

Tape 111: Padmasambhava, Tantric Guru of Tibet

Friends, I am going to start with a reminiscence as I very often do. Quite a few years ago I happened to visit the town of Darjeeling which means the place of the thunderbolt or diamond. Darjeeling is quite a small town situated at the eastern end of the Himalayas, in what are generally known as the foothills of the Himalayas which raise to be the height of about 7 to 8,000 feet above sea level. And this little town of Darjeeling situated at the eastern end of the Himalayas is inhabited by all sorts of people, especially by the Nepalese mainly Ghurkas, but also by Sikkhimese, Indians, Bhutanese and so on, in fact by all sorts of tribes speaking not only various languages but various dialects as well. And amongst all these predominantly Nepalese people living in this little town of Darjeeling there happened to be quite a large number of Buddhists. And since there were quite a large number of Buddhists amongst them and since there were also quite a number of temples and monasteries, both large and small in Darjeeling, I was quite interested in visiting this particular place. And in the course of the first visit which I paid there I wanted to see not only as much as I could of the local Buddhist people, but also see whatever temples and monasteries and shrines that happened to be there of any interest.

And in the course of my visit it so happened that almost by accident one day I found myself standing in the morning on a little spur of land somewhat down from the road standing in front of what seemed to be a sort of three storey pagoda-like building. And as I stood there and as I looked, I couldn't help wondering what sort of building it was. It seemed rather unfamiliar. But I really took to notice that the door was open so forthwith in I went. At first I couldn't see very much. There weren't any windows, it was rather dark. The only light came from the open doorway, but as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom I started to make out the outline of an enormous image. An image perhaps fifteen to twenty feet tall, so big in fact that it seemed to fill practically the entire chamber. And this particular image, this particular figure which I was now seeing more and more clearly was seated cross-legged on an enormous lotus-throne. And the figure was clad not in the yellow or orange robes of the Buddha, but in rather rich, decorated, princely robes of a deep red type. And in the right hand of this great figure, seated there on the lofty lotus throne, there was resting a golden purbha and in his left hand, which rested in his lap, there was a skull cup. Again in the crook of the left arm, resting against the shoulder of the figure, there was a long staff, a staff surmounted by a sort of trident and below the trident I could just discern what seemed to be three human heads in various stages of decomposition. And raising my eyes just a little I saw that on his head, this great figure wore a red lotus-cap surmounted by a dorje, and above the dorje a long white vultures feather. But remarkable though this image was, impressive though this figure was, the most remarkable, the most impressive thing of all was the head. And the face I saw was sort of half Indian, half Tibetan, half as it were Aryan, half as it were Mongolian. And on the face there was a thin black mustache and the brows were slightly knitted together as though almost in anger. And the expression of the face was on the one hand extremely intelligent and penetrating and on the other, powerful and commanding, not to say fierce. And on looking around a little more I saw on either side of this main central figure, two tiny female figures. One in Indian dress and the other in Tibetan dress including a sort of multicoloured rainbow apron.

But who was this figure? Who was this figure that I encountered in the gloom of that room in the pagoda all those years ago? It was of course the figure of Padmasambhava, the great Tantric Guru of India and Tibet. The great spiritual teacher and also the great spiritual symbol [word indistinct], following the Tibetan tradition, we are celebrating this evening. Now from the purely historical point of view it is not easy to speak about Padmasambhava. We don't know the exact date of his birth or the exact date of his death. All that we know, and we know this quite definitely, is that he belongs to the eighth century. We also know that he was born in India and spent the greater part of his life there as well as in adjacent Buddhist countries. He visited Tibet during the reign of King Trisong-detsen who according to the Tibetan annals reigned from the year 755 to the year 797. According to three accounts Padmasambhava spent some 18 months in Tibet. According to others he spent as long as forty years. And it seems as far as we can judge that the former account, that is to say the account of him spending some 18 months in Tibet, is the more likely. Now all our information about Padmasambhava comes from Tibetan sources. In India unfortunately he seems completely Tibetan. Perhaps this is not surprising. After the revival of Orthodox Hinduism, after the destruction of the Buddhist monasteries at the hands of the Muslim invaders the Buddha himself was forgotten for more than 500 years. So it is not surprising that the Great Guru Padmasambhava should be forgotten too. Now there exists in the Tibetan language as part of Tibetan literature quite a number of biographies of Padmasambhava. The oldest of them all appeared in the 13th century and there is a short summary of this very early and important biography in Evans Wentz's, 'Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation'. The biography happens to be attributed to Padmasambhava's Tibetan consort Yeshe Tsogyal.

And these biographies are very very interesting indeed. They contain a great deal of very valuable material but they are not very helpful historically speaking. And there are various reasons for this. In the first place when we examine these biographies we find that the biography of Padmasambhava in some sense, in some unaccountable way had been mixed up with the biography of the Buddha. Though he lived some 13 hundred years before. Now it is rather as though the biography of St. Francis had got mixed up with the biography of Christ. But that is the situation that we find. [indistinct] that in the course of his career Padmasambhava was known by very many different names and titles and epithets. According to what he was doing or initiations he received and so on. In fact in the biographies he is referred to by so many different names, so many different names occur that we are not always quite sure with whom we are actually dealing especially as some of the names which Padmasambhava bore at certain stages in his career were also born by other people at different stages of their career. But we hardly know sometimes with whom we are dealing at all. And in the third place the biographies usually do not fit to what we would regard as historical facts. But into a great deal of what modern Western scholars would regard, even dismiss, as legendary material. Just like in fact the traditional biographies of the Buddha. They are not just concerned with stating historical fact. They also incorporate myth and legend and symbol and parable. And all these things in their own way shed light on the inner meaning, the inner significance of the life. Notice they are from another point of view, throw light on it as it were from another dimension. So this sort of legendary material in the biographies of Padmasambhava consist of various kinds of material, in the first place we can say there are episodes which though as it were represented as having actually occurred historically, are not

really historical at all, do not really belong to the external historical biography of Padmasambhava at all. They symbolize rather certain spiritual truths and certain spiritual experiences.

One of the more obvious examples, one of the more obviously symbolical episodes for instance is that of Padmasambhava's initiation by a Dakkhini. In the course of this episode which is recounted as though it actually happened some very strange things indeed occur. For instance Padmasambhava enters a Dakkhini's palace and after a few preliminaries have happened, she transforms him into a syllable, into a mantra, into the mantra Hum. And having transformed him into the mantra the Dakkhini proceeds to swallow him. And then we are told he receives the secret Avalokiteshvara initiation inside her stomach. So obviously here we are not concerned with historical fact. We are concerned with a different level of meaning and significance. Lama Govinda, incidentally, in his book, 'The Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism', has explained or given some explanation of this particular incident, this particular episode. Obviously it is not meant to be taken literally. And the biographies of Padmasambhava are full of episodes of this sort, full of material of this sort. And then again of course there are lots of episodes where the purpose of it seems to be simply to glorify Padmasambhava and to emphasise his greatness. And certain episodes as has already been pointed out represent Padmasambhava more as a sort of cultural hero than as a spiritual teacher. And then again there are episodes in the biographies which simply incorporate indigenous Tibetan folklore. But all this, the biographies as containing all this sort of material, all these episodes of so many different kinds, certainly constitute a very rich body of material indeed. And it is not very easy therefore to sort out what is really historical and what is not. But some preliminary work has been done by scholars, by western scholars, and has formed a clearer idea about Padmasambhava's career, but there are still quite a number of unanswered questions and we've no [indistinct] definitive biography.

But this evening I am going to try to do just three things. In the first place I am going to give a brief account of some of the main facts of Padmasambhava's career or what, in the present state of our knowledge, appear to be the facts. And then I am going to go back to what is historically speaking the central episode in his career, that is to say his visit to Tibet and I am going to deal with that in some detail. I am going to deal with this particular episode, with his visit to Tibet in some detail for two reasons. First of all it is very well attested historically and also it contains certain legendary elements which are of special interest, of special significance to us today. They are not only of general interest but even have some meaning for, some bearing on, our own movement here and now. And thirdly and lastly I am going to give a short account of Padmasambhava's teachings in the Tibetan spiritual tradition of which he is regarded as having been the founder.

But first of all [word indistinct] the main facts of Padmasambhava's career. But before we start dealing with historical facts I am going to give just one legend. And it's the legend, perhaps two legends of Padmasambhava's birth. I'm going to recount this legend because it illustrates the sort of symbolism, the sort of mythological material if you like, that in the course of centuries clustered about the events of his life. The legend of the birth also is of special interest to students of comparative mythology, comparative religion. And this particular legend, with which these biographies commence, begins not on the Earth at all, begins as it were in a higher

world, in a sense in the highest of all worlds, a purely spiritual world, a purely transcendental world, the world of the Buddha Amitabha, who is in principle the chief Buddha of the Ningmapa tradition which was established by Padmasambhava. 'Amitabha' means 'Infinite Light', so Amitabha is the Buddha of Infinite Light! And according to the accounts on this occasion he was seated in meditation, in profound meditation. In fact Amitabha is usually represented in the posture of meditation with his eyes half closed and his two hands together in his lap. And the legend goes on to say how as the Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite and Eternal Light sat there in meditation there came forth from his tongue a ray of pure red light and this ray of pure red light fell down to the Earth. It fell into the centre of a certain lake in Northwest India. And at the spot, by the very heart, where it penetrated into the water of the lake there arose a small island. And this island was completely covered with golden grass. And in the midst of the golden grass we are told there flowed three springs of water. Pure water of the colour of turquoise, and from the centre of the island there sprang forth an enormous lotus blossom. And as the lotus blossom sprang forth we are told, the Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light emitted from his heart a golden dorje, a golden dorje with five points. And this dorje fell from the heart of Amitabha into the centre of that lotus blossom. And later, the legends continue, as people came they found a small boy seated in the lotus. A boy of about eight years of age, who looked, the legend tells us, just like an infant Buddha. In his right hand a little tiny lotus blossom, in his left hand a tiny vase of the kind that are used for tantric initiations, and in the crook of his left arm a tiny trident, and this was Padmasambhava, The Lotus Born. The name Padmasambhava means 'The Lotus Born', the one born from the lotus. So this is the legend. It has of course its own significance, its own spiritual value, but I am not going into that now.

Now we are going to go into the facts, or rather into facts of another order. As we have already seen, Padmasambhava was born in the 8th century, at the beginning of the 8th century, and he was born in North Western India in the kingdom of Uddiyana, and Uddiyana was, we know, at that time a very great and a very famous centre of tantric practice in general, tantric ritual, tantric meditation, especially esoteric meditation. And Padmasambhava as a boy it seems was adopted by the king of Uddiyana who's name was Indrabhuti. Now Indrabhuti himself was a great Buddhist scholar and yogi some of who's writings on the tantra survive in Tibetan translation even today. So Padmasambhava was given as a young man the education, the upbringing, suitably, of a young prince of those days and in due course he was married to a daughter of a neighbouring king. But despite this, we are told, just like the Buddha so many centuries earlier, just like so many other great masters, teachers, yogis, he was not satisfied with the household life, was not satisfied with high status, position, with wealth, with domestic felicity and so on. He left home and he became a monk, and in the course a number of years he studied all the different forms of Buddhism then known in Northern India, he practiced meditation, especially tantric meditation, and he studied very widely indeed. It seems that he visited practically all the Buddhist kingdoms of Northwestern India and even of Central Asia. And it is highly probable according to some scholars that here, in Central Asia, he came into contact with Nestorian Christians and with Manicheans. Central Asia, we know, at that time was a veritable melting pot of religions and cultures of every kind. He also visited Eastern India, that is to say Bengal and Assam, and it is highly likely that he also visited Java and Sumatra which in those days were very great centres of Buddhism, of Mahayana Buddhism and Sarvastivada Buddhism, indeed.

And above all Padmasambhava spent a great deal of time meditating in cremation grounds. Now this may strike you as rather odd but in India even today yogis are very often fond of meditating in cremation grounds. Especially tantric yogis, and Padmasambhava also for many years followed this practice. I myself have visited in India quite a number of cremation grounds and I always found a very strange sort of atmosphere there, because after all so many dead bodies are burned there, are reduced to ashes, and the burning ground is regarded as a sort of door if you like, a sort of opening from this world into the next. And I also [word indistinct] that if you visit the burning ground, especially if you visit it at night, you find a very very strange, a very peculiar sort of vibration there, you can almost see, let's say, the feeling, you can almost see the air, the atmosphere quivering with the vibration. That's the only way one can describe it. And there's a very peculiar, a very intense sort of atmosphere and yogis in general believe that the atmosphere of the cremation ground is especially favourable to meditation, particularly tantric meditation.

I remember - I mentioned Darjeeling a little while ago - it just now occurs to me that when I was staying in Kalimpong I heard from my friends that there was a yogi, a Bengali tantric yogi, at that time living in a burning ground just outside Darjeeling and some of my friends actually went and visited him and he lived all the time in the cremation ground for a period of some weeks. And he meditated on a very strange sort of asana. Its a sort of asana, a sort of seat that Hindu tantric yogis think very highly of. The seat was nothing other than the mummified body of an 8 year old girl. The girl apparently had died, the body had been mummified and this was used as a seat by the tantric yogi. This was a fairly common practice amongst the Hindu tantric yogis.

Now whether Padmasambhava himself did this or not we don't know, but he certainly engaged in a number of very highly esoteric, occult meditation practices during this period when he frequented the burning grounds of Northern India. So in the course of these years we are told, he had a large number of spiritual experiences of various kinds. He mastered the occult arts and sciences and eventually became enlightened, attained full spiritual realization.

And after many years he paid a visit to the kingdom in which he was born, that is to say, he returned to Uddiyana and we are told, according to the biography, that when he went back to Uddiyana he at once got into trouble with the king. We are not sure whether it was the same king who had adopted him or his family successor of the same name, that is to say, Indrabhuti. But whether or not it was the old king or his son, Padmasambhava got into very serious trouble with him. And the reason was this; that while he was in Bengal he had become acquainted with a female yogi, that is to say a yogini, or even Dakini, called Mandarava. And she became a very faithful and devoted disciple. Not only that but she became his constant companion as well. And they used to meditate together in the cremation ground. But you know what people are like. Some people thought Padmasambhava, who apparently was still young and handsome, and the yogini Mandarava, meditating together, staying together in the cremation ground, they thought quite wrongly that they were just living together as man and wife. And this is apparently what King Indrabhuti thought, and as good people very often do become on such occasions, he became very very indignant indeed that Padmasambhava who was supposed to be a monk and a yogi was

traveling around with this woman Mandarava, who seemed to be his wife. So what did he do? He ordered that they should both be burned at the stake. But according to the biography they escaped and there are many legends gathered around this remarkable episode.

But having had enough of Uddiyana apparently Padmasambhava then went to Bodhgaya where the Buddha of course, so many centuries earlier, had gained enlightenment. And there he engaged in a great debate with various Brahminical teachers and he succeeded in defeating them all in argument, after which he went to Nepal and he spent quite a long time there meditating solitarily in a cave. And it was while he was staying in Nepal, while he was living in this cave and meditating, that he received the invitation to visit Tibet. But he did not delay and he helped the great teacher Shantarakshita who was the head of the Nalanda Buddhist monastery to establish Buddhism in Tibet. And having done that, we are told, Padmasambhava left for the country of the Rakhshasas. But where the country of the Rakhshasas was, or is, no-one exactly knows. But that's where Padmasambhava went. and all the accounts agree that he went there flying through the air, riding I might add, on a winged horse! And he disappeared in that way from history. So these so far as we know at present are the main facts of Padmasambhava's career, and you will probably agree with me that these facts of his career are quite extraordinary enough even without any legend that might have been incorporated with them.

So now let's go back and concentrate on that central episode, on what is historically speaking the central episode of Padmasambhava's life, his visit to Tibet. "Padmasambhava's visit to Tibet." And we may say at once that this is one of the most famous and fateful visits in the whole course of Buddhist history. It is comparable to Yuen Chuan's visit to India and Bodhidharma's visit to China. But how did it come about? How did Padmasambhava come to be invited to Tibet at all? To understand this we have to go back a little. At the time of Padmasambhava's visit Buddhism had been known in Tibet only about 100 years. About as long as Buddhism has been known in this country. It had been known in Tibet only for 100 years, that is to say, since the time of the great king Song Sen Gampo. But Buddhism at the time of Padmasambhava's visit was by no means well established. A few temples had been built, here and there, mainly in the capital, a few texts, a few Buddhist scriptures had been translated. But that was all. So there were temples, but there weren't any monasteries, there were no Tibetan monks, no Tibetan nuns. Not only that but some of the King's most powerful ministers including what we would call his chief minister, his prime minister were for various reasons, partly political, partly religious, very much opposed to the introduction of Buddhism. But it so happened that the fourth king after Song Sen Gampo was very strongly inclined to Buddhism. We don't know how or why, but this it seems was the situation. And eventually in spite of many difficulties he managed to invite the great teacher Shantarakshita, the great head monk of Nalanda on a visit to Tibet. But even so there was very much opposition, there were many intrigues, and the King even had to get rid of his chief minister before it was possible for the head monk to be invited. And I suppose the King got rid of his chief minister in a rather unpleasant way. But we won't go into that now.

Shantarakshita incidentally was one of the greatest scholars and greatest teachers of the day in India and a number of his works have come down to us in Tibetan translation, and one in fact has come down to us in the original Sanskrit and this is a

work called 'The Tatvasangraha', which means 'Compendium of Principles'. This is a very large work in two thick volumes and is rigorously logical in form, it criticises all larger schools of thought and it establishes the author's own tantra which is known as the Tantra Yogacara. There is no time to go into that now. So this is the man, this was the scholar, this was the philosopher, the great teacher Shantarakshita who was invited by the King to Tibet.

But on his arrival in Tibet, we are told, Shantarakshita set to work with a will. And he taught in the king's palace for 4 months without interruption, every day, so many hours, the king, the courtiers, other interested people who were listening. Shantarakshita just went on teaching, and a Kashmiri monk, we are told, who knew Tibetan had to be the interpreter.

But what did Shantarakshita teach? The account that has come down to us, the chronicles are very detailed, and we have a very clear idea of, in fact even detailed information as to what Shantarakshita taught. and it is very interesting. It seems that he taught mainly three things on this occasion. He taught what are known as the 10 Principles of Skillful Action - in other words the 10 Upasaka Precepts. This is what he started with. That is to say: The precept of the abstention from taking life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from false, abusive, frivolous and slanderous speech, and from mental states of craving, aversion and wrong views. So this is what he taught first. The Ten Principles of Skillful Action.

And then he went on to teach what are known as the 18 Dhatus, looking along the list, the 18 Elements of the Perceptual Situation. These consist of the 6 senses, the 6 (*parithujjas*) and the 6 associated consciousnesses. There is a great deal of Buddhist psychological teaching with regard to these things.

Thirdly and lastly he taught what are known as the 12 Niddanas or Links, and these of course are the 12 successive stages in the process of birth, death and rebirth, according to Buddhist teachings as illustrated for instance in the outermost circle of the Tibetan Wheel of Life. So, what are these 12 Niddanas; let's just remind ourselves of them. The first case; in dependence on Ignorance arise what are called the Karma Formations. Then in dependence on the Karma Formations there arises Consciousness. In dependence on Consciousness there arises the Psychophysical Organism. In dependence on the Psychophysical Organism arise the 6 Senses. In dependence on the 6 Senses arises Contact. In dependence on Contact arises Sensation. In dependence on Sensation arises Craving. In dependence on Craving arises Clinging. In dependence on Clinging arises the whole process of Conditioned Existence. In dependence on the process of Conditioned Existence arises Birth! That is to say, the Ego. And in dependence on Birth arises Old Age, Disease and Death. And thus the tradition says, thus arises this whole Mass of Suffering. The Wheel takes one complete turn. But all this apparently Shantarakshita explained in detail. In other words we may say that what Shantarakshita did was he gave the King and other interested Tibetans a sort of elementary course, not to say extended seminar, in Buddhist Ethics, Buddhist Psychology and Buddhist Metaphysics. This is what he did on his arrival in Tibet. To as it were establish the Dharma.

But what was the result of all this? Of his teaching, of his elementary course on Buddhist Ethics, and Psychology and Metaphysics? The result was we are told that

the gods of Tibet became very angry. One of the King's palaces was struck by lightning. Another was swept away by a flood. The harvest was badly damaged and there was a great epidemic. And so terrible in fact was the reaction from the gods that Shantarakshita had to leave Tibet and retire. [unclear] to retire. That was the result of his teaching. And before he left he took the King aside we are told, and quietly give him some good advice. And he said, "The situation is beyond me, I can't handle this. But in India there is a great spiritual master called Padmasambhava. He will be able to overcome the gods of Tibet. So send for him. I shall also write, but you extend an official invitation." So in this way Padmasambhava came to be invited to Tibet. It was approximately, it was round about the year 750. But on his arrival in Tibet, he too, like Shantarakshita set to work with a will. But in a different way. Padmasambhava did not give any discourses, not at this stage anyway, didn't hold any seminars. He said nothing at all about The 18 Dhattus or the 12 Niddanas. He just devoted himself we are told to overcoming the gods and goddesses of Tibet. And as you can well imagine there are very many highly colourful legends in this connection. And they all end by telling us that Padmasambhava not only overcame the gods and goddesses of Tibet, but converted them to Buddhism! We are told that he initiated them. *Laughter*. And he entrusted to them the task of protecting the Dharma in Tibet. They all became guardian deities. And when this had been done, when the gods and goddesses of Tibet had been overcome by Padmasambhava, Shantarakshita, now that the coast was clear, returned from Nepal where he had been waiting, to Tibet. And with the help of the King a great monastery was built in Southeast Tibet and we are given a detailed description of this monastery. The layout of it, the ground plan of it as it were was very interesting, it was highly symbolical. Right in the middle there was a three storey temple to the great Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. And this three storey temple represented the central mountain of existence according to Buddhist symbolical cosmology. And at each of the four cardinal points there was a large temple and a small temple. These represented the traditional four continents. There was a temple for the sun, there was a temple for the moon, and there were four stupas of different colours as well as various other buildings. And the whole complex, the whole area was enclosed by an enormous circular wall. And this was the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet and it was known a Samye. And it is still standing almost intact. And the consecration ceremony along with the building, the consecration ceremony was performed jointly by Shantarakshita and Padmasambhava. They did it together, and then we are told, 12 Hinayana monks were brought from India to live in the monastery. And seven young Tibetans volunteered to become monks. But to that time, up to that time no Tibetan had ever been ordained. No Tibetan had ever become a monk. So Santarakshita thought, "Well, we don't know what these Tibetans are like. Whether they are fit for this life, whether they can be monks or not, we don't know. So let's take it cautiously." And he put them all on probation for a while to test them. And they are known in Tibetan history as 'The Seven Men on Trial.' But apparently Shantarakshita was very satisfied with them in the end, so they were ordained with Shantarakshita himself acting as the preceptor or chief monk and a number of the seven subsequently became very well known in Tibetan religious history, especially one called Vairocanarakshita who was a great translator. And in this way Buddhism came to be properly established in Tibet for the first time.

So we can see that Padmasambhava played a very important part in the introduction, in the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. But we have to recognise at the same time

that the exact nature of the role he played, the part he played is not at all clear. The Tibetan people say that he overcame the gods of Tibet. And they are quite happy to leave it there. That is quite clear, quite straightforward and obvious so far as they are concerned. He came and he overcame the gods of Tibet, and that is that, and Buddhism was established. But for us it isn't quite so easy. We can't help wondering, well, what does it all mean? Who or what are the gods of Tibet? And why did they become angry when Shantarakshita started teaching Buddhism? Why did they react in that rather unpleasant way? And what is meant by Padmasambhava's 'overcoming' them? To us all this isn't clear, it isn't obvious. So let's try to get into it just a little, because it's of [indistinct] interest and it's also of some significance to our whole Western Buddhist movement, especially our own [indistinct].

So let us begin by taking a look, a closer look at Shantarakshita's teaching because it is this that upsets the gods of Tibet. We saw that Shantarakshita taught mainly three things. He taught the Ten Principles of Skillful Action, the 18 Elements of the Perceptual Situation and the 12 Stages in the Process of Birth Death and Rebirth. In other words as I mentioned earlier he taught elementary Buddhist Ethics, elementary Buddhist Psychology and elementary Buddhist Metaphysics.

[End of side one.]

[Side 2]

Apparently however he said nothing about meditation. He didn't say anything about symbolic ritual and it seems he didn't tell the Tibetans any parables or stories or legends or anything of that sort. In other words it seems quite clear from all the accounts that we have that Shantarakshita's approach when he started teaching Buddhism in Tibet was predominantly, not to say exclusively, intellectual and rational and this apparently was Shantarakshita's approach anyway. We know, as I mentioned, that he wrote that great work 'The Tatvasangraha' and this is a very highly intellectual work indeed. So we can conclude about Shantarakshita that although in fact a great Bodhisattva, in fact he is known in Tibetan history as 'The Bodhisattva' - that's how they refer to him - just 'The Bodhisattva', though he was a Bodhisattva, though he was spiritually highly advanced, his approach to Buddhism, especially to teaching Buddhism, was predominantly intellectual.

And that this in fact was so was shown by another incident which occurred soon after Shantarakshita's arrival in Tibet. Apparently the King wanted to make quite sure about him. You know, in those days all sorts of people were going about saying that they were great tantric yogis, teachers of Buddhism, teachers of meditation - some of them weren't real teachers at all and they were just wandering here and there exploiting people. So the King had heard of this sort of thing, so he wanted to check up on Shantarakshita before he allowed him actually to start teaching. So he sent three ministers to interview him and they asked various questions. and one of the questions they asked him was this; They asked, 'What is your doctrine?' A very plain straightforward question. 'What is your doctrine?' And Shantarakshita replied according to the chronicle, 'My doctrine is to follow whatever is proved correct after examining it by reason and to avoid all that does not agree with reason.' This was his response, this was his reply when he was asked what his doctrine was. So perhaps we can begin to see why the gods of Tibet were displeased. It's as though they weren't so

much displeased with Buddhism itself, or displeased that Buddhism itself was being preached. They were displeased, as it were, with Shantarakshita's rather one-sidedly rational approach.

But you might ask another question. You might ask, 'Well, why should the gods of Tibet (why should any gods, for that matter) dislike rationalism?' Why should they not be happy about a rational approach? I mean, are the gods themselves not rational? So one has to ask a further question. One has to ask well who or what were, even are, the gods of Tibet? What do they represent. If we are not just going to dismiss them, as scholars very often do, as just sheer fiction, just names, nothing! Who were the gods of Tibet? What did they represent? So we can say that the gods of Tibet represented all the non-rational forces of the Tibetan psyche, or if you like, the forces of the Tibetan collective unconscious. And these forces were, as it were, threatened, even repressed, by Shantarakshita's rationalism. In fact we may say, Shantarakshita doesn't even recognise the existence of the gods. He completely ignores them. He has nothing to do with them. He is unaware of their existence. So far as he is concerned they are just not there. He just goes on preaching the Ten Ways of Skillful Action, the 18 Dhattus, the 12 Nidanas. The gods just don't exist. Irrational forces don't exist. They are not there. So what do the gods do? The gods are not going to take this lying down; the gods react. The gods get angry. They create havoc in the national life. They insist on being recognised; they demand to be recognised. So Padmasambhava has to be called in.

So, like Shantarakshita, Padmasambhava is a great scholar, a great intellectual; he knows all the texts, the scriptures, the philosophy. But his overall approach is not intellectual, he is much more than a scholar, much more than an intellectual. He is a yogi. He is a supreme yogi. He is a meditator. He is the master of the occult arts and the occult sciences. He has spent much time in the cremation grounds, in the burning grounds, he has spent time there with the Dakinis. So this is a very mysterious word, this word 'Dakini'. Padmasambhava has spent much time with the Dakinis. So who are the Dakinis? We have to ask that too. Because it throws a great deal of light on the character and the approach of Padmasambhava. The Dakinis we may say very roughly, are a sort of Buddhist equivalent of the Tibetan gods and goddesses. They are, as it were, the forces of inspiration which arise in the depths of the Enlightened Mind.

The word Dakini itself, like the word Daka which is the masculine counterpart, comes from a root meaning 'space' or 'the sky', so the Dakas and the Dakinis are those who belong to the sky, they fly through the sky, they travel through the sky. And what is the sky. The sky is not the literal sky, not the sky of blue that we see with our eyes. The sky here is the sky as it were, of the One Mind, the sky of the Absolute. And this sky of the One Mind, this sky of the Absolute is not, as it were, vacant; it's not empty. It is not inert. But is full of life and full of energy. There are all sorts of, as it were, currents of energy flowing through it, flowing across it all the time. Forces, if you like, arising within its immaculate depths all the time. And these currents, these forces which fly, as it were, from side to side, (or one shouldn't even say 'side to side' because there are no sides) which desport themselves freely, as it were, in the sky of the Absolute, these are personified by the Dakinis, the Dakas. And Padmasambhava in the burning grounds has spent much time in the company of the Dakinis. He is

acquainted with these great spiritual forces. His experience is not just, as it were, intellectual. He's even, we may say, the master of these forces.

So on arrival in Tibet what does Padmasambhava do? His approach, his attitude is very different from that of Shantarakshita. He begins by recognising the gods, by seeing that there are gods. Yes, this god, that god, they are there! He sees them, he recognises them. Not only that; he establishes contact with them, he, we are told, converts them. He transforms them into protectors of the Dharma. So what does this mean? Padmasambhava starts off by acknowledging those irrational, non-rational, even sometimes suprarational forces in the Tibetan psyche, and he integrates them, he succeeds in integrating them into the great current of the spiritual life of Tibetan Buddhism. He as it were harnesses their energy. He doesn't go against them, he carries them along with him.

And then what happens once Padmasambhava has done this, once he has converted the gods and the goddesses, once he has transformed them into guardians of the Dharma? What happens next? What happens next is that Shantarakshita the intellectual, as it were, and Padmasambhava the yogi, they together build and consecrate Samye, the great monastery. There is no antagonism, as it were, between the two approaches. The rational, the non-rational, they are both necessary, they are complimentary, and Shantarakshita and Padmasambhava, each recognises the greatness of the other. And then when Samye has been consecrated through their joint efforts, through the collaboration of the intellectual and the yogi, what happens next? Monks are brought from India. Young Tibetans are ordained. The Sangha is founded. In other words the Spiritual Community comes into existence. So the significance of all this for Buddhism in the West, for even our own movement, is so obvious that I need not spell it out word by word.

It's clear that it's not enough to appeal just to the rational mind. One must appeal also to the unconscious depths. It's not enough just to read books on Buddhism, not enough just to listen to lectures. One must also meditate, one must plumb the depths within oneself. One must chant, as we shall be chanting later on this evening. One must perform pujas, engage in symbolical ritual. It's not enough just to think, to think even about Buddhism, but one must feel. One must respond totally with one's whole being. Only when we can do this, only when a sufficient number of people can do this shall we have a real genuine authentic Buddhist spiritual movement, as distinct from a little wave of intellectual interest in this country. Only then shall we have a true spiritual tradition.

Of course we know very well the situation here is very much more complicated than it was a thousand years ago in Tibet in Shantarakshita's and Padmasambhava's time. To begin with we don't even have any gods. We don't have any gods of our own. There are no indigenous British gods. So what happened to them? Where have all the gods gone? Where are they? So I am afraid we have to say rather sadly, we have to confess, that the gods have all been turned into devils. And they have been turned into devils quite a while now. They were turned into devils by Christianity because the Christian attitudes towards gods, indigenous gods - gods of the Earth and gods of the Sky - is very different from the attitude of Buddhism. Christianity in the past has tended to regard the gods of the countries to which it has spread as evil, and it therefore tried to destroy the gods, to stamp them out, to abolish even the memory of

their names. So wherever it went, in this country as in other countries, Christianity smashed the images, cut down the sacred groves, killed the priests. But it couldn't really destroy the gods because they had some real life and energy of their own. It could only repress them. So we may say, a repressed god becomes a devil. 'Diabolus Deus inversus est.' And these repressed gods that have been transformed into devils continue, we may say, to trouble us still. So it is time we recognised them. Time we established contact with them. Time that we transformed them from being devils back into being gods. And perhaps if we can do that, they will protect the Dharma in this country.

But time is running short and I am afraid we now have to come on to the third and last part of the lecture which is Padmasambhava's teachings and the spiritual tradition of which he is regarded as being the founder. And we will have to be very brief indeed here. There is time only for a few salient points. Now first of all just one general observation. As I realised from the time that I saw first that image of Padmasambhava and as I realised increasingly as I had more and more contact with Tibetan Buddhists including many distinguished Lamas, the figure of Padmasambhava, just the figure you may say, exerted a tremendous impact on the imagination of the Tibetan people. There is perhaps not a single Tibetan Buddhist who doesn't know, isn't familiar with, the figure of Padmasambhava, regardless of the school of Tibetan Buddhism to which he belongs. We may say even that in some ways Padmasambhava is the most distinctive and most colourful figure in the whole history of Tibetan Buddhism. And it is quite impossible when you see his picture or image, or any other representation, it is quite impossible to mistake him for anybody else.

Now it isn't easy, in fact it is very difficult to say very much, even anything at all about his actual teachings. This is partly because Padmasambhava being a yogi above all, was much more important for what he was than for what he said. And partly it is because the teachings of Padmasambhava, to the extent that he did teach at all, are predominantly tantric in character and esoteric tantric at that. And in addition, according to Nyingmapa tradition, what he did was in the course of his stay in Tibet after the consecration of Samye, he came to the conclusion that the Tibetans were not spiritually advanced enough to understand his real teachings. So he wrote them down in little books and he hid them, we are told, in different places, in caves and under rocks. And the Tibetans believe that they were discovered many many centuries later, and these are known as Termas, which means 'treasures'. Books which were buried and then discovered, then taken out. I'll be saying a few words about them later on. Now though Padmasambhava's teachings were predominantly tantric, he by no means rejected the earlier forms of Buddhism, he by no means rejected what we call the Hinayana and the Mahayana, in fact he regarded them all, Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana, (Vajrayana of course meaning the tantric teachings) as being successive stages on a single path to Enlightenment or Buddhahood. And this idea, by the way, is the common property of all forms of Tibetan Buddhism. So in your journey to Enlightenment you pass through all these three Yanas, Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana. But Padmasambhava went a bit further. Or rather he dealt with the three Yanas rather more elaborately. He divided the path to Enlightenment not just into the three Yanas but into nine Yanas, the culminating one being The Atiyoga Yana which was his own special contribution. In fact his own distinctive teaching. The teaching in which he specialised. So I am going now just very briefly indeed to enumerate, it's hardly more than that, enumerate these nine Yanas. And this will give us I hope some

general idea of the type of Buddhist tradition that Padmasambhava represented and introduced into Tibet.

First of all there is what we call The Shravakayana. Yana by the way means 'path' or 'way', or 'stage' or even 'vehicle', 'method'. 'Shravaka' - yana, the shravaka is the disciple, one who listens, one who hears. It's supposed to be the first characteristic of a good disciple, he listens to you. You say something, he listens. He doesn't start asking questions before he's really heard what you've got to say. So 'Shravakayana'. The path of the disciple, the path of the listener. And here in this stage, in this yana one goes for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, one takes the precepts, whether five or eight or ten or more and one strives to understand, to realise, the Four Noble Truths, and makes some commencement at least in the development of Insight into the truth of Annata. That there is no separate, unchanging ego. So if one does these things successfully, one accomplishes the Shravakayana, one traverses the Shravakayana.

And then secondly, the Pratyekkhayana, the yana, the path of the privately or solitarily Enlightened One. Here in addition to what the shravaka does, here one develops an understanding of the Law of Conditionality, especially of the twelve Niddanas that we have already been mentioning. And one develops also in this stage, in this yana, some insight into the Truth of Sunyata, The Voidness, The Absolute.

And then thirdly the Bodhisattvayana. Here one develops what is called The Will To Enlightenment, the aspiration to become enlightened so that one may help all living beings. One observes the special Bodhisattva precepts, one practices the Six Perfections, that is to say generosity, ethics, energy, meditation, patience, wisdom, one furthermore realises, one has a sort of spiritual experience to the effect that everything is like a sort of magical illusion or everything is like the reflection of the moon in water. It's sort of neither real nor unreal, it's both real and unreal. It's very difficult to say very much about this in a few words, but this is one of the principle insights developed by the Bodhisattva.

Then fourthly, Kriyayogayana. In this yana, which means the yana of the tantric yoga which consists mainly in symbolic ritual with some meditation, in this yana one purifies, at least to some extent, all sorts of inner subtle defilements. One practices repetition of the mantra, many hundreds of thousands of times, one visualises one or another of what are called the Three Family Protectors, that is to say; The Bodhisattva of Compassion, The Bodhisattva of Wisdom or The Bodhisattva of Power. And one meditates upon them, visualises them and so on, as distinct from one's self. One looks up to them. You see them clearly, you have a definite spiritual relationship with them, but you are separate. The Family Protector, the Bodhisattva, is there, you are here.

And then we come on fifthly to what is called The Ubayachariyayogayana. 'Ubayā' means 'both sides', chariya means 'practice'. So it's the practice of both sides. And it means the practice in which the inner and the outer aspects of practice are equalised and harmonised. And here in this yana one is initiated into the Mandala of The Five Buddhas, and one's relationship with one's particular Family Protector becomes much closer. One practices here two kinds of yoga, one is called the yoga With Signs and the other is called the yoga Without Signs. There is no time to explain all this

now. But the result of this particular yana is, or the result of the practice of this particular yana is that one is gradually transformed into Vairocana, the Buddha of Light who occupies the centre of the Five Buddha Mandala.

Then sixthly what is called Yogayana. 'Yoga' here means yoga or union between Wisdom on the one hand and Compassion on the other. This is the principal practice in this yana, to unify Wisdom and Compassion. And in this connection there are very many different initiations and four esoteric practices which are called the Four Mudras. And the word 'Mudra' means a sort of sign or gesture, but that tells you nothing about the practices at all. And again you practice the yoga with With Signs and Without Signs, your practice here becomes very much deeper. And in the end you realise the Five Knowledges which are associated with the Five Buddhas, that is to say the Knowledge of the Absolute, The Mirror Like Knowledge, The All-performing Knowledge, and so on.

Then seventhly what is called Mahayoga, or The Great Yoga. And here the real esoteric tantra begins. So one really cannot say anything about this at all. Perhaps just one thing I can and shall say and that is that in this stage one still does visualisation exercises of a very advanced kind, very complex kind, one visualises Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, but in this stage, in this yana they are always visualised in what is called Yab-Yum form. Which literally means Father-Mother form, that is to say two figures, two Buddha figures, a male Buddha and a female Buddha figure in sexual union. So this sort of visualisation you get only when you reach this yana. The Mahayoga Yana.

Then eighthly the Anuyogayana. 'Anu' means 'following after' because it follows after the Mahayoga Yana. Here the main practice is the development of Thumo or what is called 'psychic heat', which isn't to be taken literally, it's a spiritual experience and it's been described in one of the texts translated in Evans Wentz's 'Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines'. Also in this yana you get the various practices which Western writers sometimes call the 'Sexoyogic Practices' though one has to observe here that they have nothing at all to do with sex in the ordinary sense of the term.

And ninthly and lastly we come on to Atiyogayana. The yana of Supreme Yoga. And this consists in the direct immediate recognition and realisation of the One Mind. If you like, The Absolute, The Dharmakaya, by means of various highly advanced and esoteric meditation practices. And this of course, this Atiyogayana is the special teaching of Padmasambhava.

So these are the Nine Yanas. This is the spiritual tradition that went from India to Tibet, which Padmasambhava took to Tibet from India, which he represents, which he handed down in Tibet, and which is still continued. This Nine Yana teaching is still very well known indeed in the Ningmapa tradition, to the Ningmapa lamas. That is to say the Ningmapa tradition, the one founded by Padmasambhava himself.

So now just a few words about the Ningmapa tradition then we have to conclude. What does the word Ningmapa mean? Ningmapa means - an 'old style' one. Someone who follows the old ways. If you like, an 'old timer'. Even a conservative. So the Ningmapas are those who follow the old, the original traditions of Buddhism as

introduced into Tibet by Padmasambhava and who do not follow, perhaps do not even recognise the later reform movements started some centuries later by Atisha, by TsongKaPa and other teachers. Sometimes the Ningmapa tradition is known as the 'Red Hat' tradition. Their lamas are sometimes known as 'Red Hat' lamas because for certain ceremonial purposes they wear tall red caps. Whereas the Gelugpas wear yellow ones. The Ningmapas are at present one of the four main branches or main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the others being the Gelugpa, the Shakyapa and the Khagyupa. The Ningmapas as far as I have been able to ascertain are the second biggest. The Gelugpas are the biggest, the Ningmapas come next, though a long way after the Gelugpas, so far at least as numbers are concerned. And in the course of centuries since the time of Padmasambhava right down to the present day they've produced very many highly distinguished lamas, and I can say from my own acquaintance with them, my own experience of them that Ningmapa lamas, unlike Gelugpa lamas, tend to be a bit unconventional. They tend to be very spontaneous, to do things as it were on their own or even suddenly, just as a result of an inspiration that has come to them either in meditation or at some other time. I remember for instance, just to give a very small example that one of my own Ningmapa teachers was staying with me in Kalimpong and at breakfast he said to me one day, 'What do you think I saw in my meditation this morning?' So I said 'I don't know.' He said 'I saw the roof of this monastery'. So I said, 'Well, yes!' And he said, 'And I saw on the roof of the monastery a great banner of victory.' That is the victory of Buddhism over the Three Worlds, with coloured silk flounces and so on. So of course there wasn't one. So he said, 'I've seen it in my meditation, we must put one up.' So in the course of the next week he got one of these enormous cylindrical banners of victory made and up it went on the roof and that was that. So it was a very small thing but this is how the Ningmapa lamas operate very often, or usually, their standard way of operating. They see something in their meditation or they feel something, they get the inspiration, they do it, that's that! In the case of the Gelugpa lamas, though very good and very virtuous and very learned, they operate in a different way. If you ask them anything or they are thinking about doing something they will consult the literature, especially TsongKaPa's writings. If it's there, they'll do it! As it's written, they'll do it! They don't as it were trust so much as the Ningmapas lamas their own inner spiritual inspiration.

The Ningmapa lamas seem to trust this very much indeed, and that makes them, as I said, sometimes a bit unconventional. They don't usually live together in large monasteries with thousands upon thousands of monks altogether as the Gelugpas do, they tend, although they have a few large monasteries, they tend to live, that is to say the Gurus tend to live, just with small groups of disciples here and there. They are not nearly as highly organised as the Gelugpas. And they emphasise very much meditation, especially Atiyoga, or Tzog Chen as they usually call it, which is a special form of Atiyoga.

And as I've said, I've known in the course of my stay in Kalimpong quite a number of highly developed Ningmapa lamas. And one of the interesting things I found out about them or from them was that though they had a very high regard for the Sutras, that is to say the Buddhist scriptures, the discourses of the Buddha, they esteemed the Termas equally highly. Just as highly as the Sutras. That is to say the Termas, meaning those discovered texts, or rather those hidden texts, the texts that Padmasambhava hid away during his lifetime and which were subsequently

discovered. Tibetans, by the way, Ningmapas believe that these Termas were discovered or taken out by great lamas who are called Tertons, who happened to be partial manifestations of Padmasambhava himself. And they not only took them out but they established the spiritual tradition, taught them, and handed on the teaching, the tradition to their disciples.

And the tradition which derives from the Termas is called by Ningmapas 'The Near Tradition' whereas the traditions arising from the sutras is called 'The Far Tradition'. For instance if you follow a practice which is based on the Sutras, then you have a guru for that and he has a guru for that, he has a guru for that, there may be eighty generations of gurus to get you back to the Buddha's time. So the Tibetans say, at least the Ningmapas say, there are many possibilities of slips, you know, when you have got eighty generations of gurus and disciples. But they say, with regards to the near tradition of the Termas, you are much nearer the original source. Because Padmasambhava wrote it, he hid it, it was discovered hundreds of years later, maybe only two hundred years ago, and it was taken out and the tradition established by someone who was a manifestation of Padmasambhava, he taught it and you find, you know, when you look at the list of gurus and disciples, that far from there being eighty generations there are only five or six. Padmasambhava, then a disciple of Padmasambhava who was the Terton, and then his disciple, and then your guru, and then you! So the Tibetans say that the near tradition of the Termas, or as the Ningmapas say, that the near tradition of the Termas is more powerful than the distant tradition of the Sutras. This is their view.

I'm not commenting on it one way or the other, but I can say this; that there's an enormous number of these Termas. There's a collected edition which is called the Ratnakosha, the 'Collection of Jewels'. And it's in 64 big volumes. 64 volumes, the collected edition of the Termas, and one of the Termas is of course the very famous work 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead'. It's a Terna. You might wonder, well, where does it come from? Who wrote it? Well, it was written by Padmasambhava according to the Tibetans, hidden away and then taken out some centuries later. Of course the Western Scholar will have none of this. He will of course say, 'Well Nonsense! Padmasambhava wrote nothing, hid nothing. These lamas who came centuries later, they just forged these texts and then they just attributed them to Padmasambhava so that they could circulate widely and be respected.' But, be that as it may, we don't after all know, we must hes..., we must be careful about setting limits to what is possible. We have to judge these texts on their own merits. See what they are like. Read them, maybe practice the teachings, see what they are like. And if we do this we find that the Termas for the most part are very highly important esoteric spiritual teachings which exert vast and profound influence. So we can say, on the whole, even today among Tibetan Buddhists in general, among the Ningmapas in particular, though they have had to leave, many of them, their own country, the spirit and the influence of Padmasambhava is still very very much alive, is still very very powerful among all Tibetan Buddhists. And we may even go so far as to say that that influence may nowadays be extending to other parts of the world. I remember I was very much impressed one day when one of my again Ningmapa teachers in Kalimpong told me personally, he said, 'When I was in Tibet some years ago, I was reading Ningmapa literature and I came across some prophecies attributed to Padmasambhava'. And he said, 'One of them goes like this;' Padmasambhava is supposed to have said, 'When iron birds fly in the sky, my teaching will go to the West.' So this is what that teacher,

that lama told me. So perhaps we can say that our commemoration today of Padmasambhava, the Great Tantric Guru of India and Tibet, is perhaps a sign that this has already started happening.