

Foreword¹

H.E. Tenzin Namdak

There has always been a very close connection between the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies and Yungdrung Bon. I have been shown great kindness by the members of that University, and this is something I shall never forget. I also have very warm memories of the scholars I met in Cambridge University and the friends I made in Scotland during the three years I spent in the United Kingdom. Since I was forced to leave my own country, Britain has been like a second home to me.

The religious and secular culture of Zhangzhung and Tibet deserve systematic research. All areas of Bon that are subsumed within the Nine Ways should be understood as comprising the civilisation of the Bonpos. The Nine Ways of Bon are divided into the Four Ways of Cause and the Five Ways of Result. The first of the nine ways, The Shen of Prediction deals with: sortilege, astrology, protective and healing rituals (*Tô*), and Medicine and Diagnosis. Just to take the example of *Tô*: people sometimes perform these rituals casually, without holding them in high regard. That is a mistake. There is an enormous variety of these rituals, with a wide range of musical form, performance and structure. The purpose of *Tô* rituals is to put to rights anything that might be wrong in the world: treating illnesses, mending discord, helping whatever lives in the visible realm and bringing harmony to the Eight Categories of the Gods and Demons of the invisible realm. There may be a great deal of local variation in the components of the Shen of Prediction, but they all have a common origin in the teachings of the Enlightened One, Tönpa Shenrab, and flourish in many lands and in different languages.

Secondly, the Way of the Shen of the Visual World is concerned with offerings known as *Dö*. This Way is not just for the benefit of those living in the visible world: there is also a vast range of ritual activities concerned with offerings and oblations to the territorial divinities and place gods of the invisible realm. Among these ceremonies there are numerous rituals for ensuring harmony in the divine and natural world.

¹ This preface/foreword is an abridged version of an address given at the conference through the medium of a video recording.

The third Way, the Way of the Shen of Illusion, contains methods for repelling hostile powers that cannot be dealt with by the techniques mentioned earlier: for example, in the case of demons that incite discord, we traditionally invoke the support of the gods and serpent-spirits. These rituals offer a means of restoring well-being. But if all these techniques fail, the aid of the gods and demons of the phenomenal world must be engaged, and the support of the tutelary divinities, the gods, goddesses, the dakinis and all the Bon protectors must be enlisted.

All the practices I have mentioned so far involve a variety of activities and have various names, and each has its own origins and accompanying explanations. But in sum, these all originated in the time of Zhangzhung, and they have continued intact down to the present day. For historical reasons people claim certain traditions, and not others, as their own, and apply them in wide variety of languages. But whatever the case, they are essentially about the same thing. Because the Four Ways of Cause are so widespread they can be seen as comprising the indigenous religion, traditions and customs of Tibet. Some of these practices are preserved in religion, others through folk traditions.

We are all born, and then we die. The Fourth Way, that of the Shen of Existence, is concerned with helping the deceased in the space between death and rebirth and for generating good fortune for the living and protecting them from harm. Tibetans have certain beliefs about what happens when someone dies, and in order to dispel these concerns certain rituals and activities for generating merit have to be performed, and measures that benefit the living and the dead should be taken.

Now, to come to the Ways of Result: the Fifth and Sixth Ways are respectively those of the Virtuous Adherers and the Way of the Ascetics. Both of these are Sutra traditions, containing the so-called 'Great Way' and 'Lesser Way'. The 'Lesser Way' is concerned exclusively with achieving wellbeing and liberation for oneself – which is precisely why it is called the Lesser Way. The Great Way is for those who are not content with assuring their own well being, but who realise that looking after their own interests while there are other living beings who are suffering is not a particularly noble achievement. Therefore they mainly approach liberation on the basis of great compassion and generating the thought of enlightenment.

The Seventh and Eighth Ways, the Way of the Pure Sound of White "A" and the Way of the Primordial Shen are respectively the first and second ways concerned with secret tantras. There are various tantric methods of accumulations and offerings on the basis of such tantric practices. Tantra requires mental concentration in addition to the

ritual performance, according to whatever tantric cycle is involved. The foundation of this practice is provided by the Three Contemplations: the Contemplation of Suchness of Absolute Nature; the All-illuminating Contemplation, and the Contemplation of Cause. If these three are not cultivated in proper measure, it is very difficult to achieve anything at all. Owing to local circumstances these traditions have mutated over the course of time, and careful investigation is required to verify whether these activities correspond to the teachings of the Enlightened One, Tönpa Shenrab, and one should of course first have a thorough understanding of the traditions in question. Customs of this sort developed in response to an ever-increasing demand on the part of communities, and they were satisfied with merely this much. But they should not be seen as representative of Bon tantric teachings.

Dzogchen, the Great Perfection, the highest Way, is the pinnacle of all the Ways. Our tradition has four major cycles. Each of these consists of a complete set of teachings comprising the main features and ancillary practices. Each one contains complete instructions that can lead to the attainment of enlightenment in a single lifetime. Since it is a pure supreme view beyond the conceptual mind, it cannot be changed or modified by the mind, and therefore cannot be claimed as one's own view or anyone else's view. As for the main purpose, the quest for the Base, one should try to find the absolute natural state of existence that cannot be modified by the conceptual mind. The attainment of that state is recognised as the view of the Supreme Way of the Great Perfection. The state that has been thus attained cannot be modified by conceptual thoughts; if one tries to articulate it in words it can't be spoken, and if one tries to think about it, it can't be thought about – this is what I mean by transcending the conceptual mind.

All this, in sum, is what the Nine Ways are about. Research on any aspect of the Nine Ways of Bon would be very worthwhile, but a study of the whole system would be very difficult indeed, if only because of the difficulty of the language and the huge amount of literature. But Bon is a vast treasure-house, and even focusing on one specific area could yield extraordinary results. There are world-famous universities, with good resources, and scholars who know the relevant languages, and research in this field is something I heartily welcome.