

# A Glossary and an Introduction to BUDDHAS AND MANDALAS

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Pacific Palisades, January 1997

## Glossary of Buddhist and Tibetan Terms

(S) Sanskrit, (T) Tibetan, (C) Chinese

**Active Compassion**, *bodhicitta*, goal of *mahamudra* meditation

**Aksai Chin**, remote area at the far West-Tibetan- border with India

**Alchi**, (1060) Tibetan-Buddhist sanctuary in Ladakh with important Tibetan murals

**anuyoga**, (S) second, esoteric level of Dzogchen teaching (goal: removal of opposites, non-dual vision)

**apsara** (S) flying wind-spirit, *dakini*, *khadroma*

**Arun**, river valley crossing from Tibet into Nepal east of Everest

**atiyoga** (S) third and highest level of Dzogchen teaching (goal: awareness of the illusory, empty nature of all things)

**Bardo Tödol**, (T) Nyingma instructions for the dying, also known as "Tibetan Book of the Dead"

**Barkhor** (T) circumambulation route around the Jokhang in Lhasa

**beyul** (T), Buddhist paradise, areas consecrated by Tibetan sages

**Bhaktapur**, city near Kathmandu in Nepal

**Black-Hat Sorcerers**, *Bön* magicians recruited by *Padmasambhava*, before the *Cham* Dances they ritually cleanse the grounds

**Blavatsky**, Helena, Petrovna, (1831- 1891), Russian founder of the Theosophical Society

**bodhicitta** (S), *Active Compassion*, goal of *mahamudra* meditation exercises

**Bodhisattva** (S), a saint, man or woman, who gave up nirvana to be reborn and help other people.

**Bön**, shamanic predecessor to Buddhism in Tibet, still extant today but largely indistinguishable from Tibetan Buddhism

**Budha**, Buddhist village near Kathmandu, Nepal, built in form of a *mandala*

**Ch'an** (C), the original Chinese version of Zen

**Cham Dances**, masked dances in Tibet and Ladakh celebrating *Padmasambhava* and the victory of Buddhism

**chang** (T), light beer made from barley

**chi** (C), 'fluid' that is supposed to transport 'energy' along the connectors between acupuncture centers in Chinese medicine

**chörten** (T), stupa (S), a pyramidal building, sacred representation of the levels of insight, symbol of the Tibetan Buddhist cosmos, repository for ashes of great saints

**chuba** (T) a wide wrap-around coat with arms to the knees and a high collar worn in Tibet

**Chung Riwoche**, a large stupa only recently discovered on the Tsangpo river north of Dingri

**circumambulation**, ritual walk around a sacred object

**dakini** (S), *khadroma* (T) fierce air-spirit, their dance is a symbol of transitory nature of experience, important role in esoteric *Tantrayana* (*Vajrayogini*)

**David-Neel, Alexandra**, (186x-196y) French opera singer, Buddhist nun, anthropologist, and explorer of

Tibet

**dharma** (S), The Buddhist Faith

**dharmakaya** (S) primal, non-dual state of pure pleasure reached during anuyoga exercises

**Dingri**, village on the Friendship Highway on the Tibetan Plateau north of Everest

**dorje** (T), *vajra* (S), thunderbolt, 'diamond scepter', ritual object representing the power of the absolute

**Dragpo** (T), fierce incarnation of Padmasambhava

**dri** (T), female yak

**Drukpa Kunley**, the "Divine Madman", beloved *naljorpa* of Butan, Nepal, and Tibet

**dukhang** (T), meditation hall of the monks in a gompa

**dzo** (T), a cross between a cow and a yak

**Dzogchen** (T), a "fast" meditation teaching system of the Nyingma. It encompasses three levels: *mahayoga*, *anuyoga*, *attiyoga*, of which the last two are highly *esoteric*.

**Dzogchenpa** (T), a person practicing Dzogchen

**dzong** (T), castle, stronghold

**esoteric**, secret teachings passed from teacher to student

**exoteric**, teachings open to all

**Farsi**, Persian language

**fei-tian** (C), apsara (S), dakini (S), khadroma (T) flying air- or wind-spirits

**Friendship Highway**, Chinese-built road between Lhasa and Kathmandu

**Ganden Ling**, one of three major Gelug monasteries near Lhasa

**Garuda** (S), fabulous sacred bird common to India and Tibet

**Gautama** (S), the historical Buddha

**Gelug** (T), reformed Yellow-Hat monastic order of Tibet, the Dalai Lamas are their reincarnated head lamas, last major Tibetan school, sixteenth-century

**Gelugpa** (T) monk of the Yellow-Hat School

**gompa** (T), small Tibetan sanctuary or monastic center

**Guru from Orgyen**, one of the names of Padmasambhava

**Guru Rinpoche** (T) one of the names of Padmasambhava

**Gwumbo Dorje** (T), great teacher

**halal** restaurant, Moslem restaurant

**hamam** (Arabic), Moslem bathhouse

**Hevajrayana** (S), Hevajra, great vajrayana, 13th century meditation teaching system used by Sakya order

**hieros gamos** (Greek) the sacred union of opposites (C. G. Jung)

**Jetsun** (T), esteemed teacher

**Jokhang** (T), largest and oldest Tibetan Buddhist sanctuary, "Cathedral" of Lhasa

**kartrika** (S) ritual hatchet used by the dakinis to cut man's ignorance

**Kargyü** (T), semi-reformed Red-Hat monastic order founded by Naropa, (fourteenth century)

**Kargyüpa** (T), monk belonging to the Kargyüg order

**karma** (S), 'fate' accumulated over many rebirth cycles

**Kashgar**, large Moslem city in western Sinkiang (China)

**khadroma** (T), 'skydancer', powerful air spirits, often personal yidams in anuyoga

**Kham**, Eastern Tibet

**Khampa**, Tibetan people of *Kham*

**Kartriga** (S) **kharvanga** (T) ritual knife used by *Vajrayogini* to cut the male ego

**Koktebel**, a hamlet of three houses on the southeastern coast of the Crimea (Russia)

**korlam** (T), circumambulation route around a sacred mountain or monastery

**Kundun** (T) Dali Lama

**L'Histoire d'O**, novel by Pauline Reage, French high-class pornography (1970s)

**Ladakh**, western-most Tibet, part of India

**Lama** (T), teacher, guru, fully ordained Tibetan monk

**Lapchi**, beyul, and gompa in a valley at the border to Nepal

**lhato** (T), 'soul-place', a stone cairn decorated with prayer flags

**Ling** (T), monastic community

**linga** (T), small female figure made from bread dough used in Cham dances to represent evil and the ego

**lingam** (S), phallus, representation of Shiva in Hinduism

**Losar** (T), Tibetan New Year, a variable lunar date in February, coincides with Chinese New Year

**luma** (T) water spirits half snake, half woman, nymphs

**mahayoga** (S), first stage of all Tibetan teaching systems

**mandala** (S) a square or circular arrangement of Buddhas and their manifestations, used for meditation exercises

**mani stones**, stones carved with the inscription 'Om mani padme Hum' deposited at sacred places

**mantra** (S), sacred syllables used in meditation, e. g., "*Om, mani padme, Hum*"

**Mei Guo** (C), the USA, 'Beautiful Land'

**Milarepa**, Tibetan poet and saint, student of *Naropa*

**Mount Athos**, sacred mountain of Orthodoxy in Northern Greece

**Mount Kailash**, arguably the most sacred place on earth which some 1.8 Billion Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists consider the center of the universe. In Western Tibet

**Mount Shishibangma**, 8000-m mountain west of Everest

**muezzin**, Moslem singer who calls the hours of the five prayers a day

**nagpa** (T), *yoga* master

**naljorpa** (T) *yogin* (female: *yogini* or *naljorma*) an itinerant Dzogchen practitioner, suspected of occult powers and sexual propensities

**Naropa**, Indian sage and teacher of Milarepa, founder of Kargyü order

**nirmankaya** (S) a "Buddha-Field," primal, non-dualistic concepts experienced in *dharmakaya* exercises

**Nyingma**, Red-Hat, oldest Tibetan Buddhist order strictly unreformed, founded by *Padmasambhava* in the 10th-century

**Nyingmapa**, monk belonging to *Nyingma* order

**Ojai**, small town in Southern California founded by Annie Besant as an ashram of the Theosophical Society

**Om mani padme Hum**, sacred mantra, has several meanings: "The jewel in the lotus flower," in shadow-speak: "the precious phallus is in the lotus' chalice" i.e. the conjunction is completed. Om and Hum are "seed syllables" with no explicit meaning (inhalation-exhalation during meditation)

**Orgyen**, *Udhyana*, Swat, country in Northern Pakistan, origin of *Padmasambhava*

**Padmasambhava** (S), 9th-cent. Indian missionary of Tibet, combined *Bön* shaman magic, Indian *Tantrayoga*, *Ch'an*, *Manichean*, and *Nestorian* Christian concepts to form syncretic *Vajrayana* Buddhism

**perak** (T)

**phurbu** (T), sacred magic dagger in *Tantrayana*

**Prajnaparamita** (S), female representation of transcendental Wisdom

**preta** (S), hungry ghosts that populate the stages the dying experience (*Bardo Thödol*)

**puja** (S), personal prayer service

**rangdum**, (T), natural landmark, 'spontaneously' created manifestation of a great saint, e.g., foot- or hand-prints, etc.

**Rongphuk**, gumpa in the valley leading to the north-face of Everest

**Rongshar**, 'Valley of Roses' also Drin Valley, a valley in the Himalayas south of Dingri

**RU-486**, French morning-after abortion pill

**saddhu**, Hindu holy man

**Sakya** (T), unreformed monastic order founded in the 12th cent.,

**Sakyapa** (T), monks belonging to the Sakya order ruled Tibet from the 12th to the 15th cent. as viceroys of the Chinese emperors.

Converted Mongolia to Buddhism. Sakyapa practice hereditary succession.

**samadhi** (S), ultimate state of deep meditation

**samsara** (S), the multiply fragmented illusion of ordinary reality

**sangha** (S), the community of Buddhist monks

**Sephardic**, Jewish people practicing the Mid-Eastern- and Spanish ritual

**shadow-speak**, mystic language used to describe esoteric teachings

**Sherpa**, Tibetan ethnic group living in the Solo-Khumbu  
**Shigatse**, second largest city in central Tibet  
**Shivaite yogi trident**, emblem of the Shivaite sect of Hinduism, also used by *Padmasambhava*  
**Sichuan**, Chinese province bordering on Eastern Tibet (Kham)  
**Six Yogas of Naropa**, the codified teachings of *Naropa*  
**Sky Burial**, deposition of a corpse by hacking it into pieces and feeding it to the vultures  
**Solo-Khumbu**, area in Nepal south and east of Everest, populated by Sherpa  
**stupa** (S), *chörten* (T), the oldest representation of the Buddha  
**Shivaite**, Indian Yogi, followers of Shiva  
**skull cup**, cup made from a human skull filled with menstrual blood presented by *Vajrayogini* to her consort  
**Sufi**, plural Sufiya (Arabic), mystic Moslem brotherhoods or orders, originated in Chinese Turkestan (Kashgar) and Samarkand  
**Suni**, oldest Moslem sect deriving itself directly from Mohammed  
**Swat**, *Orgyen*, *Uddhiyana*, area in northern Pakistan where the Indian Tantrayoga originated in the 9th and 10th centuries  
**Taklamakan**, large desert area in Sinkiang (Chinese Turkestan) bordering on Tibet in the north  
**Tantrayoga** (S), Indian Shivaite yogic discipline taught by female *yoginis* in *Uddhiyana* which strongly influenced Tibetan Buddhism after the 11th century  
**Tantrayana** (S), Syncretist Tibetan discipline mixing Shivaite *Tantrayoga*, Buddhist, shamanism, and Chinese influences, introduced into Tibet by *Padmasambhava*  
**thangka** (S), scroll-painting depicting mandalas, Buddhas or other sacred images of Tibetan Buddhism  
**The Flight of the Garuda**, important Dzogchen teachings (early twentieth century)  
**The Secret Life and Songs of Lady Yeshe Tsögyel**, "autobiography" of the companion and *khadroma* of *Padmasambhava* written in mystic Tibetan shadow-speak  
**Therai**, tropical, southern part of Nepal along the Indian border  
**tögal** (T), 'Immediate Crossing', third level (atiyoga) Dzogchen meditation insight  
**toglen** (T) meditation technique employed by Dzogchen  
**trekchöd** (T) 'Cutting Through,' (anuyoga) Dzogchen meditation insight similar to, but less abrupt than Zen satori  
**tsampa** (T), roasted barley flour, staple food of the Tibetan nomads  
**Tsangpo** (T), The River, the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra in Tibet  
**Tseringma**, one of the 5 sisters of long life, ancient mountain goddesses pacified and celebrated by *Milarepa*  
  
**Tsögyelma**, or Yeshe Tsögyel, female companion and *khadroma* of *Padmasambhava*  
**Tsvetaeva, Anastasia** (Asya), sister of Marina Tsvetaeva  
**Tsvetaeva, Marina**, (1892-1941) Russian poetess  
**tulku, tulkumas** (T), male respectively female reincarnation of a *yogi* or *yogini*  
**tumo** (T), heat generated in meditation  
**Uddiyana** (S), Area in today's Pakistan where the Tantra originated  
**vajra** (S), *dordje* (T) thunderbolt, 'diamond' scepter, ritual dumbbell, symbol of spiritual power and the absolute  
**Vajrayana** (S), radical, highly syncretic Tibetan meditation system going back to *Padmasambhava*  
**Vajrayogini**, Tantric Indian-Tibetan queen of the dakini revered in Nepal and Tibet  
**Voloshin**, Maksimilian, Russian poet and philosopher, son of Yelena Ottobaldovna Voloshina  
**Voloshina**, Elena Ottobaldovna, owner of a guest-house in Koktebel where many young Russian poets and painters congregated at the beginning of the 20th century  
**White Tara**, female representation of transcendental insight, "Goddess of Mercy", "guanjin" in Chinese  
**yab-yum** (T), 'mother-father', sexual union, symbol of the unification of opposites, used in Tibetan *Vajrayana* imagery after the 12th-century  
**yak**(T), female: *dri*, long-haired, primeval-looking, grunting ox of many uses, somewhat smaller than cattle  
**yama** (T), bull-headed representation of death, of Iranian origin (after 12th century)  
**Yeshe Tsögyel**, (9th cent.) at age 16 partner, companion, and wisdom *khadroma* of *Padmasambhava*, later

eminent teacher in her own rights

**vidam** (T), personal, protective deity with which the meditator identifies

**yogin, yogini** (S) *naljorpa, naljorma* (T) male respectively female master of yoga

**Yüan**, Chinese dynasty of Mongolian origin (Khublai Khan and successors, 12th to 14th century)

## BUDDHAS AND MANDALAS

### An Introduction to the Spiritual in the Arts of Tibet

Tibet, now easily accessible to Western tourists, may have lost some of its mystery, its art and religion are, however, as puzzling or even revolting as ever. A profusion of strange "gods", wild "devils", and meaningless images overwhelm the western visitor in its dark and wooly temples smelling of rancid butter oil. Never-the-less the visitor quickly discovers that these places and images occupy the thinking of the unusually joyous people of this land to an extraordinary degree. What makes this religion so strong and resilient at the same time? What is the meaning of Tibet's religious imagery? These few pages attempt to give a very brief introduction to Tibetan art and religion in the hope that they will make the visitor, if not an expert, at least *able to see*.

The Western concept of "Art" does not apply to the visual and plastic products of Tibet. Architecture, painting, and sculptures are never *art per se*, they are parts of and exclusively serve Religion. In order to understand the Tibetan iconography it is, therefore, necessary to have a basic knowledge of its religion. This is made difficult for the Western visitor by the alien nature and complexity of Tibetan religious and artistic expression. It is equally doubtful that the Western concept of "Religion" is of much use in understanding Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism in particular. Buddhism is not a socially or politically organised religious system comparable to the three Western monotheistic religions. Classical Buddhism knows of no God and considers "gods" vain projections of our ego. Hence it has no theo-logy and is a-theist in the true sense. In addition Buddhism does not know a "Genesis". The legends of the creation are all borrowed from the "secular" literature.

Because Buddhism did not become an imperial religion like Christianity, the dogmatic absolutism of Western religions is decidedly alien to Buddhism, as is, co-incidentally, proselytizing. Tibetan Buddhism teaches *methods* useful for acquiring insights into human nature in general, *among them also into "religious" truths*. Tibetan Buddhism is a conglomerate of teachings, practices, and "archetypal" images that are continuously in flux to this very day.

The "icons" of Tibet are its mandalas. They express the doctrine and are important instruments for meditational exercises. Tibetan Buddhism and iconography are conglomerates of doctrine, practices, and techniques borrowed from a multitude of sources: Animism, Buddhism, Manicheans, Nestorians, Daoists, Ch'an, and the Tantras, that originated in many lands: India, China, Nepal, Kashmir, Iran, and Central Asia. Tibetan Buddhism modified the Mahayana-Buddhist images inherited from these countries by combining them with strong animist elements. In addition images of Tantric sexual practices are seen everywhere in the murals, sculptures, and mandalas of Tibet and disturb the Western visitor. Because the animist elements are the most striking we shall discuss them first.

**Animism and Shamanism.** Animistic and Shamanistic elements and rites that survive in Tibet to this very day originated in the hunter and nomad cultures of the steppes of Central Asia, Mandshuria, China, Tibet, Mongolia and Turkestan. They contributed a **soul-concept** that is truly alien to classical Buddhism. The existence of an indestructible "soul" *behind* the fleeting manifestations of this world is exactly what Buddhism denies or is trying to destroy.

Animism sees the cosmos "animated" ("beseelt") by innumerable hidden forces and powerful spirits which require propitiation and control by **magic** wielded and dispensed by *shamans*.

In the Tibetan version man is thought to have two kinds of soul: a **breath-soul (Sog)** and a **shadow-soul (Lha)**. Loss of Sog leads to death, whilst Lha can temporarily leave the body, fly about, and reside in numinous objects, trees, streams, stones, etc. that can become "animated".

Animistic forces, anthropologically referred to as *Numina*, are true Gods not mere reflections of the transcendental absolute into which Buddhism later recast them. They are alive in many natural objects (trees, mountains, streams, rocks, passes, or road crossings). The most important ones are:

**Dalha:** personal protectors of man, house, tent, They appear in groups of 3,5,7,9,13 (Bön numbers); **Mu:** heavenly spirits (good), **Dü:** heavenly spirits (bad), identified by Buddhism with Mara; **Tsen:** protectors of the 12 Tibetan tribes (ancestors); **Nyen:** demons of the middle kingdom bringing lepra, plagues, etc; **Tanlha:** mountain gods; **Tserin Shed Nga:** the Twelve Sisters of Long Life, **Lu:** snake-gods corresponding to the Indian nagas; **Strinpo:** vampires living in cemeteries; **Rolans:** walking corpses; **Mamo:** demonesses with long hair, who Buddhism recruited as protectresses of oracles and as companions of **Pelden Lhamo** the protectress of Tibet. Many of these were drafted or coaxed by the great Buddhist "Magicians" (Padmasambhava, Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa) after fierce fights to serve as protectors of the Buddhist Dharma.

**Gods in animal shapes (bal)** who play a role in late Bön should also be counted under this group: **Khyun:** horned Ur-bird related to the Indian Garuda and the Winged Sun in Iranian sources, and the tabus of killing monkeys, fish, and dogs also belong here.

The **shaman**, who has learned to let his Lha fly about at will (trance), propitiates these forces with magic and apotropaic instruments: spirit catchers, stag and antelope antlers, masks, bear skins, a wooden bird (khyun) which he rides making flying movements with his arms, and especially *drums*. The "music" made by the monastic orchestras with alphorns, drums, clarinettes, and tubas also has their origin in shamanist rituals: to scare the ghosts away!

An important role of the Shaman is to *accompany the dying* through the horrors the soul experiences during the 49-days in the **Bardo** - until the soul (Lha?) becomes reborn - or if enlightened by Buddhism, escapes the wheel of worldly illusions and ordeals. Buddhism appropriated the shamanist Bardo rites and replaced the "red", i.e. the shamanist animal-blood sacrifices, with "white magic" (incantations, Buddhist images etc). The Bardo experiences and the Buddhist rites for the dying are vividly describes in the Nyingma text of the **Bardo Thödol**, the "Tibetan Book of the Dead". The oldest Tibetan orders (Nyingmapa, Kargyüpa) have continued to provide these traditional services during the past 500 years of Buddhist influence. But even the late, reformed Gelugpa had to yield to public demand.

Another ancient shamanist institution is the **Oracle**, or more accurately, the use of a *medium* (Lha-pa = soul-man) to dispell illness, demons, predict the future, change the weather, and revive the dead. In Ladakh a number of traditional oracles still perform all of these rites today (under Buddhist "supervision"). In the Old Tibet (before 1950) a **State Oracle** in Nethang near Drepung was consulted before all important political decisions.

**Bön.** Next to Buddhism Bön, the original shamanist "religion" of Tibet, remains the second largest religious practice in Tibet. Many of the pre-Buddhist rituals, magic, and belief systems seem to have survived in Bön. Because of the non-existence of written Bön-material from before the arrival of Buddhism, we can only extrapolate back to the original forms of Bön. What is now practiced in the surviving Bön monasteries and communities has been formalized along Buddhist lines as early as the 9th-century to such an extent, that an outsider cannot tell the difference. Conversely Bön imagery has been systematically appropriated by Buddhism.

According to Bön tradition, the pre-Buddhist origins of systematized Bön are Iranian, not Indian. Recently translated Bön texts seem to corroborate this claim (see e.g. Per Kvearne and S.T. Gyaltsen)

In many sacred places Bönpa and Buddhists share the same objects of veneration and circumambulation routes, like around Mt. Kailas. In the most ominous and oldest "power spots" the magical "Bön-presence" is all-pervasive (e.g. Tirthapuri in W Tibet).

Superficially, it seems that the most obvious difference between modern Bön and Buddhism is that the Bönpa (pa = people) walk against the clock while the Buddhists walk with the clock around sacred objects - and that the sacred swastikas both use turn in opposite directions as well!

Descriptions of several Tibetan **Bön sanctuaries** are given by Victor Chan, "Tibet Handbook", Moon, 1994: Mt. Bönri near Ningchi in SE Tibet, Mt. Targo, and Lake Dangra in the Chang Tang. He also describes a number of recently rebuilt and operational **Bön monasteries** (Tagse, Sigyal Gönchen, and Gyeri in SE Tibet, and Khyunglung in the Sutley Gorges of W Tibet).

**Hinyana Buddhism.** The "*historical*" Buddha, lived between 568-483 BC. He was born in a small town in SW Nepal, and taught and died in Northeast India. His teachings spread all over India and Southeast Asia during the reign of the Maura emperor **Asoka** (3rd-2nd cent. BC). This earliest form of Buddhism, the *Hinyana (Lesser Vehicle)* survives in Shri Lanka, Thailand and in SE Asia. The earliest written Buddhist canon was compiled from the oral tradition in Pali (Middle Indian) by the monk Theravadan, hence the alternative names for the Hinyana: "Pali Canon" or "**Theravada**". It outlines a strictly monastic practice with three parts the **Tripitaka** (three baskets):

1. Monastic discipline, **Vinaya**
2. The teachings of the **Sutras** and **Jatakas**, legends and stories of the Buddha's life,
3. Doctrines and Metaphysics, **Abidharma**

The Buddha's concern was to expose the origins of suffering in the world and find a way to prevent it. To this end he taught the doctrine of the **Four Noble Truths**:

1. Because life has no lasting meaning it is full of suffering and continues in an endless karmic circle of death and rebirths.
2. The causes of all suffering are the three pairs of **fundamental evils**: avarice and lust, hate and envy, ignorance and illusions. They tie all living beings to the karmic wheel of birth and death.
3. The removal of these evils will end suffering and break the karmic cycle: Man requires salvation.

4. The path to salvation from all suffering is the "**Eight-fold Path of Self-Discipline**". There is no God or World-Soul behind the fleeting impressions of this world. The Buddha considered himself the teacher of this eternal, impersonal Law (**Dharma**), which governs the cosmos and the **Karma** that causes the circular wheel of rewards, punishments and rebirth. His aim is to reach **Nirvana**, the complete dissolution of the personality (ego) which will stop the karmic wheel of birth-death-rebirth and the suffering caused by ignorance and illusions (**Samsara**).

The "**three Jewels**" of Buddhism are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, the

community of monks and lay-followers.

**Mahayana Buddhism.** The strict discipline required by the Buddha's teachings can only be practiced in a rigorous, monastic environment, the ordinary layman was excluded. For this reason a change of the early Hinyana doctrine took place in the 2nd century AD with a shift of emphasis from self-salvation, by way of a life as an ascetic monk (**Arhat**), to an emphasis on saving other human beings. The **Bodhisattva** (Mahasattva) ideal evolved. A Bodhisattva is a "saint" who has achieved Buddha-nature, but in boundless compassion for his fellow-man remains in the world by allowing himself to be reborn in order to save other human beings. This became known as the Mahayana, the "Great Vehicle". In the Mahayanic view the historical Buddha, who is the "Savior" of our age, becomes the Bodhisattva **Avalokitesvara** in the Mahayana. With the help of the Bodhisattvas salvation became available to everybody.

This so called **Middle-Way** (Madhya-mika) foots on the teachings of the philosopher **Nagarjuna** (India, 2nd cent. AD). He understands "*emptiness*" (*sunyata and Nirvana*) not as nothingness but as the "*invariable Absolute*" which is free (empty, void) of all earthly, transient properties, and attachments. Sunyata is therefore *the "opposite"* of all worldly manifestations (illusions, samsara).

Suffering is only a deception (illusion) as are all worldly cares, but also fears, gods, and death. All living beings carry the absolute in themselves and have (only) to be saved (enlightened), made aware (conscious) of their "Buddha-nature" through the liberating compassion of a Bodhisattva.

Made newly attractive to ever larger numbers of people, Mahayana Buddhism spread from Afghanistan, India, and Kashmir to Central Asia (3rd cent), China (4th cent.), Nepal (5th cent.), Korea and Japan (6th cent).

**Tantrayoga.** Tantrayoga is a system of yogic practices that originally had nothing to do with religion or Buddhism. It attempted to "cure" man's "existential" problems by, what we would today call, radical "psychotherapeutical" methods. One source of these methods was Indian Yoga. The dating of the origins are uncertain.

The practices of Tantrayoga developed in India. They were handed down "secretly" from teacher to student and were not codified in texts. Because of this esoteric, impenetrable nature (secret, oral transmission), the Tantra has been shrouded in mystery. Sometime in the 6th century, probably in the Swat (Pakistan) Tantrayoga joined with Buddhism to form Tantrayana, a new branch of the Mahayana.

**Tantrayana - Vajrayana .** The Tantrayana radically transformed the original Buddhist concepts. The new doctrine was codified in India into *Tantric Sutras*. From these we glean the following "world view" or cosmology:

1. The exterior world (*macrocosm*) is a *mirror image* ("projection") of the interior world (*microcosm*), the "psyche" or "subconscious" of man.
2. In naming (making conscious) the macrocosm, man, who inherently thinks in terms of polar dualities generates a *multiplicity of opposites*: his mind effectively generates a "schizoid" World. This is the cause of man's suffering, his "neurosis".
3. However, above this world exists a mystical, invisible, *impersonal Absolute* in which all multiplicities are erased and all polarities are unified.
4. **Salvation**, the "cure" of man's "neurosis", *lies in the unification of opposites*, affected by a mystical vision of and identification with the Absolute.
5. The cure can be effected through the "psychotherapy" of *meditational techniques* using the five senses:

*Aural*: teaching stories, songs (also in Sufism and Zen)

*Verbal*: repetition of mantras (e.g., OM Mani Padme HUM)



*Physical:* exercises (yoga, lung-running, sexual union)

*Mental:* deep, one-pointed meditation (samaddhi)

*Visual:* mandalas, images, thankas

To fill the needs of these new doctrines and to provide the images for the yogic meditational exercises a new imagery developed: a pentade of five "Djanibuddhas" who are the visible (macrocosmic) personifications of the different aspects of an impersonal, completely transcendent, undivided **Adibuddha**.

1. There are five **Djanibuddhas (Akshobya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Amogasiddhi)**, the fifth called **Vairocana** is their center. His emblem, is a thunderbolt, "vajra" (Sanskrit), (Tib.: Phurbu) or a "diamond" (Tib.: dorje), a symbol of the speed with which this technique works and of the clarity of its insights. This "instrument" gave the system its name: **Vajrayana**.

2. **Buddhas** and **Boddhisatvas** exhibit *complimentary female manifestations*. They may appear entirely in their female Gestalt (Prajna) or in sexual union (Tib.: Yab-Yum) with their male complements.

3. The *super-mundane Absolute* of the Tantra is equated with the Nirvana of the Mahayana. It is associated with a sixth Buddha or *Adhibuddha* who unifies all opposites including those of the five Djanibuddhas, who are his emanations. The Adhibuddha can be apprehended only in a mystical vision as a "Great White Light" (Bardo Tödol, "Tibetan Book of the Dead") during advanced, deep meditation or in dying. - Nevertheless, in certain Tibetan representations the Adhibuddha appears blue and stark naked in Yab-Yum with his white and equally naked Prajnaparamita.

A table of the Djanibuddhas, their Prajnas, colors, attributes and psychic correspondences as they appear in the mandalas of the Vajrayana is given at the end.

It is difficult to establish the origins and the exact dating of the specific imagery accompanying the Buddhist Tantrayana. It is clearly not yet in existence in the Buddhist cave paintings of Central Asia (Bamyan, Kizil, Turfan Depression, early Dunhuang) in the 5th to 8th century. The earliest appearance of the five Djanibuddhas (exclusive of the Adhibuddha) may be in a print of the early 8th century found in Dunhuang (Gansu/China). The Buddhist Tantrayana concepts may have received their final form in Kashmir, but unfortunately very little imagery has survived in Kashmir except in later Tibetan variations and translated texts.

Kashmir and the Swat were at that time the nodal points of trade and the exchange of ideas between India, Central Asia, Europe, and China. So it is not surprising that a syncretic amalgam of the thought systems of these lands contributed to the formation of the Tantrayana: Indian Buddhism provided the basic concepts, Iranian Manicheism and Nestorian Christianity the structure (Adhibuddha), and Indian Yoga together with Chinese Daoism contributed the radical meditational techniques, to which Tibetan Shamanism added the archetypal imagery as the Tantrayana entered Tibet.

It is in this form that Buddhism finally reached Central Tibet from China and Nepal.

Traditionally the queens of King Songtsen Gampo brought Buddhism to Tibet in the early 8th century. However, the Indian sage they had called to Samye for this purpose proved unable to cope with the strong shamanist Bön presence and the famous tantric master and magician Padmasambhava was recruited in his place to fight the Tibetan demons.

### **First Buddhist Diffusion to Tibet.**

Padmasambhava in a grand magical tour of the land subjugated the Tibetan Bön forces and simply made them "Protectors" of the Dharma, enriching Buddhist visions with a large number of archetypal images. He founded the school of the Nyingmapa (Red Hats) but left only two minor treatises. His teachings were written down by his immediate students and

buried as *terma* sacred texts to be unearthed by *tertöns*, specially empowered men, at a later date, when the world would be ready for their content.

This ingenious device of the Nyingmapa assured the legitimacy of their teachings, but is, of course, no help in any (Western) attempt at dating the development of the Vajrayana ideas. Visual imagery surviving in Tibet would a far better way of providing a historical understanding of ideas in Tibet, but much of this work remains yet to be done.

In the late 8th cent., at the peak of its power, Tibet controlled Central Asia and the Western parts of China absorbing religious iconography and ideas from all over. Thereafter Buddhism collapsed in Central Tibet. Only Western Tibet (Ladakh, Guge and Purang) survived.

## **Second Buddhist Diffusion**

from there the Dharma spread a second time to central Tibet in the 11th to 12th century. From the visual evidence it appears that the specifically Tibetan Vajrayana developed only after the 11th century. The murals of the Sumtsek, a temple complex in Alchi, Ladakh, (1060 AD) show the characteristics of the Prajnaparamita Sutra, an early Tantrayana text, but the imagery of the Tibetan form of the Vajrayana (fierce representations, many arms and heads, couples in yab-yum) appear there only in the Alchi Dukhang in the 13th century after the second diffusion.

By now Islam was rapidly destroying unresisting Buddhism in Central Asia and in India. By the 13th cent Buddhist culture had been eradicated in Kashmir, India, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The Tantric version of the Mahayana survived in the mountain kingdoms of Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and in Western China, Korea, and Japan. Isolated from its traditional sources, Tibet developed its own form of the Dharma: Vajrayana.

As more "psychological" insight accumulated over the centuries, new meditational methods were developed and old ones abandoned as inefficient. The traditional systems use visualizations and "one-pointed" meditational techniques and extensively employed complex mandalas. This is the reason why mandalas occupy the highest places in Tibetan sanctuaries. Each of the traditional systems developed their own meditational methods and mandalas.

They are usually associated with specific teachers and schools. The Nyingmapa, Kargyüpa, and later the Sakyapa orders are the main vehicles of these systems. The fundamental tenets of the Buddhist Tantra were written down in Sutras traditionally attributed to Indian sources.

## **Tantrayana**

One of the oldest Tantric systems, the **Yogacara**, was taught by the brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu (4/5th cent AD) at the Buddhist university of Nalanda (Peshavar, Pakistan). As **Chakrasamvara** ("Teaching of the Highest Bliss") also know simply as **Samvara** (Tib.: Demchog) this meditational method reached Western Tibet (Guge, Thöling, Tsaparang) in the 14th century. Through a chain (lineage) of teachers and students: Marpa, Naropa, Milarepa (10-12th cent.) it became the foundation of the Kargyüpa order. It permeated early Kargyüpa art (Alchi) and for this reason is of interest to us.

Some of the systems of importance for the understanding of Tibetan art are:

*Guhayasamaja*, (12th cent) an early initiation system

Chakrasamvara, (10th-12th cent), practiced by the Kargyüpa

Hevajra (13th cent), initiation system practiced by the Sakyapa

*Kalachakra* (India 10th, Tibet 15th cent.) last great, Indian Tantra system, still practiced by all orders but especially Gelugpa

Tantric methods have been and still are in constant flux, resulting in highly alive, flexible methods for gaining insights and personal growth. The main objective has continued to be to find meditational techniques that permit the student ever faster access to the "Ultimate

Awareness": Every thought, every emotion, all our fears and experiences, and even the gods are void (empty) - mirages of our mind.

One of the latest technique (19th century) generally restricted to Nyingma teaching is **Dzogchen**, a highly abstract method with partial roots in Chinese Ch'an-Zen. Dzogchen unites the two general kinds of the internal Tantra: Mahayoga and Anuttayoga and seeks final release through the practice of Atiyoga. It overcomes the need for and abandones visualizations. It is, therefore, not tied to the specific visual imagery of Tibet, and for this reason - and for its similarity to a Zen minus the Japanese Samurai additions - has become one of the most powerful meditational methods taught in the West.

**Early Tantrayana-Vajrayana Images.** A peculiar personality of the Tibetan tantra is the Bodhisattva **Manjushri**. An emanation of Akshobya, Manjushri is seen as the *Bodhisattva of Transcendental Insight*. He has the ability to represent any of the Buddha families. In a way he became the Bodhisattva of the Addibudha, an eminent example of the modifications Tantric insights made to orthoprax Mahayana Buddhism. Consequently, many "purist" Buddhist scholars, especially in England and Japan, consider the entire Vajrayana an aberration of the Mahayana, a deplorable corruption of the Buddhist faith - but in Tibetan Buddhism Manjusri is very much alive.

His female counterpart is **Prajnaparamita**, *the personification of Transcendental Wisdom*, a close relative of Sophia in the Christian-Hellenistic gnosis. In the murals of Alchi, Ladakh she is shown as a sophisticated, beautiful woman.

Manjushri can also assume a powerful, fierce manifestation *Yamantaka*, a very popular personality. He is "Anti-Death", who has the power to "defeat" death by exposing the emptiness of *Yama*, the (originally Iranian/Bön, sic!) King of Death (bull-headed personage).

Finally one other, most ubiquitous personality of the late Tantra is **Mahakala**. A fierce representation of Avalokiteshvara, blue in color, he is the protector of the Dharma. His images show that he is also related to death (blue or red bull's head). He is usually surrounded by a macabre graveyard. He appears in every sanctuary over or near the entry door. On a personal level he is able to speedily cut the ego. To show this he tramples on a human body (*Samsara*) - usually female(!) - that represents the Ego which has to be overcome by the meditator (Chöd meditation). Mahakala eventually became the main tutelary protector of the Gelugpa order.

**Hevajrayana.** The early mandalas in Alchi show mainly "peaceful", **non-frightening manifestations**. In the further development of the Vajrayana the lamas found that to get to the bottom of man's psyche, meditation on man's fears and his death are more effective. Because of its dangerous nature, this method remained esoteric for a long time: A Guru (teacher, Tib.: Lama) was needed to prevent the student (shela) from "flipping out" when traveling in this highly unstable psychic realm.

In the 12th century the Sakyapa developed a meditational path under the name of **Hevajrayana** (Supreme-Vajrayana) that used radically aggressive techniques based on this insight. It is of interest here primarily because of the extensive religious art created by the Sakyapa in the Hevajra tradition: the murals of Sakya, Shalu, Thöling, and Tsaparang reflect this Tantric system.

Borrowing from animism the Hevajra developed a set of mandalas entirely populated with **frightful manifestations** of the Djanibuddhas called **Herukas** and their Prajnas, called **Dakini** (Sanskrit) or **Khadroma** in Tibetan. They are used as **Yidams**, personal protectors and meditational objects.

**Initiation Yidams** In the esoteric tantric initiation rites (ritual near-death experience) the guru chooses a psychologically suitable Buddha, Bodhisattva or their female correspondence

as a Yidam or personal protector for the student. In addition yidams can also be personifications of meditation systems or protectors of entire lamaist schools or sects. Yidams can be peaceful or frightening images of one and the same Buddha manifestation. They often appear with their complementary female partner in Yab-Yum position. They only exist in the Tibetan Vajrayana Systems.

In the mandalas of the Hevajrayana the Heruka and Khadroma act as initiation Yidams. They are almost always wrathful and appear with their female companions in Yab-Yum or the Tantric dance positions (e.g. in the temples of Tsaparang, Guge, Western Tibet). They often have three heads and six arms.

As a symbol of their "absolute wisdom", their inherent, intuitive female (sic!) knowledge of the unity of all opposites, the Dakinis or Khadroma of the Hevajrayana are naked. Dakinis usually have only a single head and only two legs and arms. Like their Heruka they are wrathful. They probably originated in Uddhyana (Swat, now Pakistan) where they appear in shamanistic hunting rituals. Similar to the Hindu Goddess Kali they carry skull-cups filled with (menstrual) blood, bows (path, method) and arrows (insight, enlightenment), or a shamanic drum. Some have animal heads, and carry a vajra, trident, or a hatchet which they use to cut down the male Ego (sic!) which prevents their partners from gaining insight!

Because they cover a multitude of psychic states the number of Yidams is very large. The most important Yidams, covering the highest state of insight, correspond to the Djanibuddhas. A much abridged table of correspondences between Vajrayana and Hevajrayana appears at the end as a dictionary to reading the murals of Tibet and Western Tibet in particular.

**Tantric Sexual Practices.** To the Western mind, formed by Christian mores (Augustinus), it is hard to accept and understand the all-pervasive, omnipresent *sexual imagery in Tibetan religious* paintings and sculpture: Sexual unions in Yab-Yum, fierce male figures with erections, and female figures performing erotic dances in full nudity.

Sexual practices are an important part of Tantric meditational exercises. The male-female polarity is irrefutably fundamental to life, and because the Tantra attempts to reconcile and remove polarities as the source of suffering, it endowed the sexual union between man and woman with numinous significance.

The woman intuitively "knows" the unity of all opposites (insight), but cannot express it, the man with his analytical faculties can "give these insights names" (awareness) but cannot grasp their emptiness: make love as a powerful meditational exercise to gain and combine "Insight" and "Awareness". The off-spring of their union is Active Compassion for both. Unequivocally the Tantric texts state that man cannot obtain this Ultimate Awareness without a female consort.

The roots of these practices lie in the animist fertility rites of the mother cults of India and - surprisingly - in Chinese Daoist longevity techniques.

Extreme sexual yoga positions are depicted in profusion in the sculptures of the Shivaite temples, e.g., of Khajuraho (11th cent), and under the eaves of all Shiva temples in Nepal: women display their vaginas, or appear in union with man or animal to ward off evil and dangerous spirits.

Well documented (see Needham) in a number of Chinese texts, the Daoist methods had the typically Chinese objective to increase the life and strength of the male practitioner by copulating with as many women and as often as possible - without ejaculation.

Sperm is the highest form of *chi*, the vital essence that courses through the meridians (channels) connecting the acupuncture points of Chinese medicine. The purpose of copulation was to press the *chi* up the spine into the head, where it would stimulate the highest vital center, the supreme chakra of Kundalini yoga. In order to accomplish this the woman had, during intercourse, to press with two fingers on the first chakra (perineum)

behind the testicles of her partner. The pressure prevented the sperm from being ejaculated and drove it - up the spinal meridian - never mind that it actually ended up in the bladder. . . This takes some practice, and it is certainly not a recommended safe birth-control method! -

The Tibetan techniques, couched in the veiled mystical "shadow-speak" of the Tantras, are less graphical and appear to have higher spiritual aims than to merely lengthen life. It appears that the man had to learn how to bring the woman to orgasm without ejaculating - which works with some and not with others. . .

With the exception of Dzokchen, all Tantric systems, like the Chinese Dao, abhor the loss of "precious" male *chi*. In her autobiography Yeshe Tsogyel, the Khadroma-partner of Padmasambhava, describes the transport of *chi* up and through the 8 or 9 (Bön counting!) Kundalini chakras in (mystical) detail, and *she* practices this technique *as well* as her male partner.

As an example of "veiled" Tibetan language ("shadow-talk"), the famous Mantra, "*Om Mane Padme Hum*" (Om, the precious jewel is in the lotus chalice, Hum) has also a well-understood sexual meaning, in which the "jewel" (mane/vajra) is the male member and padma, the "lotus chalice", the female organ. . . - For an excellent, entirely a-mystical discussion of these subjects see Needham, *Science and Technology in China*, Vol. 5.2.!

**The Orders of Tibetan Lamaism.** From the beginning, Tibetan Buddhism developed a number of monastic schools. There are five major Lamaist orders (schools) and a number of minor ones that have survived to this day :

Unreformed Red Hats	Nyingmapa
Half-reformed Red Hats	Kargyüpa Sakyapa
Reformed Red Hats	Kadampa
Yellow Hats	Gelugpa

1. The **Nyingmapa** (pa = people) is the oldest order, traditionally founded by *Padmasambhava* (second half of 8th cent), who according to tradition founded a large number of monasteries. The Nyingmapa are the keepers of the early magic knowledge of Padmasambhava. Their doctrins still show systematized Bön remnants (e.g., 9 vehicles of the doctrin). Always recalcitrant and conservative they did not participate in Tsongkapa's reform movement in the 13th century which tried to expurgate all texts that could not be traced to Indian textual sources.

2. The **Kargyüpa** (after the 11th cent) are the strongest adherents of the Guru-Chela (teacher-student) principle by which esoteric knowledge is perpetrated. Their most famous teachers are the lineage of **Tilopa-Naropa-Marpa-Milarepa**. Naropa's "Six Dharmas" are the systematic foundations of Kargyü teaching and exerted strong influence on most esoteric knowledge including the Chakrasamvara, Hevajra, and the Bardo Tödol. **Milarepa** (1040-1123), Marpa's formost chela, became *the* great mystic **poet of Tibet**. Milarepa's student **Gampopa** was one of the great **physicians** of Tibet.

Like the Nyingmapa and Sakyapa the Kargyü lamas are not required to practice strict celibacy.

The Kargyü are strongly represented in Ladakh and Zanskar, they have several off-shoots: Drukpa, Drigungpa, Lho Drugpa. Ladakh and Zanskar, because of its distance and long

separation from Gelugpa Lhasa, have still many Kargyüpa monasteries: Drukpa (Hemis, Chemre, Henle); Drigunkpa (Lamayuru, Phiyang); Lho Drukpa (Stakna, Nardu, Sani).

3. The **Sakyapa** (after the 11th cent) Their legendary founder is Dogmi (992-1072). Their parent monastery is **Sakya** one of the great centers of Tibetan art and learning. They do not live in celibacy and instituted a hereditary succession of the head of the order. They adopted the Hevajra and practice "magic" as a kind of psychological science. Their Yidams are the Boddhisatvas Hayagriva and Vajrakila, the personification of the magic dagger Phurbu.

Supported by the Chinese emperors during the Yüan (Mongol) dynasty the Sakya Abbots reigned Tibet as **priest-kings** (mid 13th and 14th cent). Having become very rich in this position they imported large numbers of Indo-Nepalese artists to embellish their monasteries, an invaluable service to Tibetan art. Like the Jesuits in Europe they put great value in discipline and learning and accumulated one of the largest libraries in Tibet. It is, since 1959 inaccessibly housed behind the altar of the great meditation hall in Sakya Gompa. Their great scholar **Bustön** (1290-1364) founded *Zhalu* gompa and made it into one of the most influential centers of esoteric scholarship in Tibet.

4. The **Kadampa** followed the conservative Dharma as taught by **Atisha** ( -1054) who demanded celibacy of all monks and denied the authenticity of some of the more extreme esoteric tantras. His great student **Domtön** taught the idea that the great Abbots are reincarnations of Boddhisatvas, which the Gelugpa later used to solve the succession problem of their celibate monastic empire. In the 14th cent. the Kadampa were mostly absorbed into the Gelugpa.

5. The **Gelugpa (Yellow Hat Sect)** were founded by the sober puritanical scholar **Tsongkapa** (1357-1419) as a reform movement against the disorientation and spiritual corruption of his time. He tried to limit the use of Black Magic as practiced by the Nyingmapa and Kargyüpa and the extremes of the Hevajra. A superb organizer, he founded the huge Gelugpa monasteries and universities around Lhasa: Sera, Drepung, and Ganden, his main student Dubpa founded Tashilhumpo.

Initially the Gelugpa went back to the early Prajnaparamita Sutra of Narajuna, however, later they were forced by "public demand" to also adopt the Kalachakra system. Their Yidam became Yamantaka ("Anti-death"), a wrathful, Tantric emanation of the Boddhisatva Manjushri (transcendental insight).

After solving the succession problem by way of Domtön's reincarnation doctrine, the Great Lamas of the Gelugpa became the most influential religious leaders in Tibet. In the 16th cent. the Mongol Altan Khan bestowed the title **Dalai Lama** (dalai = dalä = Mongolian: great ocean) on the Great Lama of the Gelugpa and made him the political regent of Tibet. The present Dalai Lama (born 1935) is the 14th incarnation of the Bodhisatva Avalokiteshvara. According to an oracular pronouncement he will be the last Dalai Lama.

## Mandalas

Mandalas (Sanskrit: circle) are geometric designs, using squares and circles, that can be two-dimensional paintings, or three-dimensional architecture. The Chörten and the architecture of Tibetan sanctuaries are mandalas. In a few cases entire monastic complexes are laid out as a mandala, the most famous example is Samye Gompa. The mandala is a symbolic, visual representation of the abstract concept of the divine or the sacred, and as such it is universal. The ancient Greek mazes and those in Gothic

cathedrals (Chartre), and the cruciform Byzantine churches of Eastern Orthodoxy, most Turkish and many of the Iranian mosques are in effect three-dimensional mandalas. The mandala may also be related to the Pythagorean quadrature of the circle, and its mystical use in Sufism, the Kabala, and Western alchemy.

Using Indian precedences the mandala appears in Buddhism very early as the **Stupa** that represented the Buddha in 2nd-century-BC India. The most famous example is Sanchi. Painted two-dimensional mandalas appear in the 8th or 9th cent. with the rise of the Vajrayana. They are circular or square arrangements of the four Djanibuddhas surrounding the fifth in the center. This type of mandala became the major iconic image of Tibetan Buddhism. Its use is restricted to Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, and North-Western China.

The Tibetan mandalas are at the same time cosmograms of the exoteric and psychograms of the esoteric world seen by the student. Inside a circular fence rests a square cross (dual-diamond-cross, vishva-vajra) into which other concentric squares or circles have been inscribed. This "mystical garden" has four gates in the four directions, and on each side appears one of the four Buddhas or their Bodhisattvas. The tutelary Yidam resides in the center, his Paradise. Depending on the complexity of the mandala, a large number of secondary manifestations of the Yidam may appear in the corners or in further, inscribed circles. The main entry into the mandala is from the East, the lowest gate.

The outer circular fence of the mandala is a ring of fire. It is followed by a circle of vajras and a ring showing the eight graveyards of India (only in mandalas of fierce manifestations). The innermost fence is a circle of lotus petals. These fences protect the sacred garden and the meditator from evil influences. In scaling them the student sacrifices his karmic "clothing" until he stands naked before the gates of the inner sanctum.

Mandalas serve primarily as an aid to guide the visualizations of the meditator, who at first invokes the undifferentiated Void of the Adhibuddha from which slowly, bathed in light rays, form the ordered details of the mandala of his personal Yidam. In doing so the Yidam and the surrounding figures are considered evanescent projections of the mediator's inner Buddha Nature, they appear before his eyes like fleeting dreams. As his mind wanders through the gates of this *hortus mysticus* he identifies with all its figures in sequence until he reaches the center, the Paradise of his Yidam. After meditating on all aspects of the Yidam he recalls their impermanent nature, they are after all, like everything else, only a projections of his mind, and in dissolving the images he returns his gaze back at the Absolute Void.

## Chörtens

Chörten are three-dimensional mandalas. They are symbols of the cosmos and of the Buddha. They evolved from the Indian Stupa (Caitra) which in its earliest form was an earth tumulus developed in the 2nd century BC that symbolically represented the Buddha (e.g. in Sanchi). These early stupas had a huge hemispherical belly (anda = egg) on which sat a cubic reliquary container (harmika) which was crowned by an umbrella (chattra) as a sign of royal and spiritual power and dignity. The stupa was surrounded by a square fence (vedika) with four gates (toranas) towards the four directions of the world. A circular path inside the fence served for ritual circumambulations (clockwise). The stupa was the first representation of the Buddha.

Expanding this original form the stupa developed into eight distinct types that symbolically reflect the major incidents in the life of the historical Buddha: birth, enlightenment, descent from the Tushita Heaven, temptation by Mara, first sermon, paranirvana, etc. This form of the stupa is shared by all Buddhist schools: Hinyana, Mahayana, Tantryana, and

Vajrayana.

In Tibetan, lamaist Buddhism the chörten (Tibetan for stupa) assumed an additional spiritual function as a three-dimensional mandala and a "container" for the spiritual essence (thukten) of the Buddha and the dharma. In esoteric Vajrayana it later acquired a transcendental meaning as a symbol of cosmic and spiritual unity: the **Yangdrup Chörten** (chörten of enlightenment). Its parts have the following meaning:

1. **Cubic Base:** (banrim) represents the coarsest, physical existence on earth, its protector is Ratnasambhava (yellow). In many chörten this is followed by four rectangular steps that denote the four virtues of the consciousness of the Buddha.
2. **Hemispherical Middle:** (bumpa = pot) represents the Ur-ocean and the all-present Adibuddha. At the same time, because of its "water-nature" it also represents Akshobya or Vairocana (white or blue).
3. **Spira,** a stack of 7 to 13 disks, is an elaboration of the original umbrella and represents the steps to enlightenment. Its corresponding element is fire and hence represents Amitabha, the meditational Buddha of the West.
4. The uppermost **Umbrella,** only a little larger than the disks, protects the chörten from all harm. Its element is air and the protector is Amogasiddhi (green) the Buddha of the North.
5. The **Top-Jewel,** a tripartite sculpture ontop of a metallic band open to the sky represents the sun (male), moon (female) and the flame (bindu) of the ether that is the seed (Greek: pneuma!) of universal consciousness. The corresponding Buddha is Vairocana or interchangeably Akshobya.

In general, chörten are hollow and contain the ashes of enlightened beings. The corpse is cremated and the ashes are mixed with clay and formed into small conical sculptures called **Tsa-tsa** which are then stored in the chörten. In Tibet proper only saints or famous Lamas or Abbots are stored like that, but in Ladakh, where wood is plentiful, also unenlightened corpses are buried by the Lamas like this in small unadorned chörten. An important variant is the **Gomang Chörten** ("with-many-doors") a kind of step-pyramid with numerous windows and niches filled with Buddha images (Gyangtse).

## The Wheel of Life

The Wheel of Life is a special teaching mandala for the Buddhist laity. It appears in a conspicuous place on the outside of many Tibetan sanctuaries and monasteries and shows the various aspects of the karmic circle that unenlightened man is bound to.

The Wheel of Life is held by a monster with teeth and claws. Its identity is variously interpreted as **Mara** or **Yama**, the Lord of Death.

In its **center** the **symbols of the three fundamental evils** which cause rebirth rotate around each other:

**Rooster** = avarice and lust

**Snake** = hate and envy

**Pig** = ignorance and illusions

Between the spokes of the wheel are 5 or 6 **regions of worldly existence:**

1. Region of **worldly pleasures** (white): illusion of interminable pleasure and happiness, pride and frivolity, egotism. Avalokiteshvara (white) appears with a guitar and proclaims the virtue of meditation that frees man from these delusions and the the dominance of the ego.
2. Region of **torment** (black): This is the Bardo where Yama punishes the bad deeds of living beings with fire, heat and cold. Yet the indigo colored Manjushri with water and fire shows the inhabitants of this region to have hope and patience.



3. Region of **fear** (blue): region of the animals who lack the insight and the ability to read and understand. Vashrapani (blue) with the book shows the animals a way to become men who can read and escape the ignorance.
4. Region of **fighting** (yellow): dominated by titans and demi-gods (austras) who constantly fight the gods over the fruits of the tree of desires. Amogasiddhi (green) with his sword shows the path of liberation out of these illusions
5. Region of unrequited **desires** (red): the red pretas (hungry ghosts) have too small a throat to eat and drink and suffer of eternal hunger and thirst. Avalokiteshvara (red) with a bowl of nectar tries to free the pretas.
6. Region of **action** (yellow): Here men are enmeshed in passions and egoism. Shakyamuni (yellow) with beggar's bowl and staff shows the way of willpower and mental energy.

The **outer rim** of the wheel shows the **symbols for the twelve errors** that are the causes of man's rebirth :

1. **Avidya** (ignorance) = ***an old, blind woman***
2. **Sanskara** (karma producing desires): ***a potter with containers***
3. **Vijnana** (consciousness): ***a monkey eating fruits*** + and monkey jumping from branch to branch
4. **Namarupa** (name and form): the five factors man inherits at birth: rupa: body/form, nama: senses, perceptions, desires, and consciousness in which man drifts aimlessly through life: ***Ship with crew tossing in the waves***
5. **Sadayatana** (six senses): ***house with five windows(senses) and one door (thought)***
6. **Sparsha** (touch, sensual contact): ***a couple making love***
7. **Vedana** (sentience + feelings): ***arrow in an eye*** (or man with sword and woman hiding behind a screen)
8. **Trishna** (desire, thirst for life): ***man drinking wine*** (or woman who carries two children on her arm!)
9. **Upadana** (world of the senses): ***monkey gathering fruits or flowers***
10. **Bhava** (Creation of a new karma): ***pregnant woman*** (or the Hindu creator Brahma on a lotus)
11. **Jati** (Birth): ***woman giving birth***
12. **Jarmarana** (Old Age and Death): ***a corpse*** (or an old man or a sick person) ***being carried towards the cemetery.***

## Thankas

Thankas are scroll-paintings of religious subjects, the personal yidam or guru of the owner, a teaching mandala, or the personification of the protector of a monastic school. In a land of travellers, be it as nomads, on months-long caravan trips, or on pilgrimage, scroll-paintings enjoy a large popularity. They can be rolled up and hung anywhere in a tent, a miserable guesthouse, or a lonely gumpa. Often they are the most precious possession of its owner. Thankas must also have played a prominent rôle in the dissemination of Tibetan images.

Their origin is in Central Asia and Western China where roll- paintings and temple banners on precious silk materials have a long tradition. Like in the murals of the gompas and temples Thankas can have a number of themes for their subject: visionary images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, gurus and revered lamas, mandalas, and images of yidams and protectors, or the stories of the Buddha, Tibetan kings and heroes. Most important are

images of Yidams which the owner used as aids in the meditational visions of his daily exercises.

The Thanka usually shows the Yidam or Guru at its center surrounded by his attributes or other religious personalities that illustrate or define his or her meaning. The whole is set into a background of flowers, a paradise, or other relevant ornamentation. The proportions and appearance of the main figures are proscribed by manuals that are handed down from master to student. The model drawings are transferred to the grounded canvas by the use of pin-hole-perforations of the outlines and charcoal dust. The background of the main figure is left to the imagination of the artist.

Thankas are painted with mineral colors which the artists grinds himself, on carefully grounded cloth. The binder for the pigment is animal glue. The egg-based binder (tempera) that was widely employed in early religious paintings in the West, is not in use in Tibet. Gold leaf serves to enhance and outline the figures and to increase the value of the painting. Today commercial, industrial pigments are also used which often gives the Thanka a garishly colorful appearance. The finished Thanka is sewn into a frame of precious silk brocade and provided with wooden sticks on both ends for rolling the picture. The preparation of a good Thanka may take many months, and the final picture may command large sums of money: a well made Thanka of 60x100 cm - not counting its frame - can cost between 200 and 400 US\$ in Kathmandu. Sometimes Thankas are painted by monks (Likir) but more often they are painted by lay artists. The traditional painter remains anonymous. Sometimes he is a fully initiated man (lama), but he is not *required* to perform any religious rites, invocations, or special meditational exercises during his work. However, often the best Thankas show the artist's personal Yidam.

## Rangjung Images, Beyuls and Pilgrimages

Especially high or conspicuously shaped mountains, the azure lakes of the High Plateau, the colorful efflorescences of thermal springs, caves, stalacmites, or just peculiar rock formations have since mythical times been sacred in this bare and barren land. They are considered ***rangjung images***, natural, non-man-made manifestations of the Bodhisattvas or saints. Such venerated objects like the holy shrines of the monasteries are circumambulated by the faithful on *parikrama* (Sancrit) routes along which they pray, recite mantras, or prostrate themselves measuring the length of the path with their bodies.

So it comes as no surprise that areas of special beauty or with large accumulations of such rangjung images became places of retreat and meditation, "opened" by the famous teachers. Such places are called ***beyul***, Buddhist Paradises and refuges for the faithful in case of need, war, distress, or persecution.

The three most famous beyul are the area around Mount Kailas (Western Tibet), which as it also sacred to Hindus, Jain, and all Buddhists and is arguably the most sacred place on earth, the Dri (Rongshar)-Lapchi Valleys in the High Himalayas near the Tibetan border, and the Tsari in the Himalayas north of the Bhutanese border. One other *beyul* dedicated to Vajrayogini is so sacred that nobody will tell you even its name, Pemakö. It is hidden nearly inaccessibly in the rainforests east of the great Brahmaputra gorges. Here many Khampa hid from the Chinese persecution.

To and through these beyul lead the paths of pilgrimages. Singly on foot, in colorful groups on overcrowded trucks from Kham villages thousands of kilometers away, entire nomad families with their yaks from the Chang Tang on foot and horseback wander to the great beyul, singing and praying.

**Pilgrimages** are an age-old institution of Tibetan Buddhism. At the lowest level they are an ardent trek of several days or weeks through these "magical" places of great beauty and tranquillity that have the power to change the pilgrim in most subtle ways. On his trek the pilgrim visits the many sacred places along the route and offer prayers for his beloved ones, his dead, or for the betterment of mankind. Sometimes he brings clothes or personal belongings of a recently died person and leaves them in one of the "burial" grounds along the route (which look like dumps to the stupid Westerners!). The Pilgrim earns merit for himself and other beings by doing so, a better rebirth, the improvement of his *karma*, or the resolution of his troubles. It is also possible to go on such a pilgrimage purely in the mind as an intense, extended, visual meditation following the sacred route. If done in honest desire, such a spiritual pilgrimage carries the same merit and all the same benefits. It may result in insights and experiences that can rival those of an actual walk.

## THE DJANIBUDDHAS OF THE VAJRAYANA MANDALA

Name and Family:	<b>ADHIBUDDHA</b> Prajnaparamita				
Sanskrit	<b>VAIROCANA</b>	<b>AKSHOBYA</b>	<b>RATNASAM-BHAVA</b>	<b>AMITABHA</b>	<b>AMOGASIDDHI</b>
Tibetan	Namdzä	Mikyopa	Rintchen Djungdän	Öpame	Dönyödubpa
Meaning	Diamond-Being	Imperturb-able	Gem-Born	Boundless Light	Infallable Success
Era-Kalpa	past	past	past	present	future
<b>"Signatures":</b>					
Mandala	Center	east-(down)	south	west-(up)	north
Color	White	blue	yellow	red	green
Mudra	teaching	earth calling	wish fulfillment	meditation	Fearless giving
<b>Symbols:</b>					
Painting	chakra-wheel	vajra-thunderbolt	ratna-jewel	padma-lotus	vishva-vajra dual-thunder-bolt
Chörten	flame	circle	square	male triangle	half-circle up
Animals	lion	elephant	horse	peacock	garuda
Elements	Water=white	earth	fire	air	ether=blue
<b>Bodhisattvas:</b>					
Male	Vajrapani	Manjushri	Ratnapani	Avaloki-teshvara	Vishvapani
Female	Vajrayogini (Vajra Being)	Locana (Buddha Eye)	Mamaki (My Very Own)	Pandara (White Garment)	Tara (Savior)
Living	Krakucchanda	Kanakamuni	Kashyapa	<b>Shakyamuni</b>	<b>Maitreya</b>
<b>Correspondences:</b>					

Insight-Wisdom	pure-absolute	mirror-like	discriminating	equality	all-encompassing
Awareness	consciousness	body, form	senses	perception	impulses
Mirror	pride-delusion	rage-hate	egotism	desire	envy-avarice
<b>Hevajraya Mandala:</b>					
Heruka	Buddhaheruka	Vajraheruka	Ratnaheruka	Padmaheruka	Karmaheruka
Khadroma	Vajrayogini	Dorje Khadro	Rinchen Khadro	Pema Khadro	Laskyi Khadro

*In the late Vajrayana Tantra* : Akshobya moves into the center and Vairocana into the eastern position, and Manjushri becomes a kind of Bodhisattva of the Adhibuddha, he can appear in the garb of any family:

Manjushri (Transcendental Awareness), his female conjugation is:  
Prajnaparamita (Transcendental Wisdom).

In the Hevajra Akshyoba changes to Vajraheruka. Also some of the colors change and Amitabha becomes Padmaheruka (Heruka of the Lotus), and not illogically Amoghasiddhi, the Buddha of the Future, becomes Karmaheruka (Heruka of our Karma). - Manjushri and his female counterpart can in the Tantra represent any of the Buddhas and appears in all four colors.