-lde btsan-po), a demon or evil spirit ('*dre*) kidnapped a boy of thirteen who belonged to the Shen (*gshen*) clan and took him to different wild places in the mountains of Tibet and Kham. Other accounts add the detail that this thirteen year old boy was discovered to have had the ears of a donkey, apparently from birth, whereupon the evil spirits absconded with him. For thirteen more years thereafter, this boy wandered in the wilderness and came to be fully instructed in the magical arts of the non-human spirits (*mi ma yin*). At the age of twenty-

six he was permitted to return to his native village. Because of his Otherworld journeys and the knowledge he acquired thereby, he knew the names and the haunts of all the spirits and demons. He knew which spirits caused troubles among mankind and which spirits brought good luck and prosperity. And he knew how to appease hostile spirits with rituals and offerings. Thus this young man was the first to introduce Bon among the Tibetans and from his time onward, the kings of Tibet followed Bon and no other religion. It is said, moreover, that when he returned to his village from the wilderness, he hid his donkey's ears by wearing a white woollen turban, for which reason the white turban became the distinctive head-gear of the ancient Bonpos. It was said of these early Bonpos that below ('og) they tamed the evil spirits, above (steng) they invoked the gods of their ancestors, and in the middle (bar) they purified the hearth when it became polluted and thereby offended the hearth god (thab lha) and other household spirits. This account is an obvious scenario of shamanic initiation and thereby it would appear to account for the origin of shamanism in Tibet.

2. Deviant Bon ('khyar bon): This represented innovations made due to foreign influences coming into Tibet from the outside. When the king of Tibet, Drigum Tsanpo (Gri-gum btsan-po), was killed because of his persecution of the Bonpos, it became necessary to prevent the restless spirit of the murdered king, which had become a gshin or restless ghost, from doing mischief among the people. Therefore, three Bonpo practitioners were invited from Kashmir (Kha-che), Gilgit (Bru-sha), and Zhang-zhung, respectively, in order to perform the appropriate funeral rites to set the spirit to rest. This was because the local priests did not know how to do this. Such rites are known as 'Dur. All three of these Bonpos were foreigners from countries which lay to the west of Tibet. One of these Bonpos, presumably the one from Zhang-zhung, propitiated the deities Ge-khod (the patron deity of Zhang-zhung), Khyung (Garuda), and Me-lha (the god of fire). Thereby he was able to fly through the sky on his drum and divine mineral and metal deposits hidden beneath the earth. The second Bonpo, presumably the one from Gilgit, was skilled in divination and could foretell the future by means of the knots and threads, a practice known as ju-thig, and the use of scapula (sog dmar). Moreover, he made inspired oracular utterances (lha bka'). This would appear to locate the origin of this method of divination in Gilgit. The third Bonpo from Kashmir, a land famous for its Sanskrit learning among both Buddhists and Shaivites, was an expert in conducting the funeral ceremonies. Previously there had existed no philosophy of Bon in Tibet, but now Bon became mixed up with the Shaivite doctrines of the Tirthikas, that is, the Hindus of Kashmir, and therefore this became known as Deviant Bon (mu-stegs dbang-phyug-pa'i grub-mtha' 'khyar-ba bon).

3. Transformed Bon (bsgyur bon): This occurred in three phases. First, an Indian Pandita, having slandered a famous Buddhist teacher and being charged with immoral acts, was expelled from the Sangha or monastic community. He went to the north of Kashmir and dressing himself in blue robes (sham-thabs sngon-po-can), he proclaimed himself a great teacher. There he wrote several heretical books and hid them underground. After a few years, he invited the public to witness the discovery of these texts that he had hidden previously. He proclaimed them to be the sacred scriptures of Bon and thereby he brought about a transformation in the Bon religion.

Second, during the reign of the great Buddhist king of Tibet, Trisong Detsan, an edict was issued requiring that all Bonpos to renounce Bon and to embrace the Buddhist faith of India. A Bonpo named Rinchenchok (Rin-chen mchog) refused to do so and was punished by the king for his obstinacy. He became very angry at this and thereupon he and some other Bonpo priests composed Bonpo scriptures by whole-sale plagiarizing of the Buddhist ones. When the king heard of this activity, he was outraged and had these priests beheaded. However, some conspirators survived and hid copies of these plagiarized texts under rocks in various places. Later these priests rediscovered these texts and they became the Bonpo Termas. Third, after the overthrow and death of the Tibetan king Langdarma in the ninth century, some Bonpo priests continued to alter other Buddhist texts using different orthography and terminology. In Upper Tsang, two of them, Shengur Luga (gSen rgur klu-dga') and Daryul Drolag (Dar-yul sgro-lag), composed more texts and hid them under rocks. Thereby they converted many Buddhist scriptures into Bon texts, such as transforming the extensive Prajnaparamita (Yum rgyas) into the Khams-chen, the Bonpo version of the Prajnaparamita. Later they brought them out as apparently accidental discoveries. These caches of texts were known as "the White Water" (Chab dkar) and the Fruitional Bon ('bras-bu'i bon).

The tone of the account here is rather anti-Bon and this may be contrasted with the Bonpos' own account of the origin and development of their tradition such as found in the Legs-bshad mdzod of Shardza Rinpoche. See the translation of this work in Samten G. Karmay, *The Treasury of Good Sayings: A Tibetan History of Bon*, Oxford University Press, London 1972.

(14) Oral communication from Lupon Tenzin Namdak. See also his history of Bon, *g.Yung-drung bon gyi bstan-pa'i 'byung khungs nyung bsdus*, Kalimpong 1962.

- (15) According to the traditional accounts found in the *gZer-myig* and the *gZi-brjid*, the demon prince and sorcerer Khyabpa Lagring (*bDud-rgyal Khyab-pa lag-ring*) stole the seven horses of Tonpa from their stable in 'Ol-mo lung-ring, and after spiriting them away, he concealed them in Kongpo, a country in Southeastern Tibet. Tonpa Shenrab took this as an opportunity to travel to Tibet in order to subdue the fierce demons (*srin-po*) who at that time dwelt in the country and oppressed primitive humanity. See H. Hoffman, *The Religions of Tibet*, op. cit. Also see Tarthang Tulku, *Ancient Tibet*, op. cit., pp. 107-108.
- (16) See David Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, Oxford University Press, London 1967. Also see Namkhai Norbu, *Drung, Dreu and Bon*, LTWA, Dharamsala 1995.
- (17) See Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, op. cit. Also on Bonpo ritual, see John Myrdhin Reynolds, *The Cult and Practice of Zhang-zhung Meri*, Bonpo Translation Project (privately printed), San Diego 1996.
- (18) Oral communication from Lopon Tenzin Namdak. On the conflict between Buddhist Lamas and indigenous shamans regarding the question of blood sacrifice, see Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, op. cit. On a parallel situation in seventeenth century Mongolia, see Walther Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1980 and Walther Heissig, "A Mongolian Source to the Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism in the 17th Century," in *Anthropos* 48, pp. 493-533.
- (19) On 'Chi-med gtsug-phud and the lineages for the Bonpo Dzogchen teachings, see Chapter Two below and also the translations of the *Yig-chung* and the *rNam-thar* in Part Two.
- (20) On the Zhang-zhung language, see Erik Haarh, "The Zhang-zhung Language: A Grammar and Dictionary of the Unexplored Language of the Tibetan Bonpos," in *Acta Jutlandica* XL: 1, Copenhagen 1968, pp. 7-43.
- (21) Samten G. Karmay, *The Treasury of Good Sayings: A Tibetan History of Bon*, Oxford University Press, London 1972.
- (22) On the *sMar-yig* script of Zhang-zhung, see Tshe-ring Thar, "The Ancient Zhang Zhung Civilization," op. cit. Also see Namkhai Norbu, *The Necklace of gZi*, op. cit..
- (23) On the Bonpo Terma tradition, see Samten Karmay, *The Treasury of Good Sayings*, op. cit. All of the early Terma discoveries of the Bonpos were *sa-gter*, that is, the actual physical texts written in previous times and concealed in various places of Tibet and Bhutan. Most of the actual discoverers of these collections of Terma texts were not learned Lamas, but simple farmers and hunters, who could not have possibly forged these texts. Among the most famous of these early "Tertons" were three Nepali thieves known as the three Atsaras, who in the year 961 CE stole a heavy locked chest from the Cha-ti dmar-po temple at Samye monastery. Escaping into the mountains with their loot, thinking that it contained gold they broke into the chest, but when they opened it, they found only some old texts. Greatly disappointed, they sold these old books to some local village Bonpo Lamas for some gold and a horse.
- (24) On the Nyingmapa Terma tradition, see Eva Dargyay, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1977. Also see Tulku Thondup, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of the Nyingmapa School of Buddhism*, Wisdom Publications, London 1986, and Tulku Thondup, *The Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapas*, Buddhayana, Marion MA 1984.
- (25) The Nine Ways of Bon, or rather, the nine successive vehicles of Bon (*bon theg-pa rim dgu*), as classified in the System of the Southern Treasures (*lho gter lugs*), is expounded in as many chapters in the *gZi-brjid*, the most extensive hagiography of Tonpa Shenrab. These chapters have been translated by Snellgrove in consultation with Lopon Tenzin Namdak. See David Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, Oxford University Press, London 1967. Here the Nine Ways are listed as follows:
1. The Way of the Practice of Prediction (*phywa gshen theg-pa*): Literally *theg-pa* means a vehicle or conveyance, rather than a road or a way. *gShen*, a word of obscure origin and meaning, can here be translated as "practice" or "practitioner" according to the Lopon. And the term *phywa* means prediction or prognostication. This way or vehicle is principally concerned with divination (*mo*), astrological and geomantic calculations (*rtsis*), medical diagnosis (*dpyad*), and the performing of healing rituals (*gto*).
 2. The Way of the Practice of Visible Manifestations (*snang gshen theg-pa*): This way is principally concerned with visible manifestations (*snang-ba*) perceived as positive manifestations of the activities of the gods (*lha*) who come to the aid of humanity. Therefore, the emphasis is placed on invoking the gods (*lha gsol-ba*) for their aid. This includes such classes of deities as the Thugs-dkar, the *sGra-bla*, the *Wer-ma*, and so on.
 3. The Way of the Practice of Magical Power (*'phrul gshen theg-pa*): This way is principally concerned with magical rituals to ensure prosperity and control over the spirits evoked, especially the rites of exorcism (*sel-ba*) to eliminate negative energy and the negative provocations of evil spirits (*gdon*) who come to

disturb human existence. The practitioner works with these energies in terms of evocation, conjuration, and application (bsnyen sgrub las gsum).

4. The Way of the Practice of Existence (srid gshen theg-pa): Here "existence" (srid-pa) properly means the processes of death and rebirth. This way is also known as 'Dur gshen, the practice of ceremonies for exorcising ('dur) the spirits of the dead who are disturbing the living. It is, therefore, principally concerned with the three hundred and sixty kinds of rites for accomplishing this, as well as methods for ensuring the good fortune and the long life of the living. These four represent the Four Causal Ways of Bon (bon rgyu'i theg-pa bzhi). These are followed by the higher ways of a more spiritual nature, whose goal is liberation and enlightenment, which are collectively known as the Fruitional Ways ('bras-bu'i theg-pa).

5. The Way of the Virtuous Lay Practitioners (dge-bsnyen theg-pa): This way is principally concerned with morality and ethics, such as the ten virtuous deeds (dge-ba bcu), the ten Perfections or Paramitas, and so on, as well as pious activities such as erecting stupas, and so on.

6. The Way of the Ascetic Sages (drang-srong theg-pa): The term drang-srong (Skt. rishi), meaning a sage, has here the technical significance of a fully ordained monk who has taken the full complement of vows, corresponding to the Buddhist bhikshu (dge-slong). The principal concern is with the vows of the monk and the rules of the monastic discipline ('dul-ba).

7. The Way of the White A (A-dkar theg-pa): This way is principally concerned with the Tantric practice of transformation by way of visualizing oneself as the meditation deity and the practices associated with the mandala. Here are included both the Lower Tantras and the Higher Tantras.

8. The Way of the Primordial Shen (ye gshen theg-pa): This way is concerned with certain secret Tantric practices including the proper relationship with the Guru and with the Tantric consort, as well as with the methodologies of the Generation Process (bskyed-rim) and the Perfection Process (rdzogs-rim) and the conduct connected with them.

9. The Ultimate Way (bla-med theg-pa): This ultimate and unsurpassed (bla na med-pa) way is comprised of the teachings and practices of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection, which describes the process of enlightenment in terms of the Base, the Path, and the Fruit, as well as the practice of contemplation in terms of the view, the meditations, and the conduct.

(26) The Nine Ways according to the System of the Central Treasures (dbus gter lugs) are also divided into the Causal Vehicles (rgyu'i theg-pa) and the Fruitional Vehicles ('bras-bu'i theg-pa). These are as follows:

1. The Vehicle of Gods and Men where one relies upon another (lha mi gzhan rten gyi theg-pa): that is to say, this is the vehicle of those disciples who must first hear the teachings from another. This vehicle corresponds to the Shravakayana in the Buddhist system and the philosophical view is that of the Vaibhashikas.

2. The Vehicle of the Shenrabpas who understand by themselves alone (rang-rtogs gshen-rab kyi theg-pa): These practitioners do not need to hear the teachings first from another, but they discover it for themselves. This vehicle corresponds to the Pratyekabuddhayana of the Buddhists and the philosophical view is that of the Sautrantikas.

3. The Vehicle of the Compassionate Bodhisattvas (thugs-rje sems-pa'i theg-pa): This vehicle corresponds to the Mahayana Sutra system or Bodhisattvayana vehicle in the Buddhist system. In particular, the reference is to the Bodhisattvas who practice the ten Paramitas of generosity, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, strength, compassion, commitment, skillful means, and wisdom. The philosophical view is that of the Yogacharins or Chittamatrins (sems-tsam-pa) who discern the absence of any inherent existence in terms of the internal self, as well as external phenomena.

4. The Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas that are without conceptual elaborations (g.yung-drung sems-pa'i spros med-pa'i theg-pa): This vehicle also corresponds to the Bodhisattvayana in the Buddhist system. The Bonpo term g.yung-drung sems-dpa', literally Svastikasattva or "Swastika being," has the same meaning as the Buddhist term Bodhisattva (byang-chub sems-dpa'). Here one finds the same practice of the ten Pramitas. However, the philosophical view of emptiness and the absence of any inherent existence in the internal self and the external phenomena is understood by way the Madhyamaka (dbu-ma-pa), rather than the Chittamatra. These four lower ways represent the Causal Vehicles (rgyu'i theg-pa), while those which follow are known as the Fruitional Vehicles.

5. The Vehicle of the Primordial Bon of Pure Conduct and Ritual Activity (bya-ba gtsang-spyod ye bon gyi theg-pa): Focusing on ritual activity (bya-ba, Skt. kriya) and purity of conduct, this vehicle corresponds to the Kriyatantayana in the Nyingmapa system. In terms of method, the Wisdom Being (ye-shes-pa) is invoked into one's range of vision and treated as a great lord being petitioned by a humble servant, and thereby the practitioner receives the knowledge (ye-shes) and the blessings (byin-rlabs) of the deity.

6. The Vehicle of the Clairvoyant Knowledge that possesses all of the aspects (rnam-par kun-ldan mngon-shes kyi theg-pa): The focus is equally on external ritual action and internal yoga practice. This vehicle corresponds to the Charyatantrayana in the Nyingmapa system. Together with the practice of the ten Paramitas and the four Recollections, the presence of the Wisdom being is invoked, but this time the deity is regarded as an intimate friend rather than as a superior lord. These two vehicles represent the Outer or Lower Tantras (phyi rgyud), while the vehicles that follow represent the Inner or Higher Tantras (nang rgyud).

7. The Vehicle of Visibly Manifesting Compassion in terms of the Actual Generation Process (dngos bskyed thugs-rje rol-pa'i theg-pa): This vehicle corresponds to the Yoga Tantra and to a certain extent to the Mahayoga Tantra and the Anuttara Tantra in the Buddhist system of classification for both the Nyingmapas and the Newer Schools. Establishing oneself in the higher view of the Ultimate Truth and remaining in the original condition of the Natural State, one engages in the Generation Process (bskyed-rim) and transforms oneself into the meditation deity, thereby realizing the qualities attributed to that manifestation of enlightened awareness.

8. The Vehicle wherein Everything is Completely Perfect and Exceedingly Meaningful (shin tu don-ldan kun rdzogs kyi theg-pa): Becoming established in the Ultimate Truth and the original condition of the Natural State as was the case above, here one places the emphasis on the Perfection Process (rdzogs-rim) rather than the Generation Process (bskyed-rim), so that Space and Awareness are realized to be inseparable (dbyings rig dbyer-med). And particularly in terms of the meditation deity, the practitioner comes to realize the gnosis or pristine awareness of the inseparability of bliss and emptiness (bde stong ye-shes). This vehicle corresponds to the Mahayoga Tantra and especially the Anuyoga Tantra classifications of the Nyingmapas.

9. The Unsurpassed Vehicle of the Highest Peak of the Primordial Great Perfection (ye nas rdzogs-chen yang-rtse bla-med kyi theg-pa): This vehicle comprises the Dzogchen teachings in terms of the Mind Series (sems-sde) which emphasize the awareness side of the Natural State and the Space Series (klong-sde) which emphasize the emptiness side, as well as the Secret Instruction Series (man-ngag sde) which emphasize their inseparability.

On the Central Treasures, see John Myrdhin Reynolds, *Yungdrung Bon: The Eternal Tradition*, Tibetan Translation Project (privately printed), New York 1994. And also Lopon Tenzin Namdak and John Reynolds (tr), *The Condensed Meaning of an Explanation of the Teachings of Yungdrung Bon*, Bonpo Foundation, Kathmandu n.d. Also see Tenzin Wangyal, *Wonders of the Natural Mind*, Station Hill Press, Barrytown NY 1993, pp. 35-37, 203-208.

(27) Oral Communication.

(28) According to Lopon Tenzin Namdak, the translations of these technical terms *chab dkar* as "white water" and *chab nag* as "black water" are problematical. Indeed, *chab* does mean "water" in Tibetan, but the word may originally have been a Zhang-zhung term and had a different and now forgotten meaning. In the old Bonpo usage, the terms "white" (*dkar*) and "black" (*nag*) did not have the moral connotations that they have in English, such as "white magic" done for good purposes and "black magic" done for evil purposes. In this context, white refers to invoking the aid of the gods and spirits, drawing positive energy to oneself, while black refers to the exorcizing and expelling of negative energies, perceived as a process of purification. The exorcised negative energies are felt to appear black in color, but the intention here is positive, namely, that of purification.

(29) According to Karmay, the name 'Phan-yul designates the district of 'Phan-yul to the north of Lhasa. This may have been the location where the Bonpo translation of the Prajnaparamita was made in the early period, then later concealed in a different region and rediscovered at a later time by *gShen-chen klu-dga'* in the 11th century. However, the Lopon disputes this theory and holds that 'phan-yul was probably a Zhang-zhung word whose meaning has been forgotten. The Tibetan term 'bum, literally meaning "one hundred thousand," is the usual designation in the Buddhist tradition for the entire collection of the Prajnaparamita Sutras, the largest of which consists of one hundred-thousand verses.

(30) See Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, *ibid.*

(31) The Termas revealed to *bLo-ldan snying-po* (b.1360), *Mi-zhig rDo-je*, otherwise known as *rDo-rje gling-pa* (1346-1405), *Kun-grol grags-pa* (b. 1700), *bDe-chen gling-pa* (b.1833), *gSang-sngags gling-pa* (b. 1864), *mKha'-'gro bDe-chen dbang-mo* (b.1868), etc., are considered recent treasure text discoveries (*gter gsar*). Among those listed here, *rDo-rje gling-pa* is also well known as a Nyingmapa Tertön. On him, see Eva Dargyay, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1977. On the New Bon Termas in general, see Karmay, *Treasury*, *ibid.*, pp.182-190.

- (32) On the Tibetan translator Vairochana as a Bonpo, see Samten Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, Brill, Leiden 1988, pp. 17–37, 216–223.
- (33) See Samten G. Karmay, *The Great Perfection: A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*, Brill, Leiden 1988. Also see Eva Dargyay, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1977.
- (34) See the discussion in Reynolds, *The Golden Letters*, op. cit., pp. 199–286.
- (35) Eva Dargyay, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1977. The Nyingmapa class of the Mahayoga Tantras is divided into the Tantra Section (rgyud-sde), consisting of eighteen Tantras headed by the Guhyagarbha Tantra (rgyud gsang-ba snying-po), and the Sadhana Section (grub-sde) consisting of the texts for the practices of these eight Herukas.
- (36) See the translation of the Man-ngag lta-ba'i phreng-ba in Samten Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, op. cit., pp. 137–174.
- (37) The state of even contemplation (mnyam-bzhag, Skt. samahita) represents the culmination of the Tantric process of transformation known as sadhana (grub-thabs). Just as the visualization process begins from the state of emptiness or Shunyata, generating the pure forms of the deity and the mandala out of this primordial condition of pure potentiality, so at the conclusion of the practice of the transformation, the visualization of the deity and its sacred space is dissolved once more back into its source, the state of Shunyata. The dissolving of all the pure forms generated in the creation process (bskyed-rim) of the sadhana back into emptiness does not, however, represent a true destruction or annihilation in any absolute sense. To assert that this is the case would represent the erroneous philosophical position of nihilism (chad-lta). Rather, it represents a re-enfolding of manifest forms back into their source, where they remain in their full potentiality. Having dissolved the visualization once more, the meditator rests for a period of time in Shunyata or pure unmanifest potentiality, in what is called a condition of even contemplation (mnyam-bzhag), out of which, subsequently, the sights and sounds of normal everyday life re-emerge as the post-meditation condition (rjes-thob). The Sanskrit term samahita is cognate with the more familiar term samadhi, both of which I translate into English as "contemplation," in order to distinguish them from "meditation" (sgom-pa, Skt. bhavana). In terms of Dzogchen, this remaining in the state of contemplation is equated with being in the Natural State (gnas-lugs). However, within the practice of Tantra, it is necessary to first go through this elaborate process of visualization and transformation in order to find oneself in the condition of contemplation once the visualization is dissolved back again into Shunyata. This visualization process recapitulates the creation, the evolution, and the dissolution of the entire manifest universe. But in the context of Dzogchen practice, it is not necessary to first transform something into something else in order to find oneself in the condition of contemplation. Rather, one simply relaxes and just finds oneself in contemplation at the very beginning of practice and remains thereafter in it, by whatever means. This represents the principal practice of Dzogchen, in relation to which all Tantric transformation practices are considered secondary. On this question, also see David Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means: The Tibetan Controversies on the "Self-Sufficient White Remedy" (dkar po chig thub)*, Der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna 1994.
- (38) There has been much discussion among scholars about the location of Uddiyana (o-rgyan). Tucci located it in the Swat valley in Pakistan on the basis of two medieval Tibetan texts. See Giuseppe Tucci, *Travels of Tibetan Pilgrimes in the Swat Valley*, The Greater India Society, Calcutta 1940. However, there is much evidence to indicate that Uddiyana was a far larger region embracing much of Eastern Afghanistan. See C.S. Upasak, *History of Buddhism in Afghanistan*, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Varanasi 1990.
- (39) On Gyer-spungs sNang-bzher Lod-po and his disciples, see Chapters Three and Four below.
- (40) On the origin of the Mahayana in the Northwest of India, see Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, Louvain 1988. And on the origin of Dzogchen in the same region, see Samten G. Karmay, "A Discussion of the Doctrinal Position of the rDzogs-chen from the 10th to the 11th Centuries," in *Journal Asiatique* 1–2, Paris 1975, pp. 147–155; as well as his *The Great Perfection: A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*, Brill, Leiden 1988.
- (41) On the Guyasamaja Tantra, see Alex Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras: Light on Indo-Tibetan Esotericism*, Samuel Weiser, New York 1973, and also his *The Yoga of the Guhyasamajatantra*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi 1977.
- (42) On the origin of the Kalachakra Tantra and of Shambhala, see Edwin Bernbaum, *The Way to Shambhala*, Anchor/Doubleday, New York 1980.

- (43) Lopon Tenzin Namdak and other Bonpo Lamas I have spoken to have identified 'Ol-mo lung-ring with Shambhala. For a discussion of Shambhala in the Tibetan tradition in general, both Buddhist and Bonpo, see Bernbaum, *The Way to Shambhala*, op. cit.
- (44) This has already been suggested by Snellgrove in *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, *ibid.*
- (45) See C. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, *ibid.*
- (46) Oral communication from Lopon Tenzin Namdak. The Lopon spent two years in that region hiding from the Chinese Communists. On this region and its archaeological remains, see John Vincent Bellezza, *Divine Dyads: Ancient Civilization in Tibet*, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala 1997. Also see his article, John Vincent Bellezza, "High Country Culture: A Civilization Flourished in the Himalayas before Buddhism Reached Tibet," *Discovering Archaeology* v.1 n.3, May-June 1999, pp. 78-83.
- (47) Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, *ibid.* Lopon Tenzin Namdak asserts that this monk Bodhisattva was not the famous Indian Buddhist scholar Shantirakshita who later became the first abbot of Samye monastery. But see the translation of the Bon ma nub-pa'i gtan-tshigs in Chapter Six of Part Two.
- (48) On the A-khrid system and rMe'u-ston dGongs-mdzod ri-khrod chen-po, see Per Kvaerne, "Bonpo Studies: The A-khrid System of Meditation," Part One: "The Transmission of the A-khrid System," in *Kailash* v. I, n. 1, pp. 19-50, Kathmandu 1973.
- (49) A-za bLo-gros rgyal-mtshan, 1198-1263.
- (50) Bru-chen rGyal-ba g.yung-drung, 1242-1209, composed the practice manual entitled the A-khrid thun mtshams bco-lnga-pa, "the Fifteen Sessions of Practice for A-khrid." For the translation of most of this text, see Per Kvaerne and Thubten Rikey, *The Stages of A-khrid Meditation: Dzogchen Practice of the Bon Tradition*, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala 1996. And on the A-khrid system generally, see Per Kvaerne, "Bonpo Studies: The A-khrid System of Meditation," Part One: "The Transmission of the A-khrid System," in *Kailash* v. I, n. 1, pp. 19-50, Part Two: "The Essential Teachings of the A-khrid System," in *Kailash* v. I, n. 4, pp. 248-332, Kathmandu 1973. For a translation of the hagiography of this master, see Chapter Eight below.
- (51) Shar-rdza bKra-shis rgyal-mtshan, 1859-1934. Shardza Rinpoche was a realized practitioner of Dzogchen who, at the end of his life, manifested the Rainbow Body. On the dark retreat according to Shardza Rinpoche, see the monograph, John Myrdhin Reynolds, *The Instructions of Shardza Rinpoche for the Practice of Vision and the Dark Retreat*, Bonpo Translation Project (privately printed), New York 1992.
- (52) On the rDzogs-chen sems-sde, see Reynolds, *The Golden Letters*, *ibid.* and also Namkhai Norbu, *The Crystal and the Way of Light: Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen*, Arkana Penguin Books, London 1993.
- (53) sNya-chen Li-shu stag-rings was said to a contemporary of the Tibetan king Khri-srong lde'u-btsan and was actively involved in the concealing of Terma texts. See Karmay, *Treasury*, *ibid.* On Li-shu stag-rings, see also Chapter Four below. The text of the rDzogs-chen yang-rtse'i klong-chen was reprinted in India in 1973.

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