



Shaman of the Glorious Copper-Coloured Mountain

Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche is considered to be the tantric Buddha who first brought Buddhism to Tibet, but to many shamans in the Himalayas he is considered to be the 'first shaman'.

NICHOLAS BREEZE WOOD



Whether seen from a Buddhist or shamanic viewpoint, Padmasambhava is a being who is able to manipulate reality and the beings who dwell in it in a very magical way, and there is no doubt that the teachings left by him have great power.

He is an extremely important figure in Tibetan Buddhism, being the tantric Buddha, and sometimes is referred to as Padmakara or Guru Rinpoche. As the 'First Shaman' he provides a role model for practitioners and the many legends that surround him link back to the pre-historic shamanic world of the Himalayas.

These legends were recorded by his Tibetan consort Yeshe Tsogyal after he came to Tibet in the 9th century, and his birth was predicted by the Buddha, who, before he died, said that one even greater than himself would be born in a lotus flower to teach the ways of tantra.

PADMASAMBHAVA'S LIFE

Guru Rinpoche's story began at the 'Ocean of Milk' or Lake Danakosha in the Land of Odiyana on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, where according to legend, in the reign of king Indrabodhi, he appeared miraculously in a beautiful red lotus blossom, as an eight-year-old child holding a *dorje* (see picture) and a lotus. He immediately began giving teachings to those around.

Indrabodhi the king did not have a son, but had been doing ceremonies and spiritual practices for some time in order to gain one. On the day of a full moon, he opened the doors to his three thousand treasures and gave all the treasure to the poor and needy until it was gone. But still the poor kept coming, even though he had no more to give.

The poor who had not received treasure told the king that if he did not give treasure to them, then all the giving he had done in the past would be meaningless. When the king heard this he decided to get endless treasure to give away, and so he travelled to Lake Danakosha to seek a wish-fulfilling jewel held by Charumati, the daughter of Naga the serpent spirit.

After he had found the jewel, the king came upon the miraculous child in the lotus. The king was so delighted at finding the son he had prayed for, that he took the boy home, made him a prince and named him Padmasambhava, which means 'The Lotus born one'.

The prince grew up and married princess Prabhadhari, but in time realised he would not be able to teach and empower people, or bring them to enlightenment if he remained a prince. So he asked King Indrabodhi's permission to leave the court.

Top: a gilded bronze statue of Guru Rinpoche.

In the complexities of Tibetan Buddhist art he can quite easily be identified by the way he sits and by what he holds.

A *katvanga* (tantric staff) sits in the crook of his left arm, while his left hand holds a *kapala* (a bowl made from the top of a human skull). His right hand holds a *dorje* or *vajra* (diamond thunderbolt), and his hat sprouts three eagle feathers.

His request was refused. So in order to escape, Padmasambhava deliberately let the trident he was carrying fall and kill the son and wife of one of the ministers of the court. This liberated them from the negative karma they were carrying, but because of this 'crime', Padmasambhava was banished.

He travelled to Bodhgaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, as well as many other sacred places, in order to inspire others with the Buddha's teachings. As he travelled he received teachings from many great Buddhist scholars.

He then took princess Mandarava, the daughter of the king of Zahor, as his spiritual partner. The king was outraged, and one day, while begging, Padmasambhava was arrested, and burned alive. But Padmasambhava showed his power by transforming the blazing pyre into a cool lake, in the centre of which he sat on a lotus flower.

This so impressed the king that he allowed his daughter to go with Padmasambhava, and together they went to the mountain cave of Maratika in Nepal. According to legend, it was here that they performed rituals to make themselves immortal.

When they had achieved immortality, they went to convert the people of Padmasambhava's home in Odiyana to Buddhism. Again whilst begging, he was recognised as the banished prince, and was once more burned in a huge pyre of sandalwood.

Yet again he quenched the flames, and both he and Mandarava appeared unharmed on a lotus flower in the centre of a lake. This time they each wore a garland of skulls to symbolise the spiritual goal of freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth.

He was allowed to remain in Odiyana for thirteen years as the king's teacher, and converted the country to Buddhism. After this time there are many legends of his travels and his visits to

he travelled over the whole country, and is said not to have left 'even the space of a horse-hoof' where he didn't walk. As he travelled, he blessed all the mountains, lakes and caves in the land as places where it was possible to gain sacred power

different lands where he conquered spirits and demons, before eventually coming to Tibet.

ARRIVAL IN TIBET

In Tibet, the King, Trisong Deutsen had a longing to spread the teachings of the Buddha, so he invited a great teacher from India, Khenpo Bodhisattva to teach there.

As soon as the people of Tibet heard the Buddhist teachings,

they wanted to make a great temple. However, the old spirits of Tibet interfered, and stopped the temple from being built. So the king sent messengers to invite the renowned master Padmasambhava to come to Tibet to help them.

The king and Padmasambhava met in the year 809 C.E. at the Tamarisk Forest in central Tibet, at a place called Red Rock. Here Padmasambhava performed a ceremony to bring all the gods, spirits and demons of the land under his command.

He then laid the foundation for the great temple of Samye and employed all the gods and demons who had earlier stopped the building, to help him.

In gratitude the king gave Padmasambhava a girl to be his attendant and spiritual partner in rituals. She was called Tsogyal and was in her early teens and already a follower of Buddhism.

Padmasambhava

gradually taught Tsogyal all of his spiritual teachings and rituals, and when she had achieved spiritual maturity, she began to travel on her own, gathering followers.

Padmasambhava remained in Tibet for some years, during which time he travelled over the whole country, and is said not to have left 'even the space of a horse-hoof' where he didn't walk. As he travelled, he blessed all the mountains, lakes and caves in the land as places where it was possible to gain sacred power. He founded the *Nyingma* tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, the oldest school of Buddhism in Tibet.

He also gave many predictions for the future, and concealed countless hidden secret teachings and magical objects, or *terma*. He hid these *terma* to prevent the teachings from being destroyed in the desperate times to come.

For each of these hidden treasures Padmasambhava predicted the time of their finding, the person who would find them, and the person who would keep the teaching or object.

Some of these *terma* are actual physical objects and texts (*sag-ter*), others are teachings that come through visions (*dag-s nang*), or the voices of invisible beings (*snyan-rgyud*). Others are 'mind treasures' (*dgongs-gter*), channelled directly through divine inspiration and automatic writing.

Perhaps the most famous *terma* text written by Padmasambhava is the Bardo Thodol, widely known as the 'Tibetan Book of the Dead'.

Padmasambhava bound all of the spirits in Tibet under oath to serve the Buddhist teachings, and entrusted them to guard the *terma* treasures. He also left physical signs of himself at many places to inspire future generations, such as imprints of his body, hand prints and footprints.

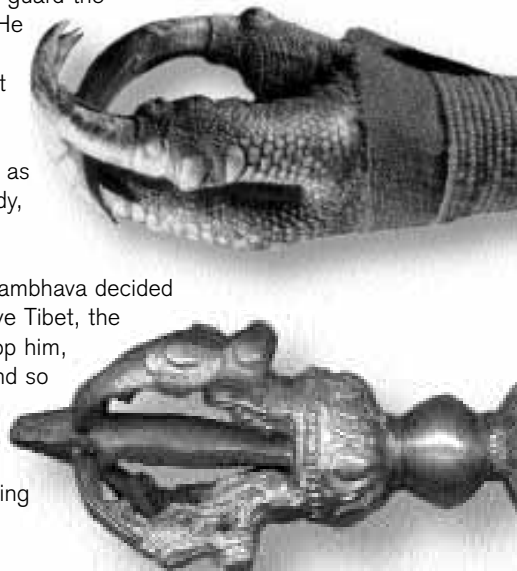
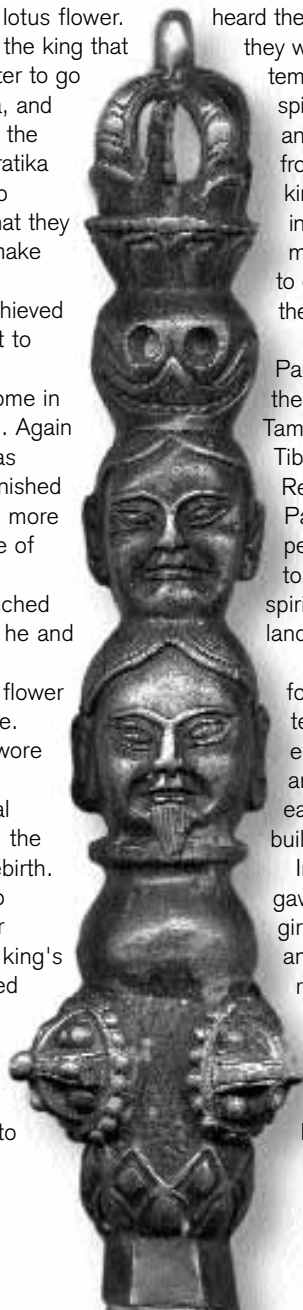
When Padmasambhava decided it was time to leave Tibet, the people tried to stop him, but to no avail. And so he left, riding on a lion, accompanied by lots of spirits making offerings.

Below Left: the *Katvanga*, or tantric staff which Guru Rinpoche carries has a mixture of Buddhist, shamanic and Hindu symbols upon it

The top part of the staff begins with a double dorje which is in effect four stylised eagle claw wands which face the four directions, above this are three human heads, a freshly severed head, a decomposing head and a skull. These represent amongst many other things, the three worlds and the three times (past, present and future)

At the very tip of the staff is generally found a trident, the symbol of Shiva, but on some *katvangas* (such as the one here) there is an extra dorje

Below: An Native American eagle's foot bundle and a dorje to show the similarity between them



Below: a Ngakpa during a ceremony in a Tibetan cave. He is playing a double sided *chod* drum and bell, and blowing a human thigh bone trumpet called a *kangling*

He went to other lands to teach, and eventually reached the summit of the Glorious Copper-coloured Mountain on the mythical continent of *Chamara*, where he is said to live still, full of compassion for all beings.

Tsogyal remained in Tibet and continued to teach and to gather disciples around her. She is considered to be a *dakini* (sky-dancer), which is a female deity who represents the feminine principle of wisdom. Because of this she became known as *Yeshe*

Tsogyal - the title 'Yeshe' means primordial wisdom.

BECOMING THE GURU

Tantric practitioners who follow his teachings today, seek to associate themselves closely with him - in effect, to *become* Guru Rinpoche. This is done in a variety of ways, the easiest being the recitation of his mantra:

*OM AH HUNG BENZRA
GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG.*

The practitioners can also visualise themselves as Guru Rinpoche in the centre of a *mandala*, (a circular sacred map of creation) imagining the whole of the ordinary reality world around them as the magical 'pure land' of Padmasambhava.

This helps them to see beyond the illusory nature of this world, and gain access to the spiritual power and understanding that comes from the realisation of the greater reality.

They can also sing power songs that summon Padmasambhava, often these are accompanied by drumming on the double-headed *chod* drum. The most famous of these songs is The Vajra Seven Line Prayer, which is the most sacred and important prayer in the Nyingma tradition. There are many melodies to this song, and many practitioners repeat it hundreds of thousands of times, singing or speaking it during all their waking hours, making it their main prayer, life, and contemplation.

TANTRIC SHAMANS

The practices associated with Padmasambhava are used by the tantric practitioners of Tibet. There are three classes of practitioner: the *ngakpa* (tantric magician), the *pawo* or *lhapa*, (more like a shaman or oracle), and the *lama* (who takes a priestly role and is usually a monk).

Ngakpas perform healings, exorcise spirits and psychopomp the dead, using their ability to perform ceremony, their mastery of *mantras*, (sounds or spells of power) and their ability to command spirits.

They have a considerable shamanic role, as do the pawo. The main difference between them however is that a ngakpa will perform ceremony to contact the

spirits, whereas a pawo will become possessed by the spirits themselves.

SPIRIT FLIGHT OF THE PAWO

Most pawo see themselves as Buddhists, even if their shamanic techniques are far older. The pawo are characterised by their shamanic spirit flight or journey.

After entering into an altered state of consciousness or trance brought about through drumming and chanting, the pawo's *namshe* (consciousness) comes out of their physical body through the top of their skull, and goes into one of the three *melong* (mirrors) arranged on their altar.

These three *melong* represent gateways to three other worlds of spirits; the *lha* (celestial spirits), the *tsen* (earth and mountain spirits), and the *lu* (subterranean water spirits). These three types of spirits correspond to the three shamanic worlds of sky, earth, and underworld.

This spirit flight, like any shamanic journey, gives a pawo direct access to the three worlds, The ngakpa however, performs ceremonies which can be seen as 'phone calls' to these other worlds, rather than actual visits to them.

When the pawo is acting as an oracle, at the moment when their *namshe* leaves their physical body, their guardian spirit, or another spirit being (also called pawo), enters the now vacant body and speaks through it, answering questions.

THE FIRST SHAMAN

Because Buddhism became so dominant in Tibet, the older shamanic folk traditions have, over the centuries, blended with the more dominant Buddhist traditions.

Because of this blending, Padmasambhava - the Buddhist teacher - has been assimilated into these older, more shamanic traditions as the 'first shaman'.

From whichever viewpoint, Buddhist or shamanic. As the 'First Shaman' he provides a role model and link back to the pre-Buddhist shamanic world, and as a Buddhist teacher, he brings magical perspectives into the intellectual and spiritual powerhouse that is Tibetan Buddhism.

THE VAJRA 7 LINE PRAYER

Hung!*

**Orgyen yul-kyi nup-chang tsham,
Pema kesar dong-po la,
Ya-tshen ch'og-ki ngodrup nyey,
Pema jugne zhey-su trag,
Khortu khadro mangpo kor.
Khyed-kyi jeysu dag-drub kyee,
Chin-kyee lab-ch'ir shegsu sol,
Guru pema siddhi hung.**

**(a sacred sound or mantra to invoke the essence of Guru Rinpoche)*

Hung!

**In the northwest of Odiyana
Born on the flower of a lotus:
Endowed with the most
marvellous attainment;
Renowned as the Lotus-Born;
Surrounded by many spirits,
I practice, following your lead.
Please come to bestow blessings.
Padmasambhava, Master,
Sacred power please
bestow to me.**

