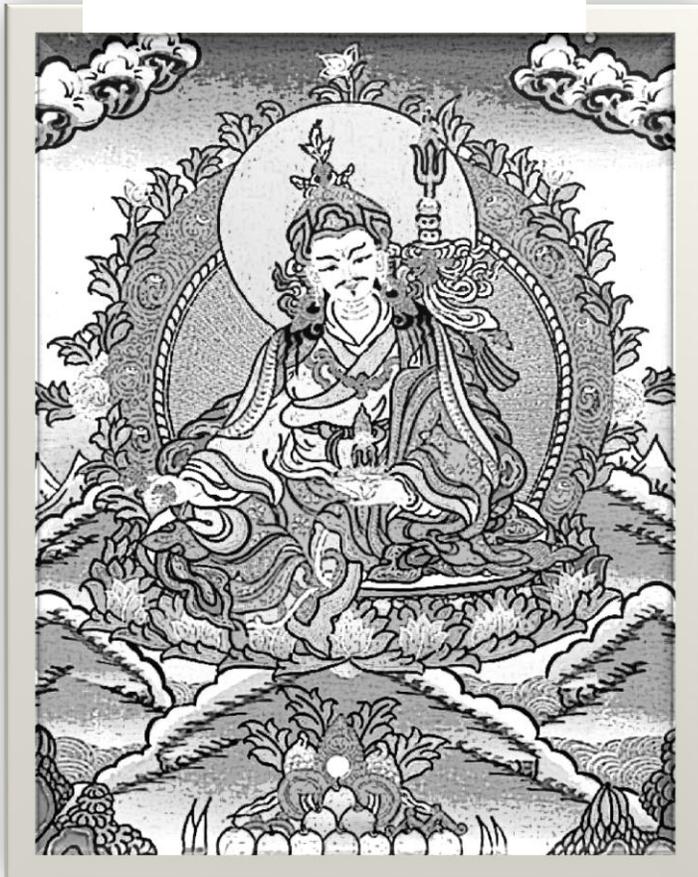


THE STORY OF GURU PADMASAMBHAVA

Figure 1 | Guru Padmasambhava



Padmasambhava or Padmakara in Sanskrit transliteration means ‘Lotus-Born,’ which refers to Guru Rinpoche's birth from a lotus in the Land of Oddiyana.¹

Guru Rinpoche, the ‘Precious Master’, is a favored name for the founder of Tibetan Buddhism and is referred to as the Buddha of our time.

¹ **Oddiyana** (Skt. *Oddiyāna*; Tib. འཕྱིན་ལྗོངས་, *Orgyen*; Wyl. *u rgyan*) – one of the twenty-four sacred places, Oddiyana played an important role in the history of Buddhism, especially from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism. It is believed to be the homeland of both the Vajrayana and Dzogchen teachings, and is said to be the land where Garab Dorje, Vairotsana, Padmasambhava and Tilopa, amongst others, received the transmissions of Dzogchen. Buddhist texts speak of Oddiyana as a beautifully green and fertile kingdom, inhabited by gentle people often clothed in white, who had great respect for wisdom and learning. It was surrounded by high, rugged mountains, and in the broad valleys were towering white stupas and golden temple roofs. It seemed a paradise on earth and so was called “the royal garden” from the Sanskrit *udiyana*. Oddiyana was also known as “the paradise of the dakinis”, as it was reputed for its unique sisterhood of priestesses – ladies dedicated to wisdom and spiritual development. These priestesses were not nuns, and lived in sanctuaries or forest chapels.

Whereas Buddha is known primarily for having taught the teachings of the sutra² vehicle, Padmasambhava came into this world and to Tibet, in particular, to teach the tantras.³ While Buddha Shakyamuni exemplifies the buddha principle (aka buddha-nature, the most important element in the sutrayana path), Padmasambhava personifies the guru principle, the heart of Vajrayana Buddhism.⁴ He is, therefore, known to the Tibetans as the ‘second Buddha’ (Tib. སངས་རྒྱལ་གཉིས་པ་, *sangyé nyipa*) after Shakyamuni.

There is no doubt in the mind of every practitioner of Tibetan Buddha Dharma to Tibet Buddhism that the second most unique and extraordinary exemplar of Tibetan lineages after Garab Dorje⁵ (*Pramodavajra*) himself, was the powerful Padmasambhava, the Wisdom Master who was chiefly instrumental in bringing the.

² In Buddhism, the *sūtra* refers mostly to canonical scriptures, many of which are regarded as records of the oral teachings of Gautama Buddha.

³ In Buddhism, defined as a scripture taught by the Buddha describing the Vajrayana practices. According to Tibetan Buddhist Tantric master Lama Thubten Yeshe: “...each one of us is a union of all universal energy. Everything that we need in order to be complete is within us right at this very moment. It is simply a matter of being able to recognize it. This is the tantric approach.”

⁴ Vajrayana is a complex and multifaceted system of Buddhist thought and practice which evolved over several centuries. According to Vajrayana scriptures Vajrayana refers to one of three vehicles or routes to enlightenment, the other two being the Hinayana and Mahayana. Its main scriptures are called Tantras. A distinctive feature of Vajrayana Buddhism is ritual, which are Skillful Means (Upaya). They are being used as a substitute or alternative for the earlier abstract meditations.

⁵ A semi-historical first human teacher of the *Ati Yoga* (Tib. Dzogchen) or Great Perfection teachings according to Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Prior to Prahevajra, the Nyingma hold that the Dzogchen teachings had been expounded only in celestial realms and the *pure lands* (Sanskrit: śuddhanivāsa) of the Buddhas, Devas and Nāgas.^[citation needed] The Bonpo have a different view of the entry of Dzogchen into the lineages of humanity. According to Tibetan Buddhism, Prahevajra transmitted the teachings to Manjushrimitra, who was regarded as his chief disciple. Padmasambhava is also known to have received the transmission of the Dzogchen tantras directly from Garab Dorje. Prahevajra received the empowerment and transmission of the Mahayoga teachings of the *Secret Matrix Tradition* (Guhyagarbha tantra) from Mahasiddha Kukuraja

Padmasambhava was also called Arunagiri Babaji, the holy mystic of the Red Mountain, Kumara (The Eternal Youth), and Mahavatar (the Great Incarnation of the World). He shines with the incomparable brightness among masters of the Buddha Dharma. Long before he was born, mystics and prophets were signaling his advent. During his life he drew the respect and veneration of kings and emperors; and after his death, many made his memory into an imperishable icon of the Absolute.

Historical Oddiyana



To get a sense of what was happening elsewhere during the 8th Century C.E., the classical Mayan civilization begins to decline, Emperor Leo III destroys the icon of Christ above the

Chalke Gate to the Great Palace of Constantinople in the Byzantine period, the Battle of Tours halts the Islamic advance into Western Europe, Arabian armies defeat Chinese Tang Dynasty and conquers Central Asia completely, Charlemagne invades territory held by the Saxons in what is now northwestern Germany, and the Nestorian Stele is erected in China, documenting 150 years of history of early Christianity in China.

Buddhist events, during that time, include the following:

- (1) The Jataka tales of the life of Buddha are translated into Syriac and Arabic and spread into Europe.
- (2) An account of the Buddha's life is translated into Greek by St. John of Damascus and was widely circulated to Christians.
- (3) Santideva, a Buddhist monk at Nalanda Monastery in India, composes the inspirational and famous *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhicharyavatara)*.
- (4) The last Chinese patriarch Dajian Huineng of Chán Buddhism dies.
- (5) Chinese Buddhist monk, Xuanzang, writes about a prosperous period of international sea traffic coming to Guangzhou port from Bornea, Persia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and others.
- (6) A Buddhist monk, Prajna, enlists the help of Christian bishop Ching Ching in translating Buddhist sutras into Chinese.

Oddiyana was possibly located in what is now the PRC Ali (Ngari – see map below) prefecture of the Lhasa municipality. The Ali area is referred to as “the roof of the world's roof”



because it is the highest area in Tibet with the most complete plateau features.

PRC Ali is where Mt. Gangrenboqi and Lake

Manasarovar are located. To this date, many

Buddhist, Bon, and

Hindu adherents circumambulate the mountain and lake. It includes, moreover, part of the Aksai Chin area, a disputed region claimed by India but over which China exercises administrative control; and the Xinjiang-Tibet Highway passes and through this area. It is also the area where a famous pre-historic culture site, the Tibetan Guge kingdom of the 10th century C.E. It was known for its irrigation canals and rich crops.

This vicinity came under the Gandhara region (current Afghanistan) of early medieval India that lasted from the early 1st millennium B.C.E. to the 11th century C.E. and reached its height from the 1st century to the 5th century C.E. under the Buddhist Kushan Kings. It had cultural convergence with the Kambojas, an Avestan-speaking Iranian tribe that migrated into India from the early 2nd century B.C.E. to the 5th century C.E. There are several hypotheses of the location of the Kambojas; they are, however, mentioned in ancient Tibetan Buddhist literature. The Kambojas are motly listed as a tribe of Uttarapatha (*Uttara* or *Udichya* mean north or north-west, respectively, of India).

Emperor Asoka (ca. 269-232 B.C.E.) of the Maurya Dynasty refers to such a region in his inscriptions, the Edicts of Ashoka.⁶

Similarly, Oddiyana is still a speculative location within that region or surrounding areas. In Buddhist and other literature, Oddiyana (sometimes spelled Uddiyana or Udyana) means “garden” and is recognized as the place where Padmasambhava was born.

Through records and writings found in China, we are able to catch a glimpse of the lost kingdom of Oddiyana. These Chinese annals record missions from the Kingdom of Oddiyana (sometimes referred to as the Land of Odi) to the Chinese Liang Dynasty Court in the years 502, 511, 518, and 521 C.E. The Emperor Wu Di of Liang Dynasty becomes a Buddhist and introduces Buddhism as the new religion to central China and decrees that sacrifices to the ancestors be changed to dried meat instead of the traditional animals of goats, pigs, and cows.

In general, the contacts between Oddiyana and Imperial China represent trade alliances as the Silk Road was well established, and Imperial China was interested in Indian culture and Buddhism.

By this time, military power in Tibet was on the rise.

⁶ In his Edicts, Ashoka explains how and why he became a Buddhist after an early reign of terror when he experienced great remorse for cruel nature and slaughtering the Kalingas of Orissa/Andhra Pradesh, he set out to propagate Buddhism by sending emissaries to the Hellenic kings as far as the Mediterranean, and to the peoples throughout India and to convert them to the Dharma. He names the Greek rulers of the time, inheritors of the conquest of Alexander the Great from Bactria to as far as Greece and North Africa, displaying an amazingly clear grasp of the political situation at the time.

It was around this time that Buddhist monk Jnanagupta from Gandhara travelled to China and was recognized by Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty (ca. 561-592 C.E.). He brought with him 260 Sanskrit sutra of which he translated 39 into Chinese, *Sutra of Buddha's Fundamental Deeds* and *Candrottadarikaparipraccha*.

In 642 C.E., King Ta-mo-yin-t'o-ho-szu of Oddiyana is said to have sent a gift of camphor to the Tang Emperor Taizon of China.

In 644 C.E., the southern Bedouin hordes of Islam, 12 years after the death of their prophet Mohammad, succeeded in defeating the last Shah of the Sassanid, Yazdagird III, of Persia, fleeing to China during the Tang Dynasty. With the death of Yazdagird, these Bedouins began their rapacious advances eastward. The Sassanid Dynasty had established Zoroastrianism as the state religion; and once toppled, Islam replaced Zoroastrianism.

By 667 C.E., the Kaboja and Gandhara regions were invaded by the Arab Muslims; but by 683 C.E., the city of Kabul, which had been previously governed by Sassanid vassals before the Muslims, had rebelled and pushed back Islamic influence until the 10th century C.E.

In reading the Tang Annals, we note that a party of Oddiyaeen ambassadors presented themselves at the Chinese Court in 665 C.E. in response to the impending raid by Ibn Samurah. It appears that, backed by the armies of Imperial China, and granting the length and hardships of the journey, it is practical to assume that the embassy's presence was a direct response to Ibn Samurah's raid. The Chinese army was fortified by the city

of Kapisa (of the Turkish Shahi kingdom) and acted as a major bulwark against Islam penetrating the Pamir, and significantly protected Oddiyana.

Changing names as people resettled, the people of Kapisa moved their city to Wahund on the Indus River whence they continued as the Hindushahiya dynasty.

The monk and translator, Shikshananda, of Oddiyana was referenced as coming from Gandhara. Records place him as 652-710 C.E. What fragments remain of history, Oddiyana may have been renamed Shambhala when, in 870 C.E., it came under Moslem control.

During this period, a Chinese Buddhist monk by the name of Xuanzang escaped from China in 629 C.E. to find Buddhist texts in Sanskrit so that he could compare and correct the Chinese translations. He traveled westward to cross the Bedel Pass into modern Kyrgyzstan, met the great Khan of the Western Turk whose relationship to the Tang emperor was friendly at the time. He went into Uzbekistan, crossed the Pamirs into Termez and Amu Darya where he encountered a community of more than one thousand Buddhist monks. He crossed into Kapisa where there were over 100 monasteries and six thousand monks, mostly Mahayana (the fabled, old land of Gandara) where he participated in a dialectical, religious debate.

He even passed through Gandharan Peshawar, being among the most ancient cities of the region between Central, South, and West Asia. It was a center of trade and an ancient center of learning. There was an earlier account of another Chinese Buddhist pilgrim monk, Faxian, who visited Gandharan

Peshawar in 400 C.E. and who had given an account of the Palace of Asoka in Patna. He finally pushed onto Jalalabad where he considered himself to have reached India. The year was 630 C.E.



Figure 2 | Yumka Dakini

Birth, a Legend

In the north-western part of the land of Oddiyana, on an island in the lake of Dhanakosha, the blessings of all the buddhas took shape in the form of a multi-coloured lotus flower. Moved by compassion at the suffering of sentient beings, the Buddha Amitabha⁷ sent out from his heart a golden vajra, marked with the syllable HRIH, which descended onto the lotus blossom. It transformed into an exquisitely beautiful eight-year old child, endowed with all the major and minor marks of perfection and holding a vajra and a lotus. At that moment all the buddhas of the ten directions (the four cardinal directions, the four intermediate directions, the zenith and the nadir), together with hundreds of thousands of dakinis⁸ from different celestial realms, invoked the blessings and the incarnation of all the buddhas for the benefit of beings and the flourishing of the secret mantra teachings. Their invocation is known as ‘The Seven Verses of the Vajra’, or ‘The Seven Line Prayer’.

It is said that his birth took place in the year of the Earth Monkey, on the tenth day of the waxing moon in the monkey

⁷ The Buddha of Boundless Light, belonging to the lotus family (one of the five buddha families)

⁸ A female embodiment of enlightened energy. མཁའ་འགྲོ་, ‘Khandro’ literally means ‘sky-goer’, indicating one who traverses the ‘sky’ of the expanse of wisdom.

month. As Guru Rinpoche was born within the lotus flower upon the waters of the lake, the dakinis called out to him from their hearts, and their call spontaneously became the Vajra Guru mantra.

Om ah hum vajra guru Padma siddhi hung



So this mantra is his heart mantra, his life-core, his heart essence; and to recite it is to invoke his very being.

It happened that, at that time of Guru Rinpoche's birth, the second King of Oddiyana, Indrabhuti,⁹ found himself in dire straits. Residing in his nine-tufted palace with his queen as well as hundreds and thousands of inner and outer ministers, he made great offerings to the Triple Gems by taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, because he did not have a son and wanted an heir to succeed him. He recited the *Dharma Cloud Sutra* on the full moon day of the fifth summer month; and as an offering, he opened the door of his three-thousand treasuries and went on distributing alms to the poor and needy until his wealth was exhausted. When he finally had emptied his treasury, he exclaimed, "Beggars have still not ceased, but I have nothing to grant!" Beggars who had not

⁹ Indrabhuti (aka King Ja), according to the Nyingma tradition, taught himself intuitively from "the Book" of the Tantric Way of Secret Mantra that magically fell from the sky along with other sacred objects and relics that introduced a Mahayoga tantric teachings. Mahāyoga-yana is associated with the masculine principle and is for those whose primary defilement is aggression.

received a share remained relentless, complaining that, if the King could no longer provide from his coffers, all that he had done would remain meaningless.

Not only was the king blind and infertile, his kingdom was impoverished by famine. With the crops failing and the royal treasury exhausted, he had to find a cure. Upon consulting his ministers together for unfruitful advice, the blind king entered upon a quest for a magical blue pearl of the sea known as the Wish-fulfilling Gem.¹⁰ He decided to risk his own life for the good of his people and to obtain from the Nagas,¹¹ who dwell beneath the waters of the ocean, the Wish-fulfilling Gem. So he had set out on a voyage on the Lake of Dhanakosha¹² to find a wish-fulfilling jewel. There were many islands in this lake. He went to the Isle of Jewels where, after many trials and dangers, was granted the priceless gem by the Azure Lady. With the jewel in hand, he was cured of his blindness. As he returned homeward with the gem,¹³ he encountered an amazing child and questioned him about his parents, family line, name, country, his sustenance and what he was doing there. The boy sang his reply in an enchanting voice—

My father is the pure awareness of rigpa,

¹⁰ Wish-fulfilling Gem is the mind that accomplishes all wishes. If taken literally, it means actual jewels in the form of (1) jewel of the crown, (2) earrings, (3) short necklace; (4) armlets, (5) two long necklaces, (6) bracelets, (7) anklets, and (8) earrings.

¹¹ Nagas are a primeval race of divine serpent-people, half human and half snake and considered to be protectors of springs wells, and rivers. They bring rain and fertility. But they are also thought to bring disasters such as floods and drought.

¹² A lake in Oddiyana where Guru Rinpoche is said to have been born from a lotus.

¹³ In the *Padma Ka-yang*, a later biography of Padmasambhava, the restoration of the king's sight leads immediately to the king being able to see the divine, eight-year-old Padmasambhava.

*Samantabhadra,
My mother, the space of all things, Samantabhadri,
My line (chaste), the indivisibility of awareness and
space,
My name, the glorious Lotus Born,
My homeland, the unborn dharmadhatu,
My sustenance, consuming dualistic thoughts,
My destiny, to accomplish the actions of the buddhas
of past, present and future.*

Having heard this, the king was thrown into a wonder of delight. He thought a Nirmanakaya¹⁴ had taken birth and invited the child to the palace as his son as well as religious guide. He installed the child as the crown prince. The child's name remained "Padmasambhava" meaning "lotus-born." Later the king married Prabhadharani, the daughter of king Chandan Gomashree, and ruled the kingdom in accordance with the Dharma. He became known as Shikhabandh Raja or "The King with Plaited Hair."

At different points in his life, Guru Rinpoche is known by different names. He was known as Pemajungné, Padmakara or Padmasambhava, 'The Lotus-Born', as well as Tsokyé Dorjé, 'Lake Born Vajra.'

¹⁴ In Tibetan Buddhism the *nirmanakaya* is envisioned as the manifestation of enlightenment, in an infinite variety of forms and ways, in the physical world. It is traditionally defined in three ways.

One is the manifestation of a completely realized Buddha, such as Gautama Siddhartha, who is born into the world and teaches in it;

Another is a seemingly ordinary being who is blessed with a special capacity to benefit others: atulku; and the third is actually a being through whom some degree of enlightenment works to benefit and inspire others through various arts, crafts, and sciences. In their case this enlightened impulse is, as Kalu Rinpoche says, "a spontaneous expression, just as light radiates spontaneously from the sun without the sun issuing directives or giving any conscious thought to the matter. The sun is, and it radiates."¹

There are many different accounts concerning his birth. It is commonly stated that he was miraculously born from a lotus-flower on Lake Dhanakosha in Oddiyana. In fact, his very name, "Lotus-born," has undoubtedly encouraged such a belief. Some believe that he was the natural son of the king of Oddiyana. And some have claimed that he descended in a flash of light onto the peak of Mount Namchak. The Bonpo of Tibet state that he was the son of a Bon *siddha* named Drenpa Namkha.

Although there are various different accounts of his birth, the generally accepted orthodox view amongst Tibetans today is that he was born miraculously and at the age of eight from within a sacred flowering lotus bud in the center of the Lake Dhanakosha. He was then adopted by King Indrabhuti of Oddiyana. His miraculous 'lotus-birth' and adoption at the age of eight is the theme of all the revealed Treasure-texts of Tibet. However, although it is the tradition of the revealed Treasure-texts that he was born miraculously from a lotus, according to the ancient, written Ka-ma tradition of the cycle of Vajrakilaya teachings, he was the son of a royal heir, Prince Mahusita of Dhanakosha, in Oddiyana. Originally given the name Dhanaraksita, which means "Protector of Charity, it is stated that he was born in the year of the water monkey (732 C.E.). Thus his mundane birth and status as a prince of Oddiyana may be pinpointed as a fact of history.

The seemingly conflicting stories of Padmasambhava's birth may likewise be easily resolved if we understand that the revealed Treasure-texts are not meant to be ordinary historical treatises, but rather, poetic descriptions of an esoteric spiritual reality. In so far as Padmasambhava, as a Divine Incarnation, represents the ageless Enlightened-mind (*bodhicitta*) itself, the

spiritual reality of his birth is pictured as an emergence from out of the lotus heart of the Boundless Luminosity of the Absolute.¹⁵ Like a vibrant singularity of divine Love (represented iconographically in the texts by a red tonal "Hrih-gnoseme") unfolding in the manner of a lotus from the midst of universal Mind symbolized by the sacred lake of the Treasury of Charity(*dhanakosha*), he emerged self-born in the temporal world of duality for the sake of alleviating countless beings from the hell of earthly suffering. In this sense his spiritual reality transcends time and place.

Marriage and Exile

When Padmasambhava came of appropriate age, he was engaged to Princess Bhasadhara, the daughter of King Candrakumara of Simhapura.¹⁶ It was Indrabhuti's wish to have the boy brought up in the palace and educated in the ways of royal government to eventually become a wise sovereign over his people. Unfortunately, the tide of events swirling around the kingdom of Uddiyana were quickly moving beyond King Indrabhuti's control.

¹⁵ Skt: *Buddha Amitabha*, the Boundless Luminosity of Absolute-being (*buddha*). Lord Padmasambhava has been called the divine incarnation or *Tulku* of Amitabha. Scholars have suggested that Amitabha here corresponds with the Persian "Ahura Mazda". He is also thought of as an aspect of Avalokitesvara, the Buddhist archetype of love and compassion, especially as the latter, likewise, is called "the son of the Buddha", or son of the Infinite Light (*Amitabha*).

¹⁶ Simhapura was a kingdom south of Uddiyana in what today is called the Salt Range. Hiuen Tsiang refers to it as Sang-ho-pu-lo and locates its capital where today stands Khetas. The temples, shrines, fort and bathhouses of Khetas, once sacred to Avalokitesvara and later to the Hindu god Siva, are now deserted. Marriage contracts or engagements were made between the parents of the prospective couple in India at very early ages. Padmasambhava was probably twelve years of age when such a contract was formed. The children are officially married by Indian custom from that point on, but they do not begin living as a married couple until much later. The term "engagement" therefore, in this context, is more suitable than saying "marriage".

According to the T'ang Annals, in 745 C.E., an alarming event took place: the King of Kapisa was installed as ruler of Oddiyana instead of Padmasambhava. In the Padma Ka-yang, the following event is told that corresponds to Padmasambhava having to renounce the throne of Oddiyana:

The royal city was then besieged by ten thousand evil spirits who sought to prevent the Lotus-Born One from becoming a great and learned [sovereign].... The gates both of the city and palace being closely guarded because of the siege, the Lotus-Born One considered how he might escape. And, putting off his garments, he placed on his naked body magical ornaments made of human bone, and, taking with him a dorje and a trishula, went to the roof of the palace and danced like a mad man. He let both the trishula and the dorje fall below; the prongs of the trishula, striking the breast of the wife of one of the ministers of state, pierced her heart, and the dorje, striking the head of her infant, infant son, penetrated to the brain, and both died.

It is in consequence of the evil act of killing the son of a baron, or the mother and child of a minister, that the young prince is banished from the Kingdom. The prince's banishment is further explained as corresponding to the Buddha Sakyamuni's renunciation of worldly life. The young Lotus prince must leave behind not only his kingdom but also his new bride.

Another legend is told. Padmasambhava married the dakini Prabhavati and ruled the kingdom according to the Dharma, ushering in a time of happiness and peace. He was known then as King Tortokchen, 'The Turbaned King'. Seeing

that as a ruler he would be unable truly to serve others and bring them spiritual benefit on a vast scale, he begged for permission to abdicate but was refused. So Padmasambhava employed a skillful device to escape. Perceiving that a harmful minister's son was just on the point of dying and being reborn in the lower realms, he dropped his trident while dancing on the palace roof. It caused the death of the child, who was liberated and reborn in a buddha realm; but it had Padmasambhava banished.

It is said he roamed in 'The Chilly Grove', Shitavana, charnel ground, and then in the other charnel grounds, 'Joyous Grove' and Sosadvipa. There, he received empowerments and blessings from the dakinis 'Tamer of Mara' and 'Sustainer of Bliss', and practised yogic disciplines, bringing the dakinis of the charnel grounds under his sway. The name he was known by was Shantarakshita, 'Preserver of Peace.'

Returning to the island in Lake Dhanakosha, Padmasambhava brought its dakinis under his command. Then, in 'The Rugged Forest' Parushakavana charnel ground, Vajravarahi appeared to him, and blessed him. He subdued nagas¹⁷ of the oceans and planetary spirits of the heavens; wisdom dakas and dakinis granted him supernatural powers and siddhis, and he was known as Dorjé Drakpo Tsal, 'Wrathful Vajra Might'.

In actual fact, the storming of the land and city by evil forces, the tragic death of a noble son, and Padmasambhava's banishment to foreign lands, reflects the changes wrought when the powerful lords of Kapisa seized, as we know they did, control of the Swat Valley. Uddiyana was defeated and utterly lost its independence. Whatever happened to Indrabhuti we do

¹⁷

not know, but it is probable that he was slain, or perhaps as a blind captive, was dragged ignominiously back to Kabul in chains. At any rate Padmasambhava fled in the direction of Kashmir.

Padmasambhava's route of escape is fairly evident. There was only one direction for him to go. About 30 kilometres north of the old capital of Mangalapura he must have taken the ancient trail over the Shangla Pass to present day Besham on the Indus River, a 70 kilometre trek. From Besham he would have had to make the long hike up the Indus, past Dassu and the famous Buddhist rock carvings of Shatial and Chilas, until many days later he could have entered the relative safety of Baltistan. The latter country is formed by the long valley of the Indus from where it meets the Karakorum Highway at Gilgit up to Skardu. On this perilous journey Padmasambhava would have skirted around the sandy base of 26,660 foot high Nanga Parvata, the ninth highest peak in the world. Its name means "Naked Mountain" and it is a towering sentinel standing at the westernmost end of the Himalayas. On the north slope of Nanga Parvata the fleeing prince and his escort would have had the opportunity to camp in safety on the idyllic alpine pastures known as Fairy Meadows, from whence since the remotest ages pilgrims have had the opportunity to glimpse with awe the breathtaking beauty of Nanga Parvata's snow clad peak. A single days march from the Fairy Meadows would have brought Padmasambhava into the domain of Baltistan.

Now Baltistan, or Greater Pu-lu as we find it called in the Chinese annals, was under the protection of Tibet. It is interesting in light of further developments, that so early in his life Padmasambhava came within the orbit of Tibetan imperial designs, and that he found in Tibet a protector. As

Christopher Beckwith has cogently pointed out, "One may also conclude that a major reason for so many Indian Buddhist sages coming to Central Tibet from Kashmir, and notably, the famous Padmasambhava from Oddiyana, was the simple fact that Tibet then ruled much of this region." Thus Padmasambhava's work in Tibet late in his life may well have been the result of ties forged in his youth. Nothing is really reported concerning Padmasambhava's life in Kashmir. He lived, some say, with wandering yogis and saddhus, in exile from his homeland. Others report that it was during this period that he acquired worldly knowledge and skill in various crafts. Howbeit, in Kashmir he earned the name Sthiramati, the Youthful Genius.¹⁸

Becoming a Buddhist Monk

On pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya (the site where Buddha Sakyamuni had attained enlightenment), the Yogi-Prince became a disciple of Bhikshu Vidyadhara Prabhahasti who was born in the royal house of Kashmir.¹⁹ He received

¹⁸ Tib: Lo-den Chokse. If Padmasambhava was born in 732 C.E., then the years spent in Kashmir would have been roughly from the age of 13 to 20. The latter age of 20 is assumed only on the basis that the next event in his life mentioned in the various accounts is his ordination at Bodh Gaya. The full ordination of a Bhikkshu, or Buddhist monk, such as was received by Padmasambhava, is not given until the person has attained maturity. He must therefore have been at least 20 years of age

¹⁹ In Dudjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* it is stated that he was born in the royal house of Western India. Tibetan historians declare that Prabhahasti and Sakyaprabha were one and the same person. They state that when the great Vinaya teacher Sakyaprabha, born in Western India, went from Kashmir to Bodh Gaya, he became a tantric practitioner and henceforth was known as Prabhahasti. This view is not feasible for a number of reasons. Sakyaprabha lived during the reign of King Gopala. Born in Western India, he became a famous Vinaya teacher in Kashmir. His preceptor was Punyakirti and his three chief students were called Sakyamitra, Sakyaprabha II, and Sakyasimha. Prabhahasti was born in Zahor, his preceptor was called Santiprabha, and his chief student was Sakyasimha (i.e., later known as Padmasambhava).

ordination from the Master Santiprabha of Citavara and studied the Vinaya Discipline from Punyakirti of Maru. Then he went to Nalanda University.²⁰ Later he received teachings in Mahayoga tantra from Vidyadhara Humkara. After winning accomplishment he extracted the Vajrakilaya doctrines from the Shankarakuta Stupa located in the Sitavana cremation ground, and practicing the same, eventually acquired Enlightenment.

With the Kashmiri pandit Ananda acting as the master (acarya) and Prabhahasti acting as the perceptor (*upadhaya*), Padmasambhava received the full ordination of a Buddhist monk. He then received the ordination name of Bhikshu Sakyasimha, the Lion of the Sakyas. Living in the Bodh Gaya area, he disciplined himself in the path of virtue and contemplation, while receiving instruction in the Vinaya Discipline from Ananda and instruction in philosophy, logic and metaphysics from Prabhahasti. Then he was told, "Go to the Sitavana cremation ground²¹ and study the traditions of the Vidyadharas living there."

In the Sitavana cremation ground near Bodh Gaya, he received empowerment and instruction from Vajra Humkara²² in the

²⁰ According to records of history, Nalanda University was destroyed three times by invaders, but only rebuilt twice. The first time was by the Huns under Mihirakula during the reign of Skandagupta (455-467 AD). But Skanda's successors promptly undertook the restoration, improving it with even grander buildings, and endowed it with enough resources to let the university sustain itself in the longer term. The second destruction came with an assault by the Gaudas in the early 7th century. This time, the Hindu king Harshavardhana (606-648 AD) restored the Buddhist university. The final blow came when it was violently destroyed in an Afghan attack led by Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1193.

²¹ This is the same cremation where a generation earlier Sri Pramodavajra had first spread the Dzogchen teachings.

²² That Humkara was the chief influence on Padmasambhava during this period is based not on what is said in the biographies, but in the fact that Padmasambhava's chief spiritual practice, following his stay in Sitavana, consisted of the Sri Samyak Heruka sadhana. Afterwards he augmented this sadhana with the Vajrakilaya practices that he received from Prabhahasti. It should be noted that Prabhahasti was himself a disciple of Humkara. 202 Suvama Sampradaya.

practice of Vajrasattva.²³ Then when he was a little matured, he received special transmission into the wrathful aspects of the great Bodhisattvas from the eight great Insight-holders, or Vidyadhara.²⁴ Each of these Vidyadharas taught him a unique *sadhana*, or spiritual practice, based on their own realization and on the practice by which they had attained Enlightenment. Thus he acquired eight *sadhana* practices. These practices pertain to what is known as the *Mahayoga* tantra.

Here is a list of the Mahayoga teachers:

Vidyadhara Manjusrimitra came from Suvarnadwipa and was proficient in the secret practice of the wrathful Bodhisattva Manjusri, called Destroyer of Death (*Yamantaka*).



Figure 3 Vajrasattvara

Vidyadhara Nagarjuna-garbha came from Bengal and was proficient in the secret practice of the wrathful *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara*, called Hayagriva.

Vidyadhara Vajra Humkara, who came from Nepal, was proficient in the secret practice of the wrathful *Bodhisattva Vajrapani*, called Sri Samyak Heruka.

²³ Vajrasattva (Vajra Hero, Tib. *dorje sempa*) "Dorse" is the buddha of purification. As the "action" or karma protector, he also manifests the energies of all Buddhas.

²⁴ Vidyadhara(s) (Sanskrit: विद्याधर, Vidyādhara, literally "wisdom-holders") are a group of supernatural beings in Hindu mythology. They possess magical powers and dwell in the Himalayas.

Vidyadhara Vimalamitra came from Hastivana in the West and was proficient in the secret practice of the wrathful *Bodhisattva Samantabhadra*, called Vajramrita. Vidyadhara Prabhahasti came from Zahor (modern Mandi south of the Kulu Valley at the foot of the Himalayas) and was proficient in the secret practice of the wrathful *Bodhisattva Nivaranavishkambin*, called Vajrakilaya.

Vidyadhara Dhanasamskrita came from Gandhara and was proficient in the secret practice of the wrathful *Bodhisattva Akasagarbha*, called Matarah, or Controller of the Matrikas. Vidyadhara Guhyacandra came from Mount Kailash and was proficient in the secret practice of the wrathful *Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha*, called Lokastotrapuja-natha, or Lord of Mundane Sacrifice.

Vidyadhara Santigarbha came from Khotan and was proficient in the secret practice of the wrathful *Bodhisattva Maitreya*, called Vajramantrabhiru, or the Curse-pronouncing Diamond. Of the eight Vidyadharas whom Padmasambhava studied under in the Sitavana grove, it should be noted that initially the chief guru was Vajra Humkara, the guru of his teacher and Abbot Prabhahasti. We have already described how Humkara met with Sri Simha in a forest and received from the latter the fundamental instructions for the Sadhana of Vajrasattva. It was after practicing for six months with his yogini-wife in the cave of Lang-le-sho in Nepal that Humkara gained the final Great Seal²⁵ of Buddhahood and beheld the Divine Being (*Vajrasattva*) face to face.

²⁵ Mahamudra, Great Seal, the profound realization of self and all phenomena as the Divine.

Becoming a Tantric Yogi in the Yogacara Tradition

There were close ties between the various teachers and spiritual guides who were involved in Padmasambhava's life. It is not surprising therefore, that Vajra Humkara told his disciple Padmasambhava to go and study at the feet of his own beloved guruji, Sri Simha. Going to the Cina Valley, Padmasambhava found Sri Simha living as a yogi in a cremation ground. He begged for enlightenment. According to Evans-Wentz's translation in his book, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*:

When Padma(sambhava)requested the guru Sri Simha to teach him, the guru pointed to the heavens and said: 'Have no desire for what thou seest. Desire not; desire not. Desire; desire. Have no desire for desire; have no desire for desire. Desire and deliverance must be simultaneous. Voidness; voidness. Non-voidness; non-voidness. Non-obscuration; non-obscuration. Obscuration; obscuration. Emptiness of all things; emptiness of all things. Desire above, below, at the centre, in all directions, without differentiation.' When all this had been explained in detail, the guru assured Padma that he would realize the essentiality of all doctrines....

From Sri Simha, the prince of yogis received the mystical tantric empowerments and teachings. Then in various cremation grounds inhabited by yogis and yoginis in Cina, and in the famous Eight Sacred Cremation grounds of India, the diligent practitioner Padmasambhava struggled to attain

realization. Living like an ascetic hermit, he was known as Suryabhasa Yogi, the Sun-ray Mystic.

Kathmandu Valley of Nepal

Then Padmasambhava, the Sun-ray Yogi, went to the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. At that time the main Buddhist center of Nepal consisted of the royal town of Patan founded by the Emperor Asoka in the third century B.C.E. Four ancient stupas, said to have been erected by Asoka, still stand at the four quarters of the perimeter of modern Patan. But rather than stay as a monk in one of the many renowned monastic houses of Patan, Padmasambhava went to Parphing, which lies in the hills to the southwest of Kathmandu.



Today at Parphing, among other temples and shrines, there is a very famous Buddhist temple dedicated to the feminine aspect of Buddha, known as Vajrayogini, the Divine Mother. This temple was in existence in the eleventh century when it was occupied by the famous Mahasiddha Naropa, the guru of the Tibetan Master Marpa, but it is unlikely that it was there in Padmasambhava's time. Nevertheless the presence at that site of some form of worship of the Divine Mother is quite likely. Not far away there is also the Hindu sacred site of Dakshinkali, likewise dedicated to the feminine principle of Divinity. From ancient times, therefore, a goddess cult was

probably associated with the Parphing area. This would also imply that it was a region inhabited by practicing yoginis and women saints.

High on the mountain side above Parphing is the little cave of Lang-le-sho where Padmasambhava and his consort, the lovely Nepalese princess Sakyadevi,²⁶ lived together. This is the site where, earlier, Vajra Humkara and his consort had attained Enlightenment. Lang-le-sho is a very sacred place.

From Lang-le-sho one can see out over the beautiful valley lands below. The fields are yellow with sesame in spring, and later in the year varieties of flowers give them a multitude of colorings. In the cloudy distance can be seen the glorious snow covered peaks of the castle-like Himalayan mountains, beyond which lies mysterious Tibet. Looking south-east one sees the old road falling away through the mountain valleys to the dusty plains of India. The cave where Padmasambhava and Sakyadevi resided is high on the hill face in a pleasant location bathed by the warmth of the Nepalese sun. There is fresh water close by.

In the cave of Lang-le-sho, they jointly practiced the sadhana of Vajrasattva in yab-yum Sri Samyak Vajra Heruka (Tib: *Yangdag Heruka*), merging their hearts



²⁶ Princess Sakyadevi was the daughter of King Sukhadhara of Nepal.

with absolute Divinity, while dissolving themselves in the bliss of transcendental union. The spiritual practice of Sri Samyak Heruka-"diamond-mind of all the Buddhas" begins with the *mar-me gu pa*, or Nine Lamps practice, which is very profound. But, although they practiced for about twelve months, obstacles arose; and they did not succeed in acquiring true union, or *mahamudra*, with Divinity. Obstacles also manifested on the external plane. Disease and famine caused by drought spread throughout the Kathmandu Valley.

"O lord of my heart," said Princess Sakyadevi to her beloved consort, "it is appropriate to inquire of the guru the proper action to take when the loyal disciple is faced with many obstacles."

Acting on this advice, Padmasambhava wrote a missive to Vidyadhara Prabhahasti, beseeching his guidance. He then sent two of his disciples, a Nepalese couple named Jila-jisa and Kunla-kunsa, to Nalanda University in India where the great Vidyadhara Prabhahasti was teaching.

Bound by compassion for his beloved disciple and heir, Vidyadhara Prabhahasti sent two mule-loads of Vajrakilaya-practice texts. Immediately, all the obstacles afflicting the course of progress were eradicated; and Padmasambhava began to meditate with renewed ease. It is said that as soon as Jila-jisa and Kunla-kunsa arrived on the outskirts of Khatmandu with the mule-load of sacred texts, it began to rain; and the drought came to an end. Consequently Padmasambhava is recorded as having declared: "Sri Samyak Heruka is rich in accomplishments, like a wealthy merchant;

but Vajrakilaya practice is essential for protection, like an armed knight."

It is said that, when Padmasambhava performed the powerful Vajrakilaya²⁷ rites, he made it rain by subduing three kinds of elemental spirits. These spirits, or forces, are referred to as *Nagas* or serpentine spirits of water, *Yakshas* or giant spirits of the earth, and *Kumbhandas* or sylph-like spirits of air. He mastered these primitive spiritual forces through mastery of the *Garuda* or phoenix-like spirit of fire.²⁸

Invoking Vajrakilaya, the activity of all the Buddhas, for the overpowering of obstacles and demonic forces, Padmasambhava and Sakyadevi developed their contemplative practice on the basis of their earlier practice of Sri Samyak. They dissolved themselves together as a unity, in the Father-Mother (yab-yum) posture of the Absolute, with the aim of mutually realizing non-dual Buddhahood.

Through the progress of their ecstatic dance of contemplation, during the delightful union of the vajra in the serene lotus of the absolute ground of Being, the blended solar and lunar refined *bindus* ("seed-essences") of their psychic nerve-

²⁷ Vajrakilaya is a significant Vajrayana deity who transmutes and transcends obstacles and obscurations. Vajrakila is the divine 'thoughtform' (Tibetan: ལྷ་པ་པ།, Wylie: *sprul pa*) that governs the kila. Padmasambhava achieved realisation through practicing 'YangdagHeruka' (Tibetan: *yang dag he ru ka*) but he first practiced Vajrakilaya to clean and clear obstacles and obscurations.

Vajrakilaya is also understood as the embodiment of activities of the Buddha mind. Sometimes Vajrakilaya is perceived as the wrathful vajrayana form of Vajrapani, according to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. Many great masters both in India and Tibet, but especially in Tibet, have practiced Vajrakilaya (especially in the Nyingma lineage, and among the Kagyu and also within the Sakyapas). The Sakyapa's main deity, besides Hevajra is Vajrakumara or Vajrakilaya. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Dudjom Rinpoche and a significant number of lamas within the Kagyu and 11Nyingma engaged Vajrakilaya sadhana.

²⁸ The Garuda (Sanskrit: गरुड *garuḍa*, "eagle") is a large mythical bird or bird-like creature that appears in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology.

systems gradually blazed up in the heart-chakra into intense light, so that the essential energy of the lower chakras and the crown Great Bliss chakras of their two bodies burst into incandescence, irradiating their united minds with waves of rapture and joy.

In a state of intense bliss, Padmasambhava and Sakyadevi realized the infinite reality of the Primordial Buddha Mind, the All-Beneficent Lord (*Samantabhadra*),²⁹ who's absolute love is the unimpeded dynamo of existence. Experiencing the succession of the four stages of ecstasy, their mutual state of consciousness increased from height to height. And thus, meditating on Supreme Vajrasattva Heruka as the translucent image of compassionate wrathful (energized) activity, they together acquired the *mahamudra* of Divinity and attained complete Great Enlightenment.

In an exulted state of mind, upon emerging from the cave where their meditations had taken place, Padmasambhava placed his hand against the rock face of the mountain, leaving impressed in stone a miraculous handprint. His handprint can to this very day be seen outside the entrance of Lang-le-sho cave, where he and Sakyadevi attained simultaneous Enlightenment

A little after their attainment of Great Enlightenment, Padmasambhava and Sakyadevi were joined at Lang-le-sho by two other enlightened Masters. These were Silamanju, who came from the Kathmandu Valley, and the famous Vimalamitra. Vimalamitra, you will remember, had previously

²⁹ Samantabhadra is considered a primordial Buddha in indivisible yab-yum union with his consort Samantabhadri.

met Sri Simha and was a disciple of Jnanasutra. All of them lived together for some time.

Turning the Wheel of Dharma at Nalanda

Then Padmasambhava was asked to come to Nalanda University to debate against a number of proud Hindu intellectuals who were drawing many away from the practice of the Dharma by means of their brilliant scholastic arguments. Consequently, he left Nepal and once more ventured down into the hot plains of India.

Having vanquished the Hindu scholars through means of impeccable logic, the five hundred chief professors of Nalanda University conferred on him the honorary title of *Mahapandita* or great Pandit,³⁰ and he was given the name of Vadisimha, Fierce Lion of Debate.

A group of Hindu religious, who had been defeated by Padmasambhava in the great debate at Nalanda University, became so enraged that they attempted to assassinate him. Seizing Padmasambhava while he was out walking one day near the Ganges River, they dragged him to the bank of the river and threw him down into the fast rushing waters. Then they began to stone him. Yet, miraculously, Padmasambhava merely floated, unharmed, in a meditative pose, on the surface of the river, while each stone, as it struck his body, turned instantly into a delicate flower. In a very short time, his luminous bodily form was surrounded by flower petals, dancing on the sparking waves. The mob, who had only

³⁰ Pandita (Buddhism), a Buddhist teacher skilled in five sciences, bearing the title *paṇḍita*

moments earlier felt such enmity towards him, was completely awed by what they saw.

In Zahor

Then Padmasambhava began to travel to different parts of the world, beginning with the Himalayan kingdom of Zahor (modern Mandi and the Kulu Valley). It was in Zahor that the great Master was first addressed as Lord Padmasambhava, the Lotus-born Guru, and was praised as a second Buddha.

The sovereign of Zahor was King Arshadhara, a powerful ruler of a small state closely aligned with the Tibetan Empire. The brother of the King of Zahor was a renowned Buddhist monk and scholar known as Upadhyaya Santaraksita.

The king also had a daughter called Mandarava. Princess Mandarava had many suitors, but not wishing to be married to any of them, she had abandoned worldly life and become a Buddhist nun. She lived in a royal convent of nuns in Zahor. Princess Mandarava had many suitors, but not wishing to be married to any of them, she had abandoned worldly life and become a Buddhist nun. She lived in a royal convent of nuns in Zahor.

Padmasambhava became Mandarava's teacher and soon they became tantric lovers. When King Arshadhara heard that his daughter was involved with a man, and not understanding the situation, he ordered that the culprits should be punished. The King's officers therefore had the princess dragged from her convent and thrown into a pit. They seized Padmasambhava,

flogged him, and bound him to a stake, to be burnt. They then set fire to the stake.

At 'the Vajra seat' in Bodhgaya, he displayed miracles, acknowledging he was a self-manifested buddha, and then he went to the land of Zahor. Although Padmasambhava was a fully enlightened buddha, he appeared as a nirmanakaya manifestation³¹ to tame and teach beings in this age, and so for their benefit he acted as if receiving teachings, accomplishing the practice and passing through the various stages of spiritual realization, one by one. Some accounts tell how in Vajrasana, he was ordained by the Buddha's closest disciple, Ananda. Others say he took

31 1. The Nirmanakaya (Sanskrit: "Created Body") refers to the actual physical Buddha(s) who have existed on earth. Typically, the Nirmanakaya denotes the historical Gautama Buddha, the last recorded Buddha. This level/body is also sometimes called the Putikaya (meaning "decomposing" body) denoting the material body of the Buddha that was used to teach and was present amongst humanity, but was subject to decay (Samyutta Nikaya).

2. The Sambhogakāya (Sanskrit: "body of enjoyment") is the supramundane form of a fully enlightened Buddha following the completion of his career as a Bodhisattva. This body is an idealized form, similar to that seen in Buddhist iconography and in meditational visualizations, of a human figure manifesting all of the thirty-two marks of a Buddha. The place where the Sambhogakāya body appears is an extra-cosmic realm called Akaniṣṭha, similar to but perhaps distinct from the Akaniṣṭha that is the highest realm of the Śuddhāvāsa devas.

3. The Dharmakaya (Sanskrit: "Truth Body" or "Reality Body") is a central concept in Mahayana Buddhism forming part of the Trikaya doctrine that was first expounded in the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra (The Lotus Sutra), composed in the first century B.C.E. It constitutes the unmanifested aspect of a Buddha out of which Buddhas and indeed all phenomena arise and to which they return after their dissolution. Buddhas are manifestations of the Dharmakaya called Nirmanakayas. Unlike ordinary unenlightened persons, Buddhas (and arhats) do not die (though their physical bodies undergo the cessation of biological functions and subsequent disintegration). In the Lotus Sutra (sixth fascicle) Buddha explains that he has always and will always exist to lead beings to their salvation. This eternal aspect of Buddha is the Dharmakaya. The Dharmakaya may be considered the most sublime or truest reality in the Universe corresponding closely to the post-Vedic conception of Brahman and that of the Father in the Christian Trinity

Vajrayana sometimes refers to a fourth body, called the *Svabhavikakaya* (Tib. ngo wo nyi kyi ku), meaning "body of essence, or essential."¹

As with earlier Buddhist thought, all three forms of the Buddha teach the same Dharma, but take on different forms to expound the truth.

ordination from Prabhahasti in Zahor, and was given the name Shakya Sengé, ‘Lion of the Shakyas’. He received the teachings on Yoga Tantra from him eighteen times, and experienced pure visions of the deities. Then he received empowerment from the wisdom dakini Kungamo, also known as Khandroma Lékyi Wangmo, who transformed him into a syllable HUNG, swallowed him, and passed him through her body and out through her secret lotus, granting him outer, inner and secret empowerments, and purifying the three obscurations. From the eight vidyadharas at Deché Tsekpa, he received the teachings on the eight great sadhanas of Kagyé, from Buddhaguhya the teachings on “The Secret Essence Tantra,” and from Shri Singha the teachings of Dzogpachenpo. Padmasambhava would master a teaching the first time he encountered it, and experienced visions of deities without needing to practise. Attaining the first vidyadhara level, the stage of ‘the vidyadhara level of maturation’ or ‘vidyadhara with karmic residue’, Guru Rinpoche was known as Loden Choksé, ‘Wise Seeker of the Sublime.’

Returning to Zahor, Padmasambhava took the royal princess Mandarava as his consort, and they then went to the Maratika cave, where for three months they practised the sadhana of longevity. The Buddha of Limitless Life, Amitayus appeared, empowered them with longevity, and blessed them as inseparable from him. They both accomplished the second vidyadhara level, ‘vidyadhara with mastery over life’.

The king of Zahor and his ministers arrested Guru Rinpoche and Mandarava and burned him alive, but he transformed the pyre into a lake, and was found sitting, cool and fresh, on a lotus blossom in its centre. This lake is considered to be the

Rewalsar Lake, ‘Tso Pema’, in the present-day Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. Overcome with remorse, and in homage, the king offered Padmasambhava his entire kingdom, beginning with his garments and his five royal robes. In paintings and statues, Guru Rinpoche is portrayed wearing the clothing of the king of Zahor. For example, the hat offered by the king is called The Lotus which Liberates on Sight, or The Petalled Hat of the Five Families; its inner and outer layers symbolize the unity of generation and completion phases, its three points the three kayas, its five colours the five kayas working for the benefit of beings, the sun and moon skilful means and wisdom, its blue border unlimited samaya, the vajra top unshakeable concentration and the vulture’s feather the realization of the highest view and the culmination of the practice. Guru Rinpoche taught the king and subjects of Zahor, and many attained realization.

With Mandarava, he then returned to Oddiyana, but was recognized, and burned on a sandalwood pyre. After some time, they were found seated on a lotus in a lake of sesame oil, wearing a garland of skulls, as a symbol of their liberating all beings from samsara through compassion. Padmasambhava was now known as Pema Thötrenge Tsal, ‘The Powerful Lotus-born, with a Garland of Skulls’. For thirteen years Padmasambhava and Mandarava remained to teach in Oddiyana, as a result of which the king, queen and many others attained realization and the rainbow body. Then Padmasambhava was known as Padma Raja—Pema Gyalpo—, ‘The Lotus-born King’.

Manifesting himself as the monk Indrasena, it is said that Padmasambhava inspired the great king, Ashoka (3rd century BC), to have faith in the Buddhadharma. After defeating

various anti-Buddhist rulers, Guru Rinpoche was poisoned, but remained unharmed, and he was thrown in the Ganges, but made the river flow upstream and danced in the air, therefore earning the name of Khyeu Khanding Tsal, ‘Mighty Youth, Soaring in the Sky like a Garuda.’

He manifested as a number of great siddhas, such as Saroruha, Saraha, Dombi Heruka, Virupa and Krishnacharya. In charnel grounds like Kuladzokpa, ‘Perfected in Body’, he taught the secret mantra to dakinis, and made outer and inner spirits into protectors of the Dharma. He was then known as Nyima Özer, ‘Rays of the Sun.’



Padmasambhava challenged and defeated five hundred upholders of wrong views in debate at Bodhgaya. He reversed their magic with the aid of a wrathful mantra given him by the lion-faced dakini Marajita. He was known as Senge Dradok, ‘The Lion’s Roar.’

At Yangleshö

Guru Rinpoche statue inside the cave at Yangleshö.

Then at Yangleshö, present day Pharping in Nepal, he practised the sadhana of Yangdak

Heruka with the

consort Shakyadevi, daughter of a king of Nepal. Powerful spirits caused a three year drought, with famine and disease, and Padmasambhava asked his teachers in India for a teaching to counter them. Two men returned, laden with the

tantras and commentaries of Vajrakilaya, and the moment they arrived, the obstacles were pacified. Guru Rinpoche and Shakyadevi both attained the third vidyadhara level, ‘vidyadhara of the great seal, or mahamudra’. Guru Rinpoche recognized that Yangdak is like a merchant engaging in trade—the achievement can be great, but so can the obstacles, whereas Vajrakilaya is like an armed escort; he is needed to guard against obstacles and overcome them. He then composed sadhanas of Yangdak and Vajrakilaya combined, and bound the guardians of Vajrakilaya to protect the teachings.

As for the Dzogchen teachings, it is said that Padmasambhava met Garab Dorje in a pure vision, and he also received the Nyingtik teachings from Manjushrimitra. As Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche explains in his ‘History of the Natural

Dzogpachenpo’ “A Marvellous Garland of Rare Gems,”

Padmasambhava travelled to the Parushakavana charnel ground where Shri Singha³² granted him the teachings of the Three Classes of Mind, Space and Pith Instructions. After granting him the Outer, Inner and Secret cycles, Shri Singha conferred on Padmasambhava the teachings of the Innermost Unsurpassed



³² Shri Singha (Skt. *Śrī Siṃha*; Tib. ལྷ་སེང་གུ། དཔལ་གྱི་སེང་གེ།, Wyl. *dpal gyi seng ge*) – one of the early masters of the Dzogchen lineage, who was originally from the kingdom of Khotan located in the present day Xinjiang province of China. He was a disciple of Mañjushrimitra and the main teacher of Jñanasutra. He is famous for arranging the teachings of the Pith Instruction Class (*mengak dê*) into four cycles: outer, inner, secret and innermost secret unsurpassed. His last testament, which he conferred upon Jñanasutra before passing into the rainbow body, is called the *Seven Nails*.

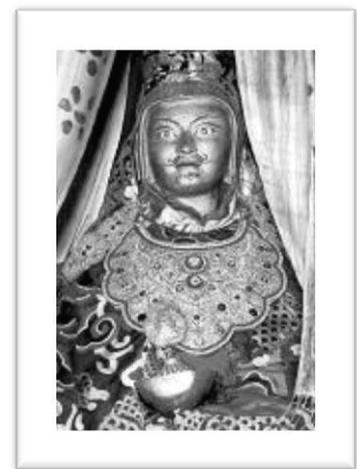
Cycle of Pith Instructions, the Khandro Nyingtik, along with all the tantras and instructions.

He stayed for twenty-five years, receiving and contemplating on this teaching. Subsequently, he went to the Sosadvipa charnel ground and practised for three years, obtaining an enlightened body that was “like the reflection of the moon in water, not subject to birth or death”. He attained ‘the rainbow body of great transference’, in which form he later went to



Tibet. In this subtle light body, great masters such as Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra can remain, without dissolving into the dharmakaya, for as long as there is service to perform for sentient beings.

Padmasambhava visited lands and kingdoms all over Asia, including Mongolia, China and Shangshung, where he manifested as Tavihricha to teach the hearing lineage of Dzogchen in the Bön tradition, which led many to enlightenment and the rainbow body. “In this way,” Jamgön Kongtrul writes, “Padmasambhava’s activity for leading people to the path of liberation through appearing in various places and in various forms, and speaking various languages, is indeed beyond all measure.”



Padmasambhava came to Muktinath, a sacred place to both Hindus and Buddhists at that time, located in Muktinath Valley (north central Nepal). It means “place of salvation” in

Sanskrit. Guru Rinpoche meditated there on his way to Tibet and received many tantric teachings from Dakinis who reside there.

The famous 'Looks Like Me' statue of Guru Padmasambhava is at Samye Monastery, the first temple to be built in Tibet by King Detsen (reigned 742-798 C.E.) of the Tubo Kingdom. It was presided over by him.

It was known for its 108 water springs. While there, he had commissioned a statue of him that still resides in the Narsingh Gompa at Muktinath.

In Tibet

Meanwhile King's Arshadhara's famous brother, Upadhyaya Santaraksita, was invited by the Bengalese Emperor Dharmapala of eastern India to take part in a peace mission to Tibet. Tri-song Detsan, son of a Chinese princess and the ruling Emperor of Tibet (755-797 C.E.), had been educated in Buddhism during the reign of his father. With the death of his father, however, a powerful minister named Manshang had driven all the Chinese monks and scholars out of Tibet.

Manshang was a great military leader who extended Tibetan rule over the greater portion of Yunnan and Si-Chuen, but his attempt to suppress Buddhism in favor of the Bon religion, resulted in his downfall. In 755 C.E., Tri-song Detsan succeeded to the throne of his father and brought the warlords of Tibet under his personal control.

Emperor Tri-song Detsan (742-803 C.E.) was the thirty-seventh sovereign of Tibet in lineal descent from King Nyatri Tsenpo (c. 127 B.C.E.). His father was the Emperor Mei

Agtsom-chen and his mother was a Chinese princess, Chin Ch'eng Kun-chu, daughter of Li-lung Chi of the Imperial House of China. His parents were Buddhists of the Chinese Ch'an (or *Zen*) school. He was enthroned in the year 755 C.E. as sovereign ruler of the Twelve Provinces of Tibet and of the subject kingdoms of Central Asia. He was, at that time, merely thirteen years of age.

By means of ceaseless combat, the Tibetan army had brought to their knees most of the chieftains of Central Asia, even taking Chang-an, the Imperial Capital of China, which they held long enough to negotiate a payment of tribute. While China was reeling under the humiliating sting of Tibetan belligerence, India was seeing larger and larger chunks of its frontier territories falling into the Northerner's orbit of power. Consequently, in 783 C.E., the Emperor Dharmapala (768-809) was more than ready to sign a peace treaty with the young Tri-song Detsan. Besides, on behalf of Tri-song Detsan, the Tibetan Minister Salnang of Ba had been secretly exploring connections with Indian Buddhism for years.

When Tri-song Detsan invited the great pandita Shantaraksita, also known as Khenpo or Khenpo Bodhisattva, to establish Buddhism in his country, he asked Santaraksita to define his system of instruction. Shantaraksita answered that his practice was to follow that which could be proved by means of rational examination and to avoid all that did not agree with reason. This rational approach to the Dharma pleased Tri-song Detsan, and he gave permission for Shantaraksita to promulgate Buddhism in Tibet.

The author of the famous *Ornament of the Middle Way* and *Compendium on Reality* (Skt. *Madhyamakalamkara*) *Tattvasamgraha*, respectively), Shantarakshita began teaching

in Tibet, and laid the foundations for Samyé monastery. This provoked the local spirits, who embarked on a campaign of disasters—disease, floods, storms, hail, famine and drought—and whatever construction work was done at Samyé during the day was dismantled at night. The Bodhisattva Shantaraksita's first attempt to teach in Tibet was a failure.

A second expedition was made by Shantaraksita in 784 C.E. However, powerful political factions of the aristocracy in the country, allied to the indigenous Bon cult, strongly opposed him and forced him to retreat back to Nepal.

It is said that it was for this reason that Shantaraksita recommended to the Emperor Tri-song Detsan that the enlightened Padmasambhava, should be invited to the Tibetan Court. As soon as Tri-song Detsan heard the name of Padmasambhava, his heart was seized with an unquenchable desire to meet him. He sent his envoys, including his minister Salnang to Nepal to extend the imperial invitation to Padmasambhava.

With his prescience, Padmasambhava knew already of their mission, and had gone to meet them at Mangyul, between Nepal and Tibet. According to Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche, it was in the Iron Tiger year (810 C.E.) that Padmasambhava came to Tibet. It is said that he was then over a thousand years old. On the way to central Tibet, he began to subjugate the local spirits and made them take oaths to protect the Dharma and its followers.

In the spring of 786, by the Tibetan reckoning a Fire Tiger year, Padmasambhava set forth across the high passes of the Himalaya. On the Tibetan frontier, in Mangyul, he was met by five royal ministers to escort him to the Imperial Palace. In

the valley of Tsang he was greeted by a messenger with a white horse. Riding in state to the town of Turdlung, he was welcomed with a grand reception. Then in the Tamarisk Garden near Red Rock, he was royally received by the Emperor. He then went to the top of Mount Hépori and brought all the 'gods and demons' of Tibet under his command. With Padmasambhava's presence in the country, opposition melted. Fresh enthusiasm for Buddhism on the part of various noble families made it possible for Shantaraksita to initiate the plans for founding a major Buddhist establishment in the heart of Tibetan territory. Consequently, Padmasambhava, through the power of his blessings, exorcised the negative, demonic *numina* of the land and consecrated the site upon which Samye Monastery, Tibet's first sizeable Buddhist academy, was to be built. In the year 787 C.E. (Fire Hare year), construction on its laid foundation began.

He then went back to Nepal. Construction of Samye continued for the next four years. Samye Monastery was completed in 791 C.E, the year of the Iron Sheep. After the completion of Samye, Langdro Nangzer, Nyer Tagtsen Dongzi and Senggo Lha-lung-zi were sent to Vrikramasila University in India. They brought back with them twelve monks of the Sarvastivada Order.

Then the first candidates for monastic life were selected. First, under the supervision of Shantaraksita acting as Upadhyaya, Danasila as Acarya, Jinamitra as father-confessor, and the ten other Bhikkhus gathered at Samye, the noble minister Ba Trizi renounced the world and was ordained as a monk. He received the name Ba Ratnaraksita. Then Ba Salnang, Pagor Vairocana, Gyalwa Choyang, Ma Rinchen-chok, Kawa Peltsek, and La-sum Gyalwa Chanchub were also ordained.

The ordination ceremony occurred in the first fortnight of the month of Spring in the Iron Sheep year of 791 C.E.

Collectively, this first group of Tibetan monks were known as the "Seven Probationers" because they were a test to see if Tibetans were suitable for the monastic life. When, after a number of years they proved that they had adapted well to monastic conditions, the Emperor gave his permission for Tibetans, in general, to apply for ordination.

‘Glorious Samyé—the Inconceivable—the unchanging, spontaneously accomplished temple’ was then built without any hindrance, completed within five years, and consecrated, amidst miraculous and auspicious signs, by Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita.

There then began a vast undertaking, an extraordinary wave of spiritual activity in Tibet. Vimalamitra³³ and other great scholars and masters, one hundred and eight in all, were invited; Padmasambhava, Shantarakshita and Vimalamitra gave teachings, and then worked with Tibetan translators, such as Vairotsana, Kawa Paltsek, Chokro Lüi Gyaltzen and Shyang Yeshé Dé, to translate the sutras, tantras and treatises into Tibetan; the first seven Tibetan monks were ordained into the Sarvastivadin lineage, and this

³³ **Vimalamitra** (Skt.; Tib. འཇིག་བཞེས་གཞེན་, *Drimé Shenyen*; Wyl. *dri med bshes gnyen*) aka **Mahavajra** — one of the most learned Indian Buddhist masters. He went to Tibet in the ninth century, where he taught extensively, and composed and translated numerous Sanskrit texts. The quintessence of his teaching is known as the Vima Nyingtik, one of the Heart-essence teachings of the Great Perfection.

Vimalamitra spent thirteen years in Tibet, and then, promising to return to Tibet every hundred years as an emanation to further the Clear Light teaching of Dzogpachenpo, he left for the Wutai Shan mountain in China. There he remains, in the rainbow body, the ‘Body of Great Transference’, and there he will remain until all of the 1002 buddhas of this Fortunate Aeon have appeared. When they have all done so, he will once again go to Vajrasana in India, where he will manifest the state of complete and perfect enlightenment.

was the time when the two sanghas, the monastic celibate sangha of monks and nuns and the community of lay tantric practitioners, came into being in Tibet; and Vairotsana and Namkhé Nyingpo were dispatched to India to receive teachings on Dzogchen from Shri Singha, and on Yangdak from Hungkara³⁴, respectively.

At King Trisong Detsen's request, Padmasambhava opened the mandala of the vajrayana teachings in the caves of Chimphu above Samyé to the twenty-five disciples, headed by the King Trisong Detsen, Yeshé Tsogyal and Vairotsana; nine of the twenty-five attained siddhis through practising the sadhanas he transmitted to them. It is said that he convened them in three great gatherings, to teach the Kagyé Deshek Düpa, the Lama Gongdü, and the Kadü Chökyi Gyatso.

Padmasambhava and his closest disciple, Yeshé Tsogyal, travelled all over Tibet and the Himalayas, and blessed and consecrated the entire land, especially: “the twenty snow mountains of Ngari, the twenty-one sadhana places of Ü and Tsang, the twenty-five great pilgrimage places of Dokham, the three hidden lands, five ravines, three valleys and one region.”

Padmasambhava made many prophecies about the future, and together with Yeshé Tsogyal, concealed countless terma teachings to prevent the destruction of the teachings of the secret mantrayana, to avoid corruption of the vajrayana or its alteration by intellectuals, to



³⁴ **Humkara** (Skt. Hūmkara; Tib. ལུ་ཀ་ར་, ལུ་མཚན་, Wyl. *hUM ka ra* or *hUM mdzad*) — one of the eight vidyadharas of India; he received the Vishudda (Tib. Yangdak Heruka) tantra from the Kagyé cycle.

preserve the blessing, and to benefit future followers. For each of these terma treasures, he predicted the time for its revelation, the identity of the revealer, and those who would receive and hold the teachings. At thirteen different places called Tiger's Lair, Taktsang, he manifested in "the terrifying wrathful form of crazy wisdom," binding worldly spirits under oath to protect the terma treasures and to serve the Dharma. Then he was named Dorje Drolö, 'Wild Wrathful Vajra'. At Shyotö Tidrö in the Drikhung Valley, he transmitted the teachings of Dzogpachenpo, the Innermost, Unsurpassed Cycle of the Category

of Pith Instructions, and the Khandro Nyingtik, to Yeshé Tsogyal and to 100,000 thousand wisdom dakinis. Later, at Chimphu, when Trisong Detsen's daughter, the



princess Pema Sel, died at the age of eight, he drew a red syllable NRI on her heart, summoned her consciousness, restored her to life, and gave her the transmission of the Nyingtik teachings, soon after which she passed away.

The Copper-Coloured Mountain according to the vision of Chokgyur Lingpa

Yeshé Tsogyal concealed the teachings as terma, and centuries later, Pema Sel's incarnation, the master Pema Ledreltsal,

revealed the Khandro Nyingtik cycle. His next rebirth was as the omniscient Longchen Rabjam.

Departure from Tibet

After the death of Trisong Detsen, Padmasambhava stayed on in Tibet into the reign of Detsen's successors. But he knew that the rakshasa cannibal demons, inhabiting the south-western continent of Chamara, Ngayab, were set to invade and destroy India, Nepal and Tibet. If not subdued, they would sweep the earth and destroy all human life. After fifty five and a half years in Tibet, in the Wood Monkey year (864 C.E.), he prepared to leave; he was accompanied by the young King Mutik Tsepo and a large gathering of disciples to the pass of Gungthang in Mangyul. They implored him to stay, but he refused. He gave final teachings and instructions to each of them. On the tenth day of the monkey month, he left for the land of Ngayab Ling in the southwest and for his manifested pure land on Zangdokpalri, the Copper Coloured Mountain of Glory.

The many accounts of his life vie in their beauty when they come to describe his departure. The Zanglingma biography says that, after giving his final instructions, "Padmasambhava mounted a beam of sunlight and in the flicker of a moment soared away into the open sky. From the direction of the south west, he turned his face to look back, and sent forth a light ray of immeasurable loving kindness that established the disciples in the state of non-return. Accompanied by a cloud-like throng of dakinis, outer and inner, and amid the sound of the music they were offering, he went to the south-western continent of Ngayab."

But different people had different perceptions of his departure. Some saw him leaving in swirling clouds of colored light, mounted on a divine horse; others saw him riding a lion. In some accounts, the twenty-five disciples in their meditation watched him receding in the sun's rays, first the size of a raven, then a dove, a sparrow, a bee, and finally a tiny speck that disappeared from sight. They saw him alighting in the land of the rakshasas³⁵ and teaching them the Dharma.

On the peak of the Copper Coloured Mountain, Padmasambhava liberated the king of the rakshasas, Raksha Thötrenng, and assumed his form. Now he dwells in Zangdokpalri as a 'vidyadhara of spontaneous presence', the fourth vidyadhara level: "There," writes Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche, "he manifested the inconceivable Palace of Lotus Light, and there he presides as king, with one of his emanations in each of the eight continents of the rakshasas, giving teachings like the Eight Great Methods of Attainment of the Kagyé, and protecting the people of this world of Jambudvipa from fears for their life. Even to this day, he reigns as the regent of Vajradhara, the 'vidyadhara with spontaneous accomplishment of the ultimate path'; and thus he will remain, without ever moving, until the end of the universe."

Disciples

As regards Guru Rinpoche's disciples, Jamgön Kongtrul lists "the original twenty-one disciples, the intermediate twenty-five disciples, and the later seventeen and twenty-one disciples." Apart from his twenty-five most famous disciples, the king and

³⁵ A cannibal tribe of Shi Lanka.

Collectively this first group of Tibetan monks were known as the "Seven Probationers" because they were a test to see if Tibetans were suitable for the monastic life. When after a number of years they proved that they had adapted well to monastic conditions, then the Emperor gave his permission for Tibetans in general to apply for ordination.

This marks the founding of the Nyingma School in Tibet. There are four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism: the Nyingmapa, or followers of the Venerable Ancients; the Kargyupa, or followers of the Oral Transmission; the Sakyapa, or followers from the Sakya-region; and the Gelugpa, or followers of the school of Virtue. The Nyingmapa were the first to be founded and they are known as the *mother* school. The other three schools, collectively called the New Schools (*sarmapa*) and known as the *sons*, were founded later, starting in the 11th century. All four main schools and their secondary branches, adhere to the Sarvastivada Order of Buddhism.

The school becomes the vehicle which carries, like a vessel, the inspiration of the Bodhisattvas from age to age. As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche used to say, the Nyingma school is not an institution with membership cards and dues paying members, nor does it has a central leader or government. The Nyingma are a collection of sacred lineages, heavenly teachings, and divine revelations, transmitted by spiritual Masters who are sovereign in their own right. These are monks, nuns, yogis, yoginis, and both male and female Lamas, who compose the school. All, in their own way, are servants of holy Dharma.

A school like this is outer, inner and secret (Tib: *Chi-Nang-Sang*). The outer, exoteric aspect of the school is the visible part, including the historical entity founded by Khenpo Santaraksita, Danasila, Jinamitra, etc., and the first Tibetan probationers. The inner, esoteric aspect consists of the transmission of the six *tantra-yana* lineages, the priceless teachings of human transformation, and the *corpus* of the Dzogchen teachings, along with the inner experience of the seekers who are practicing those teachings. On the inner level, there is a definite connection with something transcendental. The secret level of the school cannot be conceived of by ordinary individuals. In this sense it is “self-secret” . That which is self-secret has, in part, to do with the school's influence on the destiny of all humanity.

Early History of Tibet

According to archeology, Tibetan history can be traced back 4,000 years. Archeological and geological discoveries lead ethnologists to believe that Tibetans are descendants of aboriginal (“monkey”) and nomadic Qiang tribes. At that time, life was simple. The nomads foraged and hunted, often riding horses to travel long distances and using stone implements. Historical records show that not until the 7th century C.E. could Tibetans be recognized as a distinct race of people.

Though there are 24 names in ancient literature of Tibetan rulers, they remain legend prior to Tagbu Nyasig from 579-619 C.E. followed by Namri Songtsen (r. 619 – 629 C.E.).³⁸

³⁸ The first seven kings were said to have returned to the sky by a “sky-rope” at their deaths since they were not buried in tombs. It was at the time of the eighth Yarlung king, Drigum Tsenpo that tombs were employed; and in a sense, Tibetan history is said to begin here.

The first palace in Central Tibet, Yumbu Lakang, was built for the first king of Tibet, Nyatri Tsenpo. Its name means the Palace on the Hind Leg of the Deer due to the Zhaxiciri hill having such a resemblance. According to myth, he descended from heaven in the 2nd century B.C.E. to build the palace; although, another legend claims that the 28th King of Tibet, Lha Totori Nyentsen resided in the palace as late as the 4th century C.E. The three-story structure, however, by archeological consensus dates the structure to the reign of an offspring, Songtsen Gampo (r. 608-650 C.E.), the powerful and intelligent king of Tubo Kindom, who conquered other tribes and founded the first dynasty of Tibet, the 7th century Yarlung Dynasty.

The Nyingma sect monks supervised the palace-monastery grounds.

Under Lhatotori Nyentsen, Buddhist scriptures written in Sanskrit from India were introduced to Tibet. It was known as “The Tough Mystery,” and it contained methods for taming half-human/half-serpent *nagas*. This occurred in 233 C.E.; and to commemorate this important event, Tibetan currency notes were dated according to the number of years that have passed since then. It was predicted by the Tocharian³⁹ translator

Drignum Tsenpo’s successor Chatri Tsenpo was a contemporary of the Han Emperor of China, Han Wudi (140-85 B.C.E.) and is known for the material progress he brought to Tibet. He commissioned the building of canals and bridges. Under him, iron and copper ore were discovered in Tibet.

³⁹ Tocharia was a Buddhist kingdom on the Silk Route, centered in Kucha and Turfan, along the northern rim of the Tarim Basin in present-day Xinjiang Province of China, north of Tibet. The Tocharians were an Indo-European people who came to the area originally from the Roman Empire, received Buddhism from India, and were instrumental in the translation of its texts into Chinese and Old Turk.

Buddhirkshita that Tibetans would be able to read the scriptures four generations later, around the time of Padmasambhava.

It was under the reign of Songtsen Gampo that a unified Tibet first emerged. To arrange an alliance with Nepal, he sent a minister to arrange a marriage for him with the Princess Bhrikuti Devi, a Buddhist. When she arrived for the marriage, she brought the statue of Akshobhya, a Buddha figure. Gampo also made great contributions to Tibetan culture, economy, technology, and religion by linking Tibet with the outside world to establish communication and trade.

He also sought a similar alliance with China through a marriage with Princess Wencheng, the daughter of the Tang Emperor Taizong, who was also a Buddhist. However, he had to wait for the alliance since another ruler from the Kokonor region (northern Amdo) was bidding for her hand.

The Princesses brought with them advanced technology, exotic culture, tea, silk, and most importantly peace and Buddhism. Gampo embraced the religion and the first traces of Buddhism, which would later dominate the region, entered the snowy land. The king and princesses built Jokhang Temple and Ramoche Temple to enshrine the holy statues of Sakyamuni. They also ordered the construction of the grand Potala Palace.

During this period, his minister Tonmi Sambhota learned Sanskrit in Kashmir. When he returned, he developed a script for writing the Tibetan language based on the Khotanese⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Khotan was a Buddhist kingdom on the Silk Route along the southwestern rim of the Tarim Basin, just north of western Tibet. Its people were of Iranian origin, and its form of Buddhism derived from India. A trade route ran from Khotan to Tibet via Kashmir.

adaptation of the Indian Brahmi, Gupta scripts, and Zhang-zhung⁴¹ influence. Consequently, he translated “The Tough Mystery” texts into Tibetan.

Songtsen Gampo was intent on building an extensive empire beyond Central Tibet, first to the north and the east. A long period of wars ensued, during which he conquered the Qiang, Bailan, and Dangxian tribes. Now the ruler of a much greater realm, the Tibetan Emperor Songtsen Gampo asked the Chinese Emperor Taizong once more for his princess in marriage. When he was refused, Songtsen-gampo attacked the Chinese frontier province of Songzhou in present-day Sichuan Province. Once again Songtsen Gampo asked for the hand of Princess Wencheng. When he was refused again, he attacked the Chinese frontier province of Songzhou in present-day Sichuan Province. Finally, he received Princess Wencheng as his bride in 641 C.E. She brought with her another Buddha image.

The Tibetan Emperor built two temples in the city of Rasa, later known as Lhasa, to house the two Buddha images brought by his Nepali and Chinese wives. Ramoche Tsuglagkang was constructed for the Nepali statue and Rasa Trulnang Tsuglagkang, later called the Jokang), for the Chinese one. For security reasons, the location of the two statues was interchanged during the next generation.

⁴¹ It should be noted that the form of the letters in the Tibetan script was derived from an older Zhang-zhung alphabet called “Maryig” which would have also derived from an Indian script. Zhang-zhung was a kingdom in Ngari, western Tibet, that predated Songtsen Gampo and was the homeland of the native Tibetan Bon religion. It had 18 kings before the first Yarlung ruler, Nyatri Tsenpo. Tonmi Sambhota would have needed to pass through Zhang-zhung to reach Kashmir. One of his tutors was Li-byin. “Li” is also the name of a district in Zhang-zhung and was part of the name of the Zhang-zhung royal family. This “Li-byin” could have meant “The Script-giver from Zhang-zhung Royal Family.”

During this period, Songtsen Gampo further extended the Tibetan Empire to parts of northern Burma and, in 640 C.E., to Nepal as well. This was the origin of the Tibetan family clans in Nepal of Tsang, Lama, Sherpa, and Tamang. In 643 C.E., the Tibetan Empire further expanded as Legmi [more commonly known in Tibetan as Li Migkya (*Li Mig-rkya*, Zhang-zhung: *Lig-myi-rhya*)], the last ruler of Zhang-zhung, submitted and Zhang-zhung became a vassal state.

Taking advantage of the good relations between Tibet and China, Songtsen-gampo, in 645, sent a request to the Tang Emperor and subsequently built a temple on Wutaishan (*Ri-bo rtse-nga*), the five-peaked sacred mountain of the Buddha-figure Manjushri [in present-day Shanxi Province].

In 648, the Chinese Emperor Taizong sent a good-will mission to the Indian Emperor Harsha (r. 606 – 647 C.E.). When the mission arrived, Harsha had already passed away and had been succeeded by Arjuna, his minister. Arjuna was intolerant of Buddhism, and accordingly, had most of the Chinese mission killed. The survivors fled to Nepal and sought Tibetan help there. Subsequently, the Tibetan armies invaded and defeated Arjuna in Bihar. This defeat was not recorded, however, in Indian histories. Songtsen Gampo died shortly thereafter in 649 C.E.

From 659 C.E. under Emperor Mangsong Mangtsen through c. 710, Tibet and China continued to fight under several emperors. Finally, a Chinese princess named Jincheng was given in marriage to Emperor Mey Agtsom to ease tensions albeit unsuccessfully. The princess was unhappy in Tibet. In 737 C.E., being also a Buddhist, she gave asylum to Buddhist refugee monks fleeing an anti-Buddhist persecution in Khotan.

In 719 C.E., Tibet and the neighboring Arab Umayyad Caliphate became allies against Chinese Emperor Xuanzong (r. 713-756). Finally, in 730 C.E., Tibet and China signed a peace treaty, establishing the border between the two empires to the east of Kokonor Lake. The peace lasted for 15 years during which envoys traveled regularly between the two capitals, Lhasa and Chang'an (present-day Xi'an).

In 741 C.E., the Tang forces attacked and regained control of vital areas along the Sino-Tibetan border. Upon the death of Princess Jincheng, Tibet asked for peace but was refused. Tibet then sent an army into the Chinese-held territory and recaptured several border cities. Back and forth, in 747 C.E., the Chinese drove the Tibetans from the region.

It was during this period that Bon and Buddhism controversies ensued. In 755 C.E., Tibetan Emperor Mey Agtsom was assassinated by two ministers who were part of a conservative, xenophobic Bon faction at the Tibetan court. They opposed the Emperor's interest in Buddhism and his continuous attitude to reconcile with China. It was this period, too, that the Tang Dynasty was temporarily overthrown.

Mey Agtsom's successor was Trisong Detsen, also a devout follower of Buddhism. As previously reported, in 779 C.E., King Trisong Detsen set up Samye Monastery, the first Buddhist monastery, patterned after the Indian monastery Odantapuri, in Tibet. Much to their dismay, the xenophobic pro-Bon ministers blamed Shantarakshita for the disasters—storms and floods—that befell the region.

During Padmasambhava's stay, Buddhism was recognized as the state religion. Having prescience, Padmasambhava hid

various texts, concerning the advanced meditation system called “dzogchen” in the walls of the Samye monestary (still under construction) before he left Tibet the first time. He felt that the Tibetans were not yet sophisticated and ripe enough to be able to comprehend them. Thus, they were concealed as “treasure texts” to be recovered later when the Tibetans were ready to understand and practice them correctly.

According to some Tibetan sources, Emperor Trisong Detsen launched a campaign against the Bhata Hor in the Lake Baikal region⁴² to bring the protector Pe-har to Tibet. . Pe-har refers to a group of five protector spirits, known as the Five Bodily Manifest Kings , or to just one of them, the King of Enlightening Influence (*Phrin-las rgyal-po*). With his special powers, Padmasambhava foresaw that Pe-har would be the appropriate spiritual protector for Tibet. The Bhata Hor were the keepers of a *raksha* demon skin mask, a turquoise statue of the female Buddha-figure Tara and a mother-of-pearl statue of the male Buddha-figure Avalokiteshvara. These three were the physical basis and locus for summoning Pe-har.

The Tibetans appropriated these three objects, brought them to Tibet, and installed them in Samye. Padmasambhava tamed Pe-har and bound him by oath to protect Tibet.

Samye later became known as Nechen, the Great Place. At the time of the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam- (1543-1588), Pe-har began manifesting as an oracle, speaking through a medium. The Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang-lozang-gyatso (1617-1682), appointed Pe-har as the State Oracle for the newly established Tibetan government and commissioned a new monastery, Nechung , the Small Place, as the oracle’s seat. The monastery

⁴² Uighur Turks of the Orkhon Uighur Empire (745 – 840)—that empire included Mongolia and the Lake Baikal region of southern Siberia, north of Mongolia.

was completed for Pe-har in 1683; and Pe-har subsequently became popularly known as the “Nechung Oracle.”

In 783 C.E., Trisong Detsen created a Religious Council to decide upon all religious matters. He appointed Shantarakshita’s successor to the abbotship of Samye, Selnang as the chief minister of the Council. Selnang led the pro-Indian faction in Tibet; and to insure the direction in which Tibet would develop, the new abbot influenced Trisong Detsen so that the Council had the power to override decisions by other ministers.

In 784 C.E., one of the Council’s first acts was to banish the conservative xenophobic Bon faction within the imperial court to Gilgit (present-day northern Pakistan) and to Nanzhao. Following the example of Padmasambhava, the Bon master Dranpa-namka also hid various Bon texts, covering all topics, in the mud walls of Samye for safekeeping.

The Samye Debate

Before he died, Shantarakshita predicted a conflict between two schools of Buddhism, (1) the Chinese Chan School teaching instant enlightenment through stopping all thought and activity and (2) his own Indian school’s teaching of a gradual path of study, analysis, and ethical discipline. He directed that his disciple, Kamalashila, should be invited to stand for the Indian system. A protracted debate between the two schools occurred at Samye from 792 to 794.

The Chinese system was argued by a Chinese monk called “Hoshang” (*hoshang* is the Chinese word for “monk”), and the Indian system by Kamalashila. The Indian system was judged

to have prevailed, and Trisong Detsen thus declared it to be Tibet's official religion.

The outcome of the debate may have also been influenced by political events, since there were constant border conflicts with China in the second half of the eighth century. As evidence of the political struggle behind the debate, that monks from the rival Tibetan noble families that were pro-China and anti-China were present throughout the debate.

In 763 C.E., between Shantarakshita's expulsion from Tibet and his return to Tibet a few years later, the Tibetan army had even taken the Tang capital Chang'an and held it for fifteen days before being forced to withdraw. This occurred during the interval between the Chinese crushing of the An Lushan Rebellion and the return of the new Tang Emperor, Daizong, from Luoyang to Chang'an.

The fighting between the Tibetans and the Chinese had continued, however; and, in 781 C.E., the Tibetan forces had captured Dunhuang (*Tun-hvang*) at the eastern end of the Tarim Basin. The large cave monastery complex there became a center for the translation of Buddhist texts from Chinese into Tibetan. Both Dzogchen and a Tibetan form of Chan (Jap. *Zen*) Buddhism came to flourish there.

The Peace Treaty of Qingshui (*Cing-co*) in 783 C.E., established the Sino-Tibetan boundary in Amdo [present-day Qinghai, giving Tibet control of the Kokonor regions. Peace between the two empires lasted only three years, however, and war broke out again in this region in 786 C.E., six years before the Samye debate.

The Sino-Tibetan conflicts were not restricted to the Amdo borders and the Silk Route regions.] Tibet had entered into various military alliances under Trisong Detsen, especially

with King Kolofeng , the son of King Pilaoko of Siam. King Pilaoko (r. 728 – 750) was the ruler of Nanzhou, the proto-Thai kingdom in Yunnan that he had forged from uniting various Bai states in 730. Pilaoko had accepted Tang Chinese overrule in 735 and had attacked nearby Tibetan areas in 745 C.E. His son and successor, King Kolofeng (r. 750 – 779 C.E.), however, rebelled against China and allied with Tibet in 750 C.E. In 778 C.E., Tibet and Nanzhao had fought the Chinese together in Sichuan. This alliance held until 786 C.E. when the next Nanzhao ruler, King Imoshun (r. 779 – 808) allied his kingdom once more with China, and war broke out again between China and Tibet. Thus, China and Tibet fought each other on two fronts at this time. The Kingdom of Nanzhao lasted until 902 C.E.

Thus, at the time of the Samye debate, Tibet and China were fighting on not just two, but on three fronts. Undoubtedly, this affected the Chinese side's loss of the debate and Tibet's subsequent rejection of Chinese Buddhism and adoption, instead, of Indian Buddhism.

Trisong Detsen was followed by two of his sons—Muney Tsenpo and Tri Desongtsen (aka Saynaleg). The latter was succeeded by his son Relpachen who was a proponent of Indian Buddhism (r. 815-836 C.E). He implemented a system of taxation to support the monasteries, allocating seven household to support each monk.

His other brother, Tri Uidumtsen (aka Langdarma “Young Bull”) assassinated him and closed the temples and monasteries in 836 C.E.. The monks were given the choice of marrying, becoming huntsmen, or converting to the Bon religion. Those who refused were executed. This regiment eliminated Buddhism from Central Tibet though not in

eastern or western Tibet. It brought an end to the taxation system and the political influence of the religious Council.

Buddhism was dealt a temporary blow, however. The indigenous Bon people still favored their own native religion and objected strongly to the royal family's obsession with what they viewed as a foreign religion. Tri Uidumtsen believed in Bon and objected to Buddhism. Unfortunately, Lhalung Pelgyi-dorjey, one of Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava's 25 disciples is purported to have assassinated Tri Uidumtsen. Apparently, he had motive—he was the deposed head of the Religious Council and former Abbot of Samye.

After this, a schism in the royal line split Tibet into various kingdoms with decentralized authority.

But as centuries went by Buddhism slowly gained in popularity until it became the predominant religion of the area and one of the world's most famous Buddhist sects—Tibetan Buddhism.



The Master Spreads the Dharma in the Land of the Snows; Legend

When the Buddha gave Avalokiteshvara the responsibility of taming the backwards land of Tibet, Avalokiteshvara looked at the barbaric land and shed tears of compassion. From these tears the Goddess Ganga and Gangchungma were born. One day Goddess Gangchungma stole some celestial flowers and

due to her decline in merit, when she died she was unable to again take rebirth as a god and fell to the human realm. She took birth as the human woman, Dechogma, the daughter of Sale from the Jardzinma caste.

Being born from Avalokiteshvara's tears, she naturally had great faith in the Dharma and thus commissioned the construction of a magnificent stupa in Boudha near Kathmandu in Nepal. However, she died before the stupa was completed. Her four sons vowed to complete the unfinished stupa, and in honor of their mother, and out of supreme faith in the Dharma, they made solemn prayers from the bottoms of their hearts.

Upon completion of the stupa, they each fervently prayed to be reborn as a Dharma king, a great learned khenpo, a powerful tantric master, and a messenger that would bring the previous three together. Legend also has it that during the construction of the stupa a wise donkey was commissioned and overheard the four sons' prayers. Hearing this, the donkey thought, "I have done so much work for them and they don't even remember me in their prayers! I vow to do my best to destroy the fruits of their prayers."

According to their aspirations, one son was reborn as Trisong Deutsen, the 38th king of Tibet and an incarnation of Manjushri. One son was reborn as the kings' messenger who invited both the great Khenpo Shantarakshita and the tantric master Guru Padmasambhava from India, who were the reincarnations of the other two sons. Guru Padmasambhava, recalling his past aspirations, accepted the invitation, and on his way he subdued all the harmful gods and demons of Tibet, making them faithful guardians of the Dharma. After meeting in Tibet, the king, guru and khenpo together constructed

Tibet's first great monastery at Samye and fully furnished it with statues. In addition, they gave monk's vows to Tibet's first seven monks, standardized translation methods, supervised translation of most of the sutras and tantras from Sanskrit to Tibetan, and for the first time in Tibet, firmly established the tradition of study, contemplation and meditation, thereby radiating the Buddha Dharma in Tibet like rays of the sun.

As for the donkey, he was later reborn as Langdharma, the 41st king of Tibet, and subsequently almost succeeded in eliminating the Dharma from Tibet.

Not leaving even the space of a horse-hoof untouched, Guru Padmasambhava miraculously walked upon the entire land of Tibet and generally blessed all the mountains, lakes and caves as places for accomplishment. Specifically in the Ngari region of upper Tibet he blessed twenty mountain caves. In Utsang he blessed twenty-one sacred places of accomplishment. In Dokham he blessed twenty-five sacred places, as well as the three kingly treasure places in upper, central and lower Tibet, the five provinces, three valleys, one island and so forth. In addition, for the sake of beings to be tamed in the future, Guru Padmasambhava concealed eighteen varieties of treasure which include treasure texts, material wealth, holy images and so forth, and gave explicit prophecies regarding the future manifestation of these treasures, including the revealer and protector of the treasure, as well as the time of revelation.

So forth were the enlightened activities performed for the sake of sentient beings by Guru Padmasambhava's eight manifestations which are as follows:

Padmavajra, Vajra of the Lotus, severed the roots of the five poison.

Padmaraja, King of the Lotus, provided mundane and ultimate benefits to sentient beings.

Padmasambhava, the Lotus-born, blessed beings endowed with faith.

Dorje Droled tamed the Yakshas and haughty beings.

Suryaprabha, the Rays of the Sun, taught the essence of secret mantra.

Sakyasimha, the Lion of Sakyas, guided beings towards the path of liberation.

Simhanada, Roar of the Lion, defeated the outside aggressors of non-Buddhists.

And Dhimanvaruchi, the Supremely Wise Love, showered the teaching of sutra and mantra.

The results of Guru Padmasambhava's activities include the attainment of liberation by his twenty-five disciples and eighty other disciples who attained rainbow body. In addition, three million disciples achieved stability in tantric generation stage practice, one hundred thousand disciples showed signs of accomplishment, ninety thousand disciples achieved the uncontaminated Illusory Body, and eighty million disciples had some attainment. Having accomplished these great activities, knowing his personal beings to be tamed on Earth were exhausted, he departed for the South-western universe of

the magical cannibals, to help the beings there and to protect Earth from their harm.

Guru Padmasambhava is said to have lived for three thousand and six hundred years in India upholding the Buddha's teachings and benefiting sentient beings. But for his stay in Tibet there are many unreliable versions claiming he stayed for three years, six years, thirteen years and so forth. Despite these differences, according to Guru Padmasambhava's own kama teachings, he actually stayed for fifty years and three months, directly manifesting the meaning of the teachings by benefiting countless sentient beings in incredible myriad ways according to their desires and propensities, which is a reliable and trustworthy fact.