

NOTES FROM A BRIEF INTRODUCTORY TALK ABOUT

TSONGKHAPA

SUNDAY 25TH APRIL 2021

The name “Tsongkhapa” literally means “The man from Onion Valley.” His monastic name was Lobsang Drakpa and he is reverentially called “Je Rimpoche”; what his actual *birth* or family name was, is unknown. He lived from 1357-1419, i.e. for 62 years and although his writings are not widely studied at all in the world of Buddhism as a whole, he is a very well known and highly important figure in *Tibetan* Buddhism but should also be well known and considered highly important within the modern Theosophical Movement, for reasons that we’ll touch upon shortly. H. P. Blavatsky stated:

“As a supplement to the *Commentaries* there are many secret folios on the lives of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and among these there is one on Prince Gautama and another on His reincarnation in Tsong-Kha-pa. This great Tibetan Reformer of the fourteenth century, said to be a direct incarnation of Amita Buddha, is the founder of the Secret School near Shigatse, attached to the private retreat of the Panchen Lama. It is with Him that began the regular system of Lamaic incarnations of Buddhas.”

“The records preserved in the Gon-pa, the chief Lamasery of Tashilhumpo, show that Sang-gyas [Note: Sang-gyas is the Tibetan name for Buddha] left the regions of the ‘Western Paradise’ to incarnate Himself in Tsong-Kha-pa, in consequence of the great degradation into which His secret doctrines had fallen.” (see her article “Reincarnations in Tibet”)

In the “Theosophical Glossary,” HPB speaks of Tsongkhapa as “a famous Tibetan reformer of the fourteenth century, who introduced a purified Buddhism into his country. He was a great Adept, who being unable to witness any longer the desecration of Buddhist philosophy by the false priests who made of it a marketable commodity, put a forcible stop thereto by a timely revolution and the exile of 40,000 sham monks and Lamas from the country ... Tsong-kha-pa ... is the founder of the *Gelukpa* (“yellow-cap”) Sect, and of the mystic Brotherhood connected with its chiefs.” (Entry for “Son-kha-pa,” p. 305)

This “mystic Brotherhood” and the “Secret School” referred to by HPB in the earlier quote are vitally and inseparably connected with the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood and Esoteric School that are spoken of in Theosophy, although the latter pre-dates Tsong Kha-pa and the Gelugpas by over 1,500 years and owes much of its origins, at least in its present form, to the original Aryasanga, an Indian disciple of Gautama Buddha. The acting chief of the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood is the venerable Tibetan guru spoken of as the Maha Chohan.

The idea that Tsongkhapa was in some sense a reincarnation of the Buddha himself is one of numerous points in which the Theosophical account of Tsongkhapa differs from that of Tsongkhapa’s own Tibetan Buddhist followers, i.e. the Gelugpa sect or school of Tibetan Buddhism, whose most prominent leading figures are the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama. Incidentally, Theosophy indicates that the Panchen Lama is far more esoterically significant and important, and far more closely connected with the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood of the Masters of Wisdom, than the Dalai Lama is. We heard that Tsongkhapa founded a “secret school” near Shigatse and that these esoteric records about his life, summarised by HPB, were kept at the

Tashilhumpo monastery, which is at Shigatse...and Tashilhumpo was historically the seat of the Panchen Lama. As most of us know, the whole Tibetan world was thrown into great disarray after the Chinese invasion seventy or so years ago and today it's unclear whether the *genuine* Panchen Lama is even still in the world.

Tsongkhapa's revolution and his exiling of tens of thousands of lamas and monks from the country is something else which Tibetan Buddhism is virtually silent about, yet HPB is very clear that it *did* indeed happen. The book "Secret Tibet" by the 20th century travel writer Fosco Maraini very briefly refers to it but in no particular detail and for unknown reasons almost everyone, the Gelugpas included, are absolutely silent about it. HPB goes as far as to provide a specific date and writes: "This grand Reformer burnt every book on Sorcery on which he could lay his hands in **1387**, and ... he has left a whole library of his own works – not a tenth part of which has ever been made known." ("A Few More Misconceptions Corrected," posthumously published)

Those still-unknown works include, according to HPB, the original book of the Kalachakra, "re-written by Tsong-Kha-pa, with his Commentaries" and a text quoted from in "The Secret Doctrine," referred to as "The Aphorisms of Tson-ka-pa." His writings which are publicly known, and now translated into English as of just a few decades ago, consist of a number of titles, predominantly the Lam Rim Chen Mo, meaning "The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment" but also including a compilation titled "The Splendour of an Autumn Moon: The Devotional Verse of Tsongkhapa" and, just as the Lam Rim consists of three volumes providing what Tibetan Buddhists call the *sutra* teachings, focusing on the Bodhisattva Ideal and development of compassion, wisdom, and the Paramitas or perfected virtues, there is a three volume set titled the Ngak Rim Chen Mo, meaning "The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra" and this, surprisingly to some Theosophists, consists of *tantric* teachings, but we'll find this point addressed in today's handout.

It was in 1409, just ten years before his death, that the Gelugpas were officially established, whose use of yellow hats rather than red distinguishes them visually from the Lamas and monks of the other schools, whilst also containing significant spiritual symbolism. "Gelugpas" means literally "virtuous ones" or "models of virtue" and they were marked by a number of features that made them different from the other and older forms of Tibetan Buddhism, such as: very strong emphasis on philosophical study, cultivation of the intellect, and development of logic with regard to metaphysics, strict vegetarianism required for all the Gelugpa Lamas and monks, even though a purely vegetarian diet was hard to come by in Tibet's difficult and icy climate, strict abstinence from alcohol and also celibacy required for the Lamas and monks, and a very strong emphasis on the personal purity, ethics, and monastic discipline that Buddha himself had inculcated for his monks and Arhats. One might assume that all of that would just be natural for Tibetan Buddhist monks but in the rest of Tibetan Buddhism it was *not* and *still* is not. So that in itself was a significant reform.

Theosophy teaches that it was none other than Tsongkhapa who instituted the Masters' endeavours to further enlighten the world during the closing quarter of each century. HPB, in her posthumously published "Tsong-Kha-Pa – Lohans in China" article says, "Among the commandments of Tsong-Kha-pa there is one that enjoins the Rahats (Arhats) to make an attempt to enlighten the world, including the "white barbarians," every century, at a certain specified period of the cycle."

From the writings of HPB and William Q. Judge and others, we know that that's referring to the final twenty-five years of each century, such as from 1875 to 1900. In fact, HPB and WQJ and the Mahatmas Themselves are clear and emphatic that it is *only* in the final twenty-five years of a century that the Masters are *able* and *permitted*, under cyclic law, to give out further teachings from Their esoteric philosophy or sacred science. So this fact alone automatically invalidates the

mass of so-called “new” and different and further teachings published in the first half of the 20th century by later Theosophists and other innovators, who claimed that *their* writings were inspired or even dictated by the *same* Adepts as worked with HPB.

So the modern Theosophical Movement, begun in the year 1875 exactly, is thus seen as an expression of the work and impulse generated by this great being, Tsongkhapa. As we would expect, it’s indicated in a few places that the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood of Masters holds Tsongkhapa in special reverence. The Master K.H. refers to “the highest form of adeptship man can hope for on our planet” and says that Gautama Buddha – who he calls the greatest and holiest man that ever lived – attained it and that the most recent person since Buddha to reach to such a state was Tsongkhapa.

A question arises of whether the first of these “centennial cycles” or end-of-century efforts spoken of, was in 1375, while Tsongkhapa was still alive, or 1475, after his death. Seeing as in 1375 he was still just 18 years old and was over 30 years away from founding the Gelugpas, we would suggest that although he instituted this endeavour it did not actually *begin* proper until 1475. This would make the coming cycle of 2075-2100 the *seventh* of such efforts, and HPB has written that Theosophy must “win the day,” as she puts it, before the end of the 21st century, otherwise the consequences for humanity will be unspeakably dire. (“Preliminary Survey,” posthumously published) We’re aware that certain leading Theosophists who were around in the 1970s [i.e. Raghavan Iyer] spoke of themselves as representing the seventh impulsion... which may sound nice but seems unlikely when looking at the history. The Parent Lodge of the ULT, in Los Angeles, expressed the view in their “Theosophy” magazine some time ago that 2075, not 1975, would mark the start of the seventh impulsion.

As we mentioned, Tibetan Buddhism does not share the Theosophical view that Tsongkhapa was a re-embodiment of the Buddha. The majority of Gelugpas believe him to have been an emanation or embodiment of the celestial Bodhisattva Manjushri. But in her article “Reincarnations in Tibet,” HPB repeats that “This reformer is *not* the incarnation of one of the ... celestial Dhyanas, or heavenly Buddhas, as is generally supposed,” but rather an incarnation of Buddha himself. This doesn’t mean though that he wasn’t in some sense linked with Manjushri (he expresses much heartfelt devotion and reference to Manjushri) who the “Theosophical Glossary” calls “a certain Dhyan Chohan.” (Entry for “Manjusri,” p. 206)

But Gelugpa legend describes Tsongkhapa as being unsure whether to adopt and promote the Yogacharya philosophical basis or the Madhyamika one. The Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood and Esoteric School we’ve spoken of is equated in the Theosophical literature with the Esoteric Yogacharya School of pure Buddhism, the REAL *Esoteric* Buddhism, most of which is still absolutely secret and esoteric to this day. It was founded by the *original* Aryasangha, also just called Asanga, an Arhat and direct disciple of Gautama Buddha around 2,500 years ago, and is in a sense Buddha’s own esoteric school. The Secret Book of Dzyan on which “The Secret Doctrine” is based, the Book of the Golden Precepts from which “The Voice of the Silence” was translated, all these are said in Theosophy to *belong* to the Esoteric Yogacharyas, the Occult Aryasangha school. Another strange fact is that this Aryasangha, of Buddha’s era, is not known to modern history and not acknowledged or referenced within Buddhism. Another Aryasangha or Asanga, who lived in the 4th century AD, *is* known, and he founded a publicly known Yogacharya school, though this is defunct or extinct nowadays.

Yogacharya teachings, both in their publicly known and esoteric form, maintain, like Hinduism, that there *is* an Eternal Self within everyone, a higher, divine, universal Self, which, as in Hinduism, they call the Atman, adding that it is the essential Buddha Nature of all, and this is one and the same as the Absolute Primordial Wisdom (Adi-Buddhi) which is the Source, Cause, and

underlying Essence of all manifestation. It's the Atman=Brahman teaching of Hindu Advaita Vedanta, clothed in more Buddhist terminology. It also speaks of Alaya as the universal source of all consciousness in the manifested Universe.

We might assume that this is found in Tsongkhapa's teachings too but, curiously, it's *not*. Gelugpas say that Manjushri told him the Madhyamika perspective is the right one. And so under Tsongkhapa's influence the Gelugpas became the most ardent proponents of the Madhyamika view that there is *no* Higher Self, *no* universal soul or essence, *no* divine principle, but just EMPTINESS – and *not* emptiness in a symbolic or figurative sense, not emptiness in the sense of the Absolute Abstract Space of Theosophy, but a literal emptiness which is even empty of emptiness itself – complete VOIDNESS. In the Lam Rim, Tsongkhapa *critically* refers to the Yogacharyas as “essentialists,” i.e. those who misguidedly (according to him) believe that there *is* an underlying *essence* to things.

It's no surprise that HPB calls the Madhyamikas “nihilists” and “the great deniers” but it is a surprise that Tsongkhapa and his followers became the most Madhyamika of all Buddhists anywhere, as well as the most anti-Yogacharya, though still quoting the later Asanga on points they agree with – and so this is yet another mystery connected with him that seems impossible at present to solve or explain. In light of what we know of his close connection and position of authority with the Trans-Himalayan Lodge he was perhaps really a Yogacharya at heart or maybe his words have had a slightly different sense attached to them than what he intended. We really don't know.

Nonetheless this doesn't detract from the great value and help inherent in the Lam Rim, as we'll now start to see.

NOTE: Several Gelugpa lamas have mentioned what they call “the *Secret* Lineage of Tsongkhapa,” which is a suggestive point of interest and importance for students of Theosophy.

