



Biography of Guru Padmasambhava

His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche



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Guru Padmasambhava

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By the merit of this work, may Their Holiness the Sakya Trichen, the 42nd, and the 43rd Sakya Trizins enjoy perfect health and very long lives, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.



EDITORIAL PREFACE

Guru Padmasambhava brought Vajrayāna Buddhism from India to Tibet in the 8th century, establishing a tradition that thrives to this day. Known as the "Second Buddha" and "Guru Rinpoche" in Tibet, he is revered by all the major schools and followers of Tibetan Buddhism that developed subsequently. How did he manage to spread the Dharma throughout the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayan region? This forms the core of our exploration.

While many may find the stories of Guru Rinpoche to be mythical and challenging to verify, they serve a significant and necessary purpose—effectively conveying profound spiritual truths that are otherwise difficult to express directly and clearly through conventional means to the multitude of beings in this degenerate age.

The deeply rooted local culture of the Himalayan region necessitates immense skillful means to successfully transform the minds of its inhabitants. The manifestations of Guru Padmasambhava after his arrival in Tibet are not mere stories; they hold infinite significance, aimed at guiding us towards the state of buddhahood.

As we explore these narratives, engage in Dharma learning, and practice, it's essential to always remember the ultimate goal of the Dharma. Just as a glass enables us to drink the water it holds, the teachings of the Buddha aim to guide us towards complete awakening. However, we often fixate on the glass, forgetting that its purpose is to drink the water. In this text, His Holiness elucidates these common misconceptions, urging us to focus on the profound truths of the Dharma.

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Preface

Good morning. Today, according to the wishes of His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trichen Rinpoche and Jetsun Kushok, both of whom are my gurus, I will teach the biography of Guru Padmasambhava. We usually call an occasion like this a *guru teaching*, but I prefer to think of it as sharing my knowledge and experience with you.



His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin (on the left)
and His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (on the right)

Preliminary

Preliminary: Like a Speed Bump on the Road

Many people think that the pandemic is different from ordinary times. Personally, I don't see any difference. Suffering and death are in the news much more now than before so that things appear to be different. But if we think more carefully, we know that people die of diseases, accidents, and all kinds of other things every day, whether there is a pandemic or not.

As Buddhists, we believe in the law of karma and in rebirth: the wheel of life, or cyclical existence. It is our own karma that causes our suffering and takes our lives from us when we die. Everything that happens to us is the result of our own actions, and our karma determines how much time we have in this life. There are actually three factors that sustain life. They are karma, life force, and merit. If one or more of these are diminished, then we can do practices to increase them, such as

life releases, and pūjās to improve them. But once all three are exhausted, there is nothing that anyone can do.

I feel that this time of the pandemic is a good opportunity because it can push us to understand reality and the Buddha's teachings. I always say that, for practitioners of the Dharma, death is one of the most important things that we have. Death is precious. As Buddhists, we consider birth in the human realm to be the best possible birth for turning towards the Dharma because humans experience suffering, including the suffering of death and dying. We have the luxurious gift of this suffering, which drives us to seek liberation. If there were no suffering in our lives, it would be very difficult for us to practice Dharma.

In daily life, as long as we feel that we are physically fit, then everything is fine and we don't think about medical issues, doctors, or whether we should be eating this or that. But when we feel unwell, even with simple things like stomachaches or headaches, right away we do everything that doctors say we should do. And then, as time passes and we feel better again, we become lax. Maybe we forget to take the morning or the evening dose, and so on. We go back to our regular routine and do whatever we want. Understanding the pain and suffering of life makes us want to get out of our situation, and this is why death is important for practitioners.

I like cars. Sometimes I talk about things in terms of driving. We can say that the thought of death is like a speed bump on the road because it is a *reminder*. When you are driving fast and not paying attention, the speed bump makes you drive more slowly. It makes you more aware. Death is similarly a reminder. On one level, everybody knows that we are all going to die. But we do not think about it. We are always planning for tomorrow, or for next year, or five years down the line. We plan as if we will live for another fifty or one hundred years when, in reality, none of us knows how long we will live.

Death is a precious jewel for us, as humans. It gives us the opportunity to think about our present, past, and future. Although there is death and suffering in all of the six realms, the human realm is special because we have the best opportunity to practice the Dharma and get out of this situation. The human realm is in the middle of the six realms, neither high nor low. But for practitioners, the human realm is the best realm for rebirth, because it means we have this ability and the opportunity to practice.

Short Meditation Practice

Aware of this opportunity, and aware of death and impermanence, I would like for us to do a short meditation.

Before we begin, we should also develop great compassion, thinking about all sentient beings and their suffering. We should prepare with these thoughts.

Meditation gives us the chance to bring our minds to the present, *right now*, and observe what we are doing and our surroundings. Here we are: you are listening to me talk. If you think about it, you will see that our minds typically do not live in the present. They are always two steps ahead, somewhere in the future. It is about ten o'clock now. Maybe you are already thinking about lunch or about tonight or tomorrow. Maybe you think a lot about what you will do and where you will go after the pandemic. We live in the present, yet our minds are always in the future—sometimes in the past, too, but mainly in the future.

Bringing our minds to the present makes us think about what we're doing, how we're behaving, talking, eating, and how we live. In other words, it brings us to reality, and this is why it is important. The future is not here yet. It's nothing but imagination: *Next year I'll go to Mars!* It is difficult for us to see reality because our minds are typically occupied with the future, which means dwelling habitually only in imagination.

The future is imagination, and the past is already done. The present is where we act and where we can change things, but

we are rarely in the present. Our bodies might be, but our minds are not. We need to bring our minds and bodies to the same line, or the same place. This is why we meditate. Meditation helps us stop our minds from going all over the place.

Meditation is basically learning to control your mind by watching where it is going and directing your mental energy so that you can bring it back, slowly, to the present and to reality. It's not easy, but thinking about what is present, right now, is a helpful way to do it. This is why we typically start training in meditation with a sound or with a physical object placed in front of us. It could be a statue, or a flower. You practice by repeatedly placing the mind on that object when it wanders. Once you master that and are good at controlling your mind, then you can channel it whichever way you want.

Another object that you can use, besides a thought or a statue or a sound, is your breath. Settle your mind on the inhalation and exhalation of your breath. Whichever way you do it, the point is simply to keep your mind in one place. We will do a short meditation now.

[Short meditation]

Guru Padmasambhava

Guru Padmasambhava's Appearance in a Lotus and His Adoption by King Indrabhūti

We live in the era in which the Buddha Shakyamuni appeared. He was born in Lumbinī, gave his first teaching in Vārāṇasī, attained enlightenment in Bodhgaya, and entered into parinirvāṇa at Kushinagar in India. This is said to be a very good era because one thousand buddhas will appear in it. Buddha Shakyamuni was the fourth. Before he passed away at the age of 81, the Buddha gave a prophecy that in the future there will be someone greater than him who will emerge from the flower of a lotus in the lake of Dhanakośa. Fulfilling this prophecy, Guru Padmasambhava came into this world.

There was a kingdom called Oḍḍiyāna. The king at that time was named Indrabhūti. Oḍḍiyāna had three King Indrabhūtis; we are talking about the middle one. Indrabhūti was blind, and although he had one hundred and one queens, he did

not have an heir to whom he could pass the throne. He did everything possible to remedy his situation. He prayed to the gods, consulted astrologers, and did pūjās and rituals. He gave generously to the poor people in the kingdom—so much so that he emptied his store of treasure. Today, we would say that he went bankrupt. Seeing his devotion and the extent of his generosity, the god of the nāga dākinīs came to him and told him that his wish would be fulfilled if he would go to the ocean to search for the *norbu*, or wish-fulfilling jewel. This made Indrabhūti very happy, and the nāgas helped him go to the ocean to search for this treasure. When he found it, he prayed to the jewel, and thanks to its blessing, his left eye was restored so that he could see again, at least partially. He returned to the palace and was welcomed by all the queens and ministers with great ceremonies, and the people of Oḍḍiyāna were happy.

At that time, there was a lake nearby called Dhanakośa. Today, many masters and great scholars have said that this was probably located in the Swat Valley in present-day Pakistan. Many lotus flowers began to grow in the lake, and beautiful rainbows began to appear. The birds and other animals made beautiful music. All of this surprised the fishermen who worked on the lake, and they informed King Indrabhūti about the amazing things they saw. The king sent ministers to investigate, and the ministers were also amazed at the extraordinary beauty

of the lake, with its lotus flowers, rainbows, and birds singing beautiful melodies.

They returned to the king and told him what they saw. Next, the king himself decided to go. He witnessed the same things and was also amazed. While he was there, a large lotus flower in the middle of the lake opened, and the king saw a boy about eight years of age inside the lotus flower. The king was very surprised at this.

He asked the boy five questions. First, he asked, “Who is your father?” The boy answered, “My father is wisdom.” The king asked, “Who is your mother?”, and the boy answered, “My mother is also wisdom.” The king asked him where he came from, and the boy told the king that he came from the realm of wisdom. Next, the king asked him what he ate, and the boy said that he ate dual conception. “Dual conception” means maintaining the differentiation between self and other, you and I, good and bad. We have dual conception because of our attachment. The boy told the king that he consumes this, meaning that for him everything is equal or the same. Finally, the king asked him what he does, and the boy answered that he defeats the defilements of ignorance, desire, and anger.

Hearing the boy’s answers to the questions, the king was so astonished and filled with joy that he began to cry. As he was

crying, his right eye was also healed so that his sight was fully restored. Thinking that he still had no heir, he decided to adopt the boy. With great ceremony, the boy was brought to the kingdom and into the palace. The king gave him two names. The first was Padmasambhava, or Pema Jungné in Tibetan, which means “born from a lotus.” The second was Tsokyé Dorjé, which means “vajra born from a lake.” This is because, when Padmasambhava emerged from the lake, he was holding a vajra in his right hand. He held a lotus in his left hand.

The boy grew up in the palace. He was kind and compassionate, a good student, interested in everything, and he was a good practitioner. Unlike normal children who develop gradually over a period of years, Padmasambhava grew day by day. As he grew into a young man, the king arranged for his marriage to a princess named Prabhāvatī. As the king became older, he gave his throne to Padmasambhava, who ruled the kingdom for several years. He was a very good king who treated everybody equally. He was not rash, and he was compassionate. He was a great Dharmic ruler.

As I was reading different biographies of Guru Padmasambhava, I learned that each time he went somewhere and performed miracles, people would give him a different name. For this reason, Guru Padmasambhava is known by many names. One of these, for example, is King with a Lock of Hair, because of the lock

of hair on his head. There are many stories in these biographies, and today I am trying to relate only the most important parts.

Padmasambhava ruled the kingdom according to the Dharma. Remember that the Buddha had prophesied that somebody greater than him would come; he also prophesied that this person would spread the Dharma and give service to others through compassionate activities in the east, in the west, and in the Land of Snow. This was said by the Buddha himself.

Guru Padmasambhava Renounces Kingship and Meets Mandāravā

After ruling the kingdom for a few years, Padmasambhava began to feel that by ruling he could only benefit the few people that lived in the kingdom, and he wanted to do more. It was his destiny to do more to benefit people. Of course, a king cannot leave everything and go away very easily. A king has to think about the kingdom. Therefore, Padmasambhava had to devise, very cleverly, a plan that would allow him to leave the kingdom. He did this, and he began to live in a cemetery.

While he was living in the cemetery, he conducted many experiments with his practice. As a result, and because different people have different perceptions—generally speaking, most

people only see outer appearances—there were some who thought that he was a great practitioner and others who thought that he was a bad practitioner. They thought this because he appeared to be wild. During his stay in the cemetery practicing extensive meditation, ḍākinīs and gods came to him in his vision, and they gave him many blessings. Thanks to this, he became a powerful practitioner.

After receiving these blessings, he went to the kingdom of Zahor, which is now somewhere near the Mandi district in India. There is a place there called Rewalsar Lake (*Tso Pema* in Tibetan). It is still possible to go there and see this lake. In this area, there were caves where solitary practitioners came to dwell, and Guru Padmasambhava was one of them. He also taught others there.

The Mandi king had a daughter named Princess Mandāravā. She was extraordinarily beautiful, and the kings and princes of numerous neighboring countries desired her for a wife. She was not interested in any of them or in their wealth. She wanted to become a practitioner. To this end, she went to the caves at Rewalsar to practice meditation. At that time, Guru Rinpoche^[1] was giving teachings there, and she became his disciple. Eventually, he accepted her as his consort.

Together, they went to Maratika, which is now in Nepal. In the caves there, they practiced Amitāyus longevity practice for three months. At the end of that period, the Buddha Amitāyus came to them, pleased with their devotion and their practice. He gave them the longevity blessing so that they became basically immortal. He gave them nectar to drink from a vase, and thanks to this nectar, their bodies never aged. After receiving that blessing, Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā returned to Mandi in India. During that time—I must also say—they defeated many demons that they encountered along the way.

Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā are Burned Alive in Mandi

Back in Mandi, the people recognized their princess. They saw her coming and going in the streets, wearing very simple clothes, walking in the market, and so on. This made the people angry. It was an insult to the kingdom and to all the people that their great princess was going around this way. Soon, the ministers and the king also discovered that Mandāravā was in Mandi behaving this way, and they also became upset.

The ministers gathered sandalwood from all over the kingdom. I never understood why they would collect sandalwood,

specifically. Of course, I never went to any school to study science or botany. But what I have learned is that sandalwood burns hottest of all the different types of wood. Because they were so insulted, their plan was to burn Guru Rinpoche and Mandāravā. Thus, they gathered sandalwood and great quantities of sesame oil.

With the sandalwood and the oil, the two were both burned alive. Normally, what happens is that the fire dies and the smoke clears by the third day. On day three, all that will be left is dust and ashes. But this fire did not die. Even a week later, the fire was still burning very hot. People were amazed and concerned by this. The entire kingdom was dismayed. The king and ministers returned to see what was going on, and they saw the fire burning strongly. But they could see that under the fire there was water, and upon the water, there was a giant lotus flower. On the lotus flower, they saw Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā, both seated comfortably. That's when they realized that they had made a great mistake. They felt strong regret and great shame, and they requested the two to come out of the fire.

In those days, kings held absolute power. They were more like gods than like modern presidents because there were no limits to what kings could do. The king descended from his elephant and walked towards them—not carried, but on the ground, like an ordinary person—and he offered his elephant

to Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā. They climbed onto the elephant, and they were led by the king himself back to the palace. There was a great ceremony, and the king and his ministers offered the whole kingdom to Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā. The king also offered them his royal raiment, and this is why you will see Guru Padmasambhava in paintings and statues adorned with jewelry and other fine things, including a special hat. According to the historical accounts, these depictions mark the occasion when the king's clothing was offered to Guru Padmasambhava.

I want to explain why Guru Padmasambhava allowed himself to be burned alive and so on, when he could have done anything that he wanted to do. Maybe he could have gone straight into the kingdom and shown everyone his power directly. However, had he shown his power directly, it would have been too much. It would have been more than people could handle or see directly. People would have perished if they had seen his power.

Therefore, his plan was to let them do whatever they wanted to do to him. They put him into the fire, but then they saw that nothing happened to him. They had done everything that they possibly could to harm Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā, and they were exhausted. And in this way, they learned to respect his power on their own terms. Guru Padmasambhava went to a few kingdoms and did the same thing. He recognized

what they needed to be brought onto the right path, and that was how he made them ready. The people did everything they possibly could until they were exhausted, and then they were ready to receive the teachings. They became mentally and physically ready, and they offered themselves fully, physically and mentally, to Guru Padmasambhava. That's when Guru Padmasambhava gave them teachings and showed them the right path.

Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā are Burned Alive in Oḍḍiyāna

After this, Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā traveled to the Oḍḍiyāna kingdom, the place of his origin. As before, some people thought he was a good practitioner, and others thought he was a bad practitioner because he was wild and crazy, and they didn't like that. Especially seeing their royalty returning to the kingdom with such a demeanor, many did not like him at all. As before, the people gathered sandalwood and sesame oil, and they burned Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā.

In Oḍḍiyāna, such a fire normally dies down in seven days, but this fire was still burning after twenty-one days. As before, the people were dismayed. When they went to check on the fire,

they saw Guru Padmasambhava and Mandāravā in the flames, both unharmed—even looking better than ever—and wearing garlands of kapāla skulls. They were shocked by this sight, and they were filled with remorse at having done something wrong. As before, they brought the pair to the palace, and the king offered Guru Padmasambhava the whole kingdom.

Guru Rinpoche stayed there for about thirteen years, teaching the people, including the king and ministers. He gave them many teachings and guided them on the right path.

Guru Rinpoche Goes to Nepal and Defeats the Demon Causing a Famine

I said before that the Buddha prophesied that Padmasambhava would accomplish some of his most important activities in the Land of Snow. Before going to Tibet, Guru Padmasambhava moved to Nepal, which borders Tibet, to a place called Pharping today where the Asura Cave is located. When he reached there, he saw that there was a demon terrorizing the public. This demon could control the weather and had created a famine that lasted for three years. Because there was no water, there was no food. Guru Rinpoche decided that he would defeat this demon, and he practiced Yangdak Heruka to that end. However,

Yangdak is a very wild and powerful deity—so much so that Guru Rinpoche began to practice Vajrakīlaya, too, in order to be protected from the obstacles that arose. Vajrakīlaya is more like a bodyguard, and the Yangdak is the main deity.

To receive these blessings, according to the Vajrayāna, he needed a consort. At the time, there was a king in Nepal called Punyedhara. The queen passed away during childbirth when their daughter, the Princess Śākyadevi, was being born. The king was so saddened by this, that he left the baby princess in a cemetery to die. According to the story, Śākyadevi was found there and raised by monkeys. As an adult, she became a disciple, and later a consort, of Guru Padmasambhava.

It is important to understand that these consorts of Guru Padmasambhava were very powerful practitioners in their own right, as powerful as Guru Rinpoche himself. Remember Princess Mandāravā: when he was with her, she received Amitābha's blessings, the same as Guru Rinpoche. Just like him, she received the blessing of immortality. This princess of Nepal, Śākyadevi, did the same practices that Guru Rinpoche did in order to defeat the demon and end the famine. She did the same practices and received the same blessings. They were equal in terms of power.

At that time, Guru Rinpoche had another consort whose name was Kālasiddhi. He had five main consorts in his lifetime:

Mandāravā, Śakyadevi, Kālasiddhi, Yeshé Tsogyal, and Tashi Khyidren.

Guru Padmasambhava Goes to Tibet, Subdues Demons, and Constructs Samye Institute

During the time when Padmasambhava was defeating the demon in Nepal, Tibet was ruled by King Trisong Detsen. I will go a little bit off this topic here to say how Buddhism started in Tibet. An earlier king, Songtsen Gampo, had two queens, one from Nepal and the other from China. Both of them were Buddhist, and each brought a statue of the Buddha with them to Tibet. Although there are a few stories about Buddhist texts being brought to Tibet, the Dharma mainly arrived when these two Buddhist princesses came to Tibet.

Two generations after Songtsen Gampo, King Trisong Detsen was enthroned. He was interested in Buddhism, and he wanted to establish it across the land. Although Tibet had a writing system at this time, it was not suited for Buddhist scriptures. Trisong Detsen sent scholars to India, and they devised the Tibetan script that we still use today on the basis of Indian models. It is an alphabet especially designed for the Buddhist teachings, and this is why we consider the alphabet to be holy. We don't walk over written or printed text, and we don't throw

things away with text written on them, whether they are love letters or other pieces of writing.

In any case, when Trisong Detsen was the king, he invited Śāntarakṣita—the Khenchen Śāntarakṣita Bodhisattva—in order to disseminate Buddhism across the kingdom. Śāntarakṣita taught basic Buddhism to the Tibetan people, including things like the ten negative deeds. Śāntarakṣita told the king that if he really wanted to establish the Buddhist teachings in Tibet, they needed to establish an institute for training in higher teachings. They made plans to do this and began construction on a building. However, there were demons and other spirits who didn't want the Dharma to be established. The workers would build during the day, and then at night, spirits would destroy what they had constructed. After many attempts, it was clear that they would not finish the institute.

Seeing the situation, Śāntarakṣita said to the king that they should invite Guru Padmasambhava, one of the most powerful masters of their time. Only by inviting him, he told the king, would there be a possibility of success in the construction of an institute and bringing the Buddhist teachings to Tibet. The king listened to Śāntarakṣita and sent his ministers to India to invite Guru Padmasambhava. Of course, Guru Padmasambhava was already in Nepal, which is between Tibet and India. Guru Padmasambhava already knew that he should go to Tibet for

the Dharma, and this is why, when they reached Nepal, they found him there already halfway to Tibet.

Guru Rinpoche's first accomplishment in Tibet was defeating all the evil spirits and demons. When we say that he defeated them, we do not mean that he killed them. These spirits were trying to prevent Buddhism from taking root in Tibet. Guru Rinpoche subdued them and changed them from enemies of Buddhism into guardians. They were turned around and put on the right path.

The institute that they succeeded in building was in a place called Samye. This location was chosen by Guru Padmasambhava himself. He did the earth-breaking ceremony, and it took about three to five years to finish construction. Samye institute had four main sections. The first one was for philosophy. The second was for translation.

Guru Padmasambhava invited about 108 scholars from India, and they began translating the Buddhist canon into Tibetan. If you are a Buddhist, access to Tibetan texts is the most powerful way to learn Buddhism because in Tibetan we have the most texts. Buddhism began in Indian and flourished there and in the surrounding kingdoms, but because of many centuries of war and destruction, Buddhism was almost entirely destroyed in India. However, it survived in Tibet, and many texts have been

preserved in Tibet that were lost in India. This is why Tibetan texts are so important for the practice of Buddhism. Many of the lotsāwas, or translators, had come from India. The third section was for training ritual masters, and the fourth was for training in meditation.

Soon, it was decided that Tibet needed fully ordained monks in order to establish the Dharma. They chose seven monks as a trial: three older men, three younger ones, and one middle-aged man. The trial was to see whether the Tibetan people could maintain the vows. Among these initial seven, one of the young ones was Khön Lü'i Wangpo Sungwa, an ancestor to the Sakya founders.^[2]

Today, there are many Vajrakīlaya practices. If you trace the lineages of the Yangdak Heruka and Vajrakīlaya, they all go back to Khön Lü'i Wangpo Sungwa, who received them straight from Guru Rinpoche. Today, among the Sakyas, we practice a special Khön family lineage Vajrakīlaya, that, again, we trace all the way to Khön Lü'i Wangpo Sungwa. His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trichen Rinpoche says that whenever he does these Vajrakīlaya rituals, there are certain signs that he sees. This is because the unbroken lineage is still holding. It shows the power of this Vajrakīlaya lineage. As a Sakya, I am sharing this with you.

The construction of Samye monastery was difficult, but it was accomplished with Guru Padmasambhava's extraordinary assistance. After about three or five years, there was an opening ceremony to consecrate the institute, and it was presided over by Guru Padmasambhava, Śāntarakṣita Khenchen Bodhisattva, and King Trisong Detsen. Today the institute is usually called Samye Monastery, but it was initially designed to be an institute or school where people could learn Buddhism.

Yeshé Tsogyal

Guru Rinpoche had twenty-five main students in Tibet. Among them were King Trisong Detsen and his ministers, but his best student was Queen Yeshé Tsogyal, one of Trisong Detsen's many queens. She became Guru Rinpoche's disciple and his consort. As a practitioner, she was equal to Guru Rinpoche. As I said earlier, the knowledge and power of his consorts was exactly the same as his own.

Yeshé Tsogyal played a huge role in establishing many of the teachings in Tibet because of her association with terma texts. "Terma" means hidden text. At that time, they knew that there would be difficult times ahead for the Dharma. Many texts were buried under mountains or under rocks or trees so that

they could be discovered later. In addition to hiding texts in physical locations, another method was to preserve them in people's minds, so that they would emerge later. Texts were brought back this way by many masters. The precious masters who brought these treasures back are called tertöns, meaning treasure finders.

Sometimes the texts were taken physically out of the earth and the mountains, and sometimes they emerged from the minds of the tertöns. But what is important here is to know that most of the treasure texts that were rediscovered were buried or hidden by Yeshé Tsogyal. This is why she is such an important figure in Tibetan Buddhism. As for Guru Padmasambhava, he is so important that one of our ancestors, Sakya Paṇḍita, said that Guru Padmasambhava was the second Buddha of our time. In one of Guru Padmasambhava's own teachings, I think in the "Pema Khatang," he says that there will be many emanations of himself in the future, and that these figures will spread the Dharma. Two of these emanations in the Sakya lineage are Sakya Paṇḍita and Chögyal Phagpa. Their names were prophesied long before they were born.

Yeshé Tsogyal and Guru Padmasambhava traveled all over Tibet. They taught the Dharma and brought people onto the right path, all the while defeating many demons. Among the places

they visited, in today's geography, are Bhutan, various locations in India, Bumthang, Mön, and many other places. It was when he was in Bumthang or Mön, that he met another consort, Tashi Khyidren, the fifth of the five consorts.

All in all, he spent about fifty-five years in Tibet. He spent so many years there because he knew the importance of it. If there had been no Guru Rinpoche, you can be sure that we would not be Buddhists today; there would be no Buddhism in Tibet. Guru Rinpoche was important to the survival of Buddhism. Whatever teachings we enjoy today, it is thanks to Guru Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyal.

Dharma Advice

Equality of the Four Schools

At this point, I want to say something about the four orders in Tibetan Buddhism and how we should think about our differences. We have Sakya, Nyingma, Kagyu, and Geluk. There are many subdivisions, too, but these are the main schools, or orders. People tend to emphasize how different the schools are from each other, but if you look into the history and the teachings themselves, you will not differentiate between them at all.

First and most simply, we all follow the Buddha. We all follow the same teachings. We have four different orders not because of political enmity or because we didn't like each other, but because of historical factors, people's merit, and because of the needs of the time for the survival of Buddhism.

All four lineages came from India, each at different times and through different teachers and scholars. Although they taught

differently, all these scholars derive from one institute, Nālandā Institute in India. Nālandā in its time was the greatest university in the world, like a combination of Oxford and Harvard. Today, the West is more powerful and advanced, but at that time, Asia was much more advanced than the West—maybe a thousand years ahead of Western countries in terms of knowledge and the power of its kings. Nālandā was at the center of all this. The teachings came to Tibet from Nālandā at four different times, and this is why we have four schools.

You see how the hand has different fingers, but all are part of one hand. You could focus on their differences and argue their relative merits: "Oh, this little finger is very different from the other fingers," or "This one is longer; this one is tiny; this one is biggest." However, what we should do is trace our lineages, and we will no longer think this way. You may think that the deity that you practice is very different from others, but if you study your guru's lineage, then you will find that they all end up in the same place.

That's the historical perspective. Then, if you think about it from the religious point of view, you will understand that we must respect each other if we are to be good Buddhists. If you are a good Sakyapa, you will respect Nyingma, Kagyu, Geluk, and so on. In fact, if you want to be a good Buddhist, you should

respect all other religions, and not just the other schools and sects of Buddhism.

What is the Buddha's main teaching? The first teaching was the four noble truths, and the first truth is the truth of suffering. There is the same suffering for everyone, in all the six realms of saṃsāra. We cannot say disparaging things to others and, at the same time, believe in this equality.

Of course, all the Buddha's teachings were greater than anything else that existed until that time. We must understand the historical era in which Buddha Shakyamuni taught. Today, we see racism, materialism, rich and poor, but these problems were a million times stronger in the time of the Buddha. At that difficult time, the Buddha established equality, something that was unheard of. People didn't understand it or accept it. But through the Buddha's method and skillful means, they began to understand that this equality is very important. This is why, if we are good Buddhists, we will respect all other human beings, their religions, and traditions.

This is important to remember because we all have a natural tendency to say that *we are better* and *we are greater*. But this feeling has nothing to do with our school or our religion. We say such things only because we want to feel stronger, bigger,

and better. We do this because of our egos and our ignorance. My point is that we are all the same. The Nyingma and Sakya arrived earlier, around 1000 or 1100 CE. The Geluk arrived later by about 600 years. But these differences are just differences of time. All the schools are derived from the same teachings of the Buddha and from the Indian tradition that flourished at Nālandā.

The Importance of Self-Confidence

Guru Rinpoche and Yeshé Tsogyal played an unimaginably important role in Tibetan Buddhism. We can say that without them, there would be no Buddhism in Tibet today. When Guru Rinpoche left Tibet after about 50 or 55 years, according to the teachings, he went into the Zangdokpalri, or the Copper Mountain.^[3] He said that although he may not be physically present in Tibet any longer, he will always be looking towards the Land of Snow. Right up to the present, he is looking towards Tibet.

He also said, "Whenever you do my practice or worship me, I'm always there. I'm always outside your door, like a guest." Whenever you do his practice or chant his mantra, you are opening the door, and he is always there. We must know this

and feel this, and then our practice will be much more effective.

One of the histories mentions that he was born—not really born, but appeared—in the year of the monkey. The year of the monkey and the month of the monkey is the fifth, according to the lunar calendar. The tenth day of the lunar calendar, too, is considered to be special for Guru Rinpoche practitioners, who make offerings on this day. He said, “If you do the practice on the tenth day, I will physically come.” There is no question, then, whether he may or may not come: he will come. You just need to have full faith.

Whatever practice you are doing, whether it is a grand pūjā or a simple pūjā at home, you might think, “I am a simple person, a simple practitioner. Whatever practice I do does not really matter, even if it is a great pūjā.” I have been screaming my lungs out to everyone who will listen not to think this way. Please, understand that there is no such thing as a simple practitioner. Every practitioner is special. The Buddha himself said that every sentient being—and not just practitioners, but every sentient being—has buddha nature inside them. We are all buddhas by nature inside, and we just haven't realized that. We have to find ourselves. Whatever practice you are doing has full power, and there is no such thing as simple power or simple practitioners.

We must believe in ourselves. The more belief you have in yourself, the more power you will have. That should be a given. Of course, we need gurus and teachers, too, but we have them. In fact, the gurus are showering you with teachings. Today is not like one hundred years ago. If you want to practice today, there is no limit to the number of teachings, practices, and empowerments that you can receive from teachers.

The problem isn't that there is not enough Dharma, or we cannot access it. The problem is that we do not believe in ourselves and in the power of our practice. Understanding and believing are very different things. Even a new practitioner who has never studied Buddhism before will know after the first or second day that they are in saṃsāra because of their defilements. They will know that their suffering is caused by anger, desire, and ignorance. We all know these things, but really believing them is what matters.

We tend to want our gurus to do all the work for us. We want our gurus to bring us to enlightenment. But it doesn't work that way. Gurus cannot make you enlightened. You have to become enlightened by yourself, through your own efforts. Of course, the Buddha is the guide, and the Buddha and the guru are the same thing; they are showing you the right path. Your gurus can only guide you, not make you enlightened.

The more you believe in yourself, the more you will believe in your guru. When I was a student, I believed in my gurus a thousand times more than I believed in myself. Later, I realized that this is not the way it should be. The guru believes that the student can practice and attain enlightenment, and you, as the student, must believe that, too. You should not remove that part.

If you are doing nothing but thinking, “I’ll do whatever you want,” then you are not really using the teachings. If someone is homeless, and a benefactor gives them an immense amount of wealth—let’s say millions or billions of dollars—then that person would use the money to improve their situation. They would not say, “Oh, this money I have received is such a great blessing. I am so lucky to have received this, and now I will not use it.” If the homeless person did not go out and buy a house, buy better clothes and food, then what was the point of giving them that wealth? In the same way, the whole point of gurus giving you teachings is so that you will use them.

The guru is giving, twenty-four-seven. There is no limit to what the guru is giving us. But are we really accepting it? What are we doing with the teachings that we receive? Many people want more and more initiations, more practices, and more knowledge. They want blessings for wisdom from Mañjuśrī,

for wealth from Jambhala, for a long life from Amitāyus, for protection from Mahākāla—but for what? Do you want a long life just so that you can live for a few more years? If so, what will be the end result? There will be nothing to show for it.

What we must do is realize the power that we have in ourselves. On the one hand, the distance between you now and the state of enlightenment is a vast distance. But viewed another way, it is not far. We all possess buddha nature, and we can become enlightened in this very place, here where we are sitting, and right now. It is because of the defilements of ignorance, desire, and anger, we experience this saṃsāra and suffering.

If we do not believe in ourselves, we are only fooling ourselves. The teachers have given us so much, and they are still giving, without asking for anything. No matter what you are doing, even if it's only reciting one mantra, you should do it with full faith in yourself. Know that the guru is none other than yourself; the best part of you is the guru himself. This is why there is no simple student. Whether you are a monk, a nun, a lay practitioner, married or unmarried, it doesn't matter. Whether you are successful or unsuccessful, it doesn't matter. These are all outer things. Inwardly, we have to look at ourselves and understand that we have received great wealth from our gurus, and we have to practice, which is more than acquiring mere understanding.

Right now, because we do not understand ourselves, we are tangled and lost in our own negative emotions. We are caught up in ignorance, desire, and anger. We have thoughts of self-clinging: I want this, I want that, I want things that are bigger and better. There is no limit to our desire. The more things we have, the more things we want.

Mere Understanding: Desire for Knowledge

In the same way, the more things we try to understand with mere understanding, the more we will want. I've seen this many times with people who study philosophy. People who have just started studying Buddhist philosophy often feel that they understand everything, that they are masters because they can read something. For many years, I wondered about this. Great masters who have studied for their entire lives have told me that they do not understand anything, that they don't know anything. But these students who have studied for just a few years, maybe five or ten years, they tell me that they understand everything and say that they are very good at Buddhist philosophy.

For many years, this confused me. Then I started to understand it by analogy with people who study martial arts. Those who

are real masters of the martial arts do not go around fighting with everyone for show. But there are others who have studied for a few years who feel that they are very powerful now. Maybe they can break a few bricks with a kick, and they start to show off. But those who really know the meaning of martial arts and know their own power also know the damage that it can do to the other person. They do not make shows of it or brag about it. They are reserved, and they are kind to others.

Similarly, I think that great masters understand how vast the universe is, and they feel that they have just started to scratch the surface. But people who don't see how vast this world is think that they understand everything because they have understood one book, or because they understood the whole book.

Like Watching a Movie

Time and time again, when talking to members of our Saṅgha—the lamas, nuns, and students from all over the world—people tell me, “Oh, I'm just a normal person.” For many years I accepted that. But I have realized that there's no such thing as just a normal practitioner. You must believe this. If you think that you are only a simple person and nothing special, it is

because you do not believe in yourself. Once you start to believe in yourself, I think that you will begin to make great progress in your practice. You will be jumping from point to point, rather than crawling.

You will also be much happier as you begin to understand the world better and as your emotions are controlled. I always say it's like watching a movie. If you are watching a movie for the first time, then you will experience many strong emotions. Whenever something funny happens, you will laugh; when something bad happens, you will cry, when exciting or frightening things happen, you will scream. But after you've seen the same movie two or three or four times, you do not experience these emotions very strongly because you already know the story. Just like this, if you understand yourself, you will not be as reactive to what happens to you.

When you understand yourself, you understand the whole world. Consider that there are twenty people, more or less, in this hall right now. If I were to try to understand each of you, one by one—the things that you like and don't like, who your family is, and so on—it would take me a long time. You can imagine how long it would take to understand the whole world this way. I cannot know what's going on in your mind, because I cannot see your mind. But I can know my own.

We are all different and formed by many factors. A child born in a French-speaking part of the world will naturally begin speaking French. A child born in an English-speaking part of the world will speak English. Children naturally acquire their own native language, whether it's German or Chinese or Korean or whatever.

Similarly, our emotions arise according to our surroundings. Someone born into a rough neighborhood, with fighting all the time, will naturally learn aggression. If there are calm and kind people around you, then you will naturally become kinder. This is why it's important to surround yourself with good friends. The teachings, in fact, instruct us to do this.

I think it's extremely important to believe in yourself as much as your guru believes in you. If you cannot reach that level, at least try. I think that doing this will help us very much. I wanted to keep the biography of Guru Padmasambhava and this teaching as short as possible, so I will end here. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to share my feelings and my knowledge with you. Thank you very much.

Notes:

[1] Another name for Guru Padmasambhava.

[2] Also known as Khön Nagendrarakshita (Tib. འཛོན་སྐྱའི་དབང་པོ་སྤང་བ་ , Khön Lü'i Wangpo Sungwa, Wyl. 'khon klu'i i dbang po srung ba) (early 8th cent.), a disciple of Guru Rinpoche and one of the first seven monks ordained in Tibet, the so called 'seven men to be tested.' Together with his younger brother Ratnavajra, he received teachings on Vajrakilaya and Yangdak Heruka, and by practicing them, attained signs of realization.

[3] Zangdokpalri (Tib. ཟངས་མདོག་དཔལ་རི་ , Wyl. zangs mdog dpal ri) is the pure land where Padmasambhava now dwells as a spontaneously accomplished vidyādhara.



- His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, is the second son of His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin). He belongs to the noble Khön family, whose successive generations have provided an unbroken lineage of outstanding Buddhist masters.

At an early age, Rinpoche undertook his training in the principal rituals and prayers of the Sakya lineage. Rinpoche has received from His Holiness the Sakya Trichen most of the major initiations, empowerments, oral transmissions, blessings, and pith instructions that are inherent to the Sakya lineage. Furthermore, Rinpoche has received numerous common and uncommon teachings from some of the pre-eminent teachers of Tibetan Buddhism of our age.



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