

TIBETAN g-YUNG-DRUNG BON MONSATERY AT DOLANJI

I. The Tibetan Bonpo Foundation

Before and in greater numbers after the Lhasa uprising on the 10th March 1959, large groups of Tibetans, men, women and children fled Tibet and came to India. With the help of the Indian Government and several international organizations, a number of refugee camps were established in different places along the Himalayan Range and as far south as the State of Karnataka. It is estimated that the present number of Tibetan refugees in India and Nepal is about one hundred thousand. Approximately one per cent of this total are the Tibetans who profess the Bon Religion and are known to other Tibetans as Bonpos.

Soon after the Tibetans came to India, a group of Bonpo Lamas (*bla-ma*), monks and laymen gathered in Kulu-Manali where they were employed mainly as road workers. Due to climatic differences between India and Tibet, and the very little help they received from charitable organizations, their circumstances were very difficult. A fair number of them died including Sherab Lodro (*Shes-rab blo-gros* 1935-1963), the abbot of Menri (*sMan-ri*) the chief Bonpo monastery in Tibet. From the mid seventies a determined effort was made to establish a proper refugee settlement. The task of finding the land and funds was entrusted to Tendzin Namdak (*bsTan-'dzin nam-dag*), the chief tutor (*dPon-slob*) of Menri monastery. With help and sponsorship from the Catholic Relief Service, he found and bought a piece of land at Dolanji, near Solan in Himachal Pradesh. In 1967 the settlement was formally established and registered with the Indian Government under the name of the 'Tibetan Bonpo Foundation'. About seventy families transferred from Manali and each received a house and a small piece of land, the size of which depended on family size.

The Tibetan Bonpo Foundation from the time of its founding had its own constitution and a group of men elected to handle administration, the abbot of the monastery acting as president. Their main concerns are the distribution of land, housing, family problems, disputes between neighbours, helping the poor and sick, and the education of children. The new settlement at Dolanji has been named Thobgyel Sarpa (*Thob-rgyal gear-pa*) after the village Thobgyel which was near the monastery of Menri in Tsang Province (*gTsang*), Tibet. Most of the Tibetans in the settlement come from the area of Mount Kailash, Upper Tsang, Hor, Kongpo (*rKong-po*), Dege (*sDe-dge*), Amdo (*A-mdo*) and Gyarong (*rGya-rong*).

After the death of Sherab Lodro of Menri, the abbot of Yungdrung Ling (*gYung-drung-gling*), the second most important monastery in Tibet, became the spiritual head of the Bonpo community in India. He came to Dolanji with a group of monks to found a new monastic community. He built several small houses for the monks and a small chapel for religious observances. In 1969 he arranged a ceremony to elect the successor of the deceased abbot of Menri. The names of all the Bonpo geshes (*dGe-bshes*) were written on paper and placed in a vase. At the end of the ceremony which consisted mainly of prayers and invocations to the Bonpo deities, the vase was churned until one name fell out. The lot fell upon Sangye Tendzin (*Sangs-rgyas bstan-'dzin*) Jongdong (*lJong-ldong*), born 1928, and at the time of his election working at the University of Oslo, Norway. Soon after his election he was installed as 33rd abbot of Menri and received the name Lungtog Tenpe Nyima (*Lung-rtogs bstan-pa'i nyi-ma*). For one year, he and the abbot of Yungdrung Ling worked together.

Since the death of the abbot of Yungdrung Ling in 1969, Sangye Tendzin (who continues to use his former name) assumed the spiritual leadership of all the exiled Bonpos. As abbot of Menri monastery in Tibet, he is also spiritual head of the Bonpo monasteries in Tibet and Nepal. From the time he took charge of Dolanji monastic community, he erected more houses for monks, built a new library, the abbot's residence (*bla-brang*), new premises for the monastery kitchen and organized the monks into a full scale religious community, based on the monastic rules (*'dul-ba*) as outline in the Bonpo Canon and described in detail in the rules of Menri monastery. The main temple, the foundations of which

were laid in 1969 was completed in 1978 and named Pelshenton Menri Ling (*dPal gShen-ston sMan-ri-gling*).

The whole monastic complex is embraced under the name of 'Bonpo Monastic Centre' and forms a part of the Tibetan Bonpo Foundation. The main purpose of the Monastic Centre is the pursual of a strict monastic life, education of monks, and performance of religious ceremonies. Additional activities include publishing Bonpo texts, painting thangkas (*thang-ka*), running two medical dispensaries, one based on traditional Tibetan and one on modern Western medicines, cultivating their small piece of land, continuing the construction of accomodation and sending monks to help other Bonpo groups in India and Nepal with their spiritual needs. The Monastic Centre is maintained solely by voluntary donations and offerings received for the performance of religious ceremonies. The small profit from book publishing is used to publish the books required for teaching.

This monastic community, in fact the only Bonpo monastery in India, consists of three groups of men. The first group consists of twenty lamas and monks who came from Tibet. Their main activities are the religious ceremonies in the houses of laymen, private religious practices, and participation in all the rituals which take place in the monastery. Among this group are several monks who in their lifetime have followed the special methods of spiritual perfection according to the Dzogchen (*rDzogs-chen*) and Cho (*gCod*) traditions.

The second group consists of 35 young men who took their religious vows in this monastery. They are being educated in the Bonpo doctrines and trained to live according to Bonpo monastic rules. If they attend to all their duties, the monastery provides them with a mid-day meal, afternoon tea, and soup (*thug-pa*) in the evening. Clothes and morning tea they provide for themselves. The fundamental education lasts for eight years and concludes with the geshes (*dGe-bshes*) examinations. If successful they are awarded the geshes degree, approximate to a doctorate in religion in the western universities. They syllabus consists of dialectics (*mTshan-nyid*), logic (*Tshad-ma*), wisdom texts (*phar-phyin*), basic and gradual stages of inner progress (*Sa-lam*), philosophy of the Middle Path (*dBu-ma*), cosmology and

metaphysics (*mDzod-phug*), monastic discipline (*'Dul-ba*), *tantras* (*rGyud*), Great Perfection (*rDzogs-chen*), history (*Chos-'byung*), poetry (*sDeb-sbyor*), astrology (*rTsis*), and Tibetan grammar.

In 1967 when the first monks came to Dolanji, the teaching was done by Pönlob Sangye Tendzin (*dPon-slob Sangs-rgyas bstan - 'dzin*), the former grand tutor of Menri, and his successor Pönlob Tendzin Namdak, the founder of the settlement. Due to various difficulties, especially the lack of basic books, the teaching was partial and consisted mainly of training the young monks in the practices of the Dzogchen traditions, especially the Zhangzhung Nyengyü (*Zhang-zhung sNyan-rgyud*), which is considered of prime importance. One year later Pönlob Sangye Tendzin died and Pönlob Tendzin Namdak assumed full responsibilities for the education of the younger generation of monks. By 1978 a sufficient number of basic books was published and premises for use as a classroom were usable. In that year the full training in all the Bon doctrines began. The first group of monks will finish the cycle of studies by 1986.

The third group of monastery residents consists of boys between seven and fourteen years old. They receive primary education at the Central Government School in the village near the monastery. As well as the normal school syllabus including Hindi and English language, they also study Tibetan grammar and history. Outside school hours they take part in all ceremonies in the temple, receive instructions in religion, Tibetan calligraphy, painting, and music for religious use such as learning to play cymbals, drums and shawms. During the long winter-vacations they receive instructions which serve as a general preparation for the studies pursued by the second group of monks.

They have a separate kitchen and take responsibility for collecting wood and preparing their own meals. All boys, whether orphaned or not are maintained by the monastery. The parents are not obliged to pay for their sons' subsistence but contributions are welcomed. When a boy joins the community he has his head shaved and receives a new name in a short ceremony called *Tshe-ring*, which is a ritual for his wellbeing. After this ceremony he wears monastic robes when he attends ceremonies,

and ordinary clothes for school and daily life outside the temple. This group is not bound by vows until the age of eighteen when they must either take religious vows or leave the monastery to continue life in the world. They are however free to take vows before eighteen if they personally wish.

II. A SHORT HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF BON RELIGION

THE ORIGIN OF BON

The Bonpos maintain that Bon originated in the land of Olmo Lungring ('*Ol-mo lung-ring*), a part of a larger country called Tazig (*rTag-gzigs*). 'Ol symbolizes the unborn; Mo the undiminishing; Lung the prophetic words of Tonpa Shenrab (*sTon-pa gShenrab*) the founder of Bon; and Ring his everlasting compassion. Olmo Lungring constitutes one third of the existing world and is situated to the west of Tibet. It is described as an eight petalled lotus under a sky which appears like an eight spoked wheel. In the centre rises Mount Yungdrung Gutseg (*gYung-drung dgu-brtsegs*), 'Pyramid of Nine Svastikas'. The svastika is the symbol of permanence and indestructability. The nine svastikas piled up represent the Nine Ways of Bon. At the base of Mount Yungdrung spring four rivers, flowing towards the four cardinal directions. The mountain is surrounded by temples, cities and parks. To the south is the palace Barpo Sogye (*Bar-po so-brgyad*) where Tonpa Shenrab was born. To the west and north are the palaces in which lived the wives and children of Tonpa Shenrab. A temple named Shampo Lhatse (*Sham-po lha-rtse*) is to the east. The complex of palaces, rivers and parks with Mount Yungdrung in the centre constitutes the inner region (*Nang-gling*) of Olmo Lungring. The intermediate region (*Bar-gling*) consists of twelve cities, four of which are towards the cardinal directions. The third region includes the outer lands (*mTha'-gling*). These three regions are encircled by an ocean and again by a range of snowy mountains. The access to Olmo Lungring is gained by the so called arrow way (*mDa'-lam*). Before his visit to Tibet, Tonpa Shenrab shot an arrow thus creating a passage through the mountain range.

This very sophisticated description of Olmo Lungring has been tentatively related by some scholars to different geographical locations. Some see it as a description of Mount Kailash (*Mt Ti-se*) and

the four great rivers that spring from its base; China being the land to the east, India to the south, Orgyan to the west, and Khotan to the north. To other scholars the description seems to resemble the geography of the Middle East and Persia in the time of Cyrus the Great. To a believing Bonpo the question of the geographic identification of Olmo Lungring does not come so much to the foreground as does its symbology which is clearly made use of to indicate the supramandane origin of his religion. Symbolic descriptions which combine history, geography and mythology are well known phenomena in ancient scriptures. The description of the universe with Mount Meru supporting the sky and the Four Chief Continents to the four cardinal points and this earth as the southern continent (*Jambudvīpa*) is another similar example.

THE FOUNDER AND HIS TEACHINGS

The founder of Bon religion is the Lord Shenrab Mibo (*qShen-rab mi-bo*). In past ages there were three brothers, Dagpa (*Dag-pa*), Salba (*qSal-ba*), and Shepa (*Shes-pa*), who studied the Bon doctrines in the heaven named Sridpa (*Srid-pa*) Yesang (*Ye-sangs*), under the Bon sage Bumtri Loqi Chechan (*'Bum-khri qlog-gi-lce-can*). When their studies were completed, they visited the God of Compassion, Shenlha Ökar (*qShen-lha 'od-dkar*) and asked him how they could help the living beings submerged in the misery and sorrow of suffering. He advised them to act as guides to mankind in three successive ages of the world. To follow his advice the eldest brother Dagpa completed his work in the past world-age. The second brother Salba took the name Shenrab and became the teacher and guide of the present world-age. The youngest brother Shepa will come to teach in the next world-age.

The Lord Shenrab was born in the Barpo Sogyé Palace to the south of Mount Yungdrung. He was born a prince, married while young and had children. At the age of 31 he renounced the world and lived in austerity, teaching the doctrine. During his whole life his efforts to propagate the Bon religion were obstructed by the demon Khyabpa (*Khyab-pa*) Lagring (*Lag-ring*). This demon fought to destroy or impede the work of Tonpa Shenrab until he was eventually converted and became his disciple. Once, pursuing the demon to regain his stolen horses, Tonpa Shenrab arrived in Tibet; it was his only visit to Tibet. There he imparted some instructions concerning the performance of rituals but, on the whole, found the land unprepared to receive fuller teachings.

Before leaving Tibet he prophesied that all his teachings would flourish in Tibet when the time was ripe. Tonpa Shenrab departed this life at the age of 82.

There are three written accounts of the life of Tonpa Shenrab. The earliest and shortest one is known as *Dodu (mDo-'dus)* - 'Epitome of Aphorisms'. The second which is in two volumes is called *Zermik (gZer-mig)* - 'Piercing Eye'. These two accounts date from the 10th and 11th centuries respectively. The third and largest is in twelve volumes known shortly as *Zhiji (gZhi-brjid)* - 'The Glorious'. It belongs to the category of scriptures known as 'spiritual transmission' (*bsNyan-rgyud*). It is believed to have been dictated to *Loden Nyingpo (bLo-ldan snying-po)* who lived in the 14th century.

The doctrines which were taught by Lord Shenrab and recorded in these three accounts are divided into two systems. One classification is called *Gozhi Dzönga (sGo-bzhi mdzod-lnga)*, 'The Four Portals and the Treasury as Fifth'. These are:

1. *Chabkar (Chab-dkar)* - White Waters; it contains the esoteric or higher tantric practices.
2. *Chabnag (Chab-nag)* - Black Waters; it includes narratives and various rites, magic and ordinary, such as death, funeral, illness and ransom rituals.
3. *Phanyul ('Phan-yul)* - The Land of Phan; it explains the monastic rules and gives exposition of philosophical concepts.
4. *Ponse (dPon-gsas)* - The Lordly Guide; it contains the Great Perfection practices (*rDzogs-chen*).
5. *Thothog (mTho-thog)* - The Treasury; it comprises the essential aspects of all the Four Portals.

The second classification is called *Thegpa Rimgu'i Bon (Theg-pa rim-dgu'i Bon)*, 'The Bon of the Nine Successive Stages' or simply 'The Nine Ways of Bon'. The first four are the ways of cause (*rGyud kyi theg-pa*), the next four are the ways of result (*'Bras-bu'i theg-pa*), and the ninth is the Great Perfection (*rDzogs-chen*). Examined individually their subject matter is as follows:

1. The Way of the Shen of Prediction (*Phyva-gshen theg-pa*); it

describes four different ways of prediction: sortilege (*mo*), astrology (*rTsis*), ritual (*gTo*) and examination of causes (*dPyad*).

2. The Way of the Shen of the Visual World (*sNang-gshen theg-pa*); it explains the origin and nature of gods and demons living in this world, the methods of exorcisms and ransoms of various kinds.
3. The Way of the Shen of Illusion (*'Phrul-gshen theg-pa*); it contains the rites for the disposing of adverse powers.
4. The Way of the Shen of Existence (*Srid-gshen theg-pa*); it is concerned with the state after death (*Bar-do*) and methods of guiding living beings towards the final liberation or a better rebirth.
5. The Way of the Virtuous Followers (*dGe-bsnyen theg-pa*); it guides those who follow the ten virtues and ten perfections.
6. The Way of the Monkhhood (*Drang-srong theg-pa*); here are described the rules of monastic discipline.
7. The Way of Pure Sound (*A-dkar theg-pa*); it gives an exposition of higher tantric practices, the theory of realization through the mystic circle (*mandala*) and the rituals which form an integral part of these practices.
8. The Way of Primeval Shen (*Ye-gshen theg-pa*); it stresses the need for a suitable master, place and occasion for tantric practices. Here the layout of the mystic circle is described in detail together with instructions for meditation on particular deities.
9. The Supreme Way (*bLa-med theg-pa*); it is the highest attainment of the Great Perfection (*rDzogs-chen*).

THE PROPAGATION OF BON IN ZHANG-ZHUNG AND TIBET

The first Bon scriptures were brought to Zhang-zhung by six disciples of Mucho Demdrug (*Mu-cho ldem-drug*), the successor of Tonpa Shenrab. They were first translated into Zhang-zhung language and then

later into Tibetan. The works included in the Bonpo Canon as we know it now are written in Tibetan language but a number of them, especially the older ones, retain the titles and at times whole passages in Zhang-zhung language.

Until the seventh century Zhang-zhung existed as a separate state which comprised the land to the west of the Central Tibetan Provinces of U (*dBus*) and Tsang (*gTsang*) and generally known as Western Tibet. The historical evidence is incomplete but there are some reliable indications that it may have extended over the vast area from Gilgit in the west to the lake of Namtsho (*gNam-mtsho*) in the east, and from Khotan in the north to Mustang in the south. The capital of Zhang-zhung was a place called Khyunglung Ngulkhar (*Khyung-lung dngul-mkhar*) - 'The Silver Palace of the Garuḍa Valley' - the ruins of which are to be found in the upper Suttlej Valley to the south-west of Mount Kailash. The people of Zhang-zhung spoke a language which is classified among the Tibeto-Burmese group of Sino-Tibetan languages.

The country seems to have been ruled by a dynasty of kings which ended in the eighth century when the last king Ligmirya (*Lig-myi-rhya* or *Lig-mi-rgya*) was assassinated and Zhang-zhung became an integral part of Tibet. Since the annexation Zhang-zhung became gradually Tibetanized and its language, culture and many beliefs were integrated into the general frame of Tibetan culture. Through Zhang-zhung, which was geographically situated near the great cultural centres of Central Asia such as Gilgit and Khotan, many religious and philosophical concepts infiltrated Tibet.

With the increasing interest in Buddhist religion, the founding of Samye (*bSam-yas*) monastery in 779 A.D., and the establishment of Buddhism as the principal religion, the Bon religion was generally discouraged and serious attempts were made to eradicate it. However, the adherents of Bon among the nobility and especially among the common people, who for generations had followed the Bon beliefs, retained their religious convictions and Bon survived. During the seventh and eighth centuries which were particularly difficult times, many Bonpo priests fled Central Tibet, having first concealed their scriptures for fear of their destruction, and to preserve them for the future generations. Drenpa Namkha (*Dran-pa nam-mkha'*), one of the greatest Bonpo personalities of that time, embraced Buddhist religion out of fear of being killed and for the sake of preserving in secret the Bonpo teachings.

From the eighth to the eleventh centuries we know practically nothing of the developments among the Bonpos. The revival of Bon began with the discovery of a number of important texts by Shenchen Luga (*gShen-chen klu-dga'* 996-1035) in the year 1017 A.D. With him the Bon religion emerged as a fully systematized religious system. Shenchen Luga was born in the clan of Shen, which descended from Kongtsha Wangden (*Kong-tsha dbang-ldan*), one of the sons of Tonpa Shenrab. The descendants of this important Bonpo family still live in Tibet.

Shenchen Luga had a large following. To three of his disciples he entrusted the task of continuing three different traditions. To the first one, Druchen Namkha Yungdrung (*'Bru-chen nam-mkha' g-yung-drung*), born in the clan of Dru which migrated to Tibet from Druzha (*'Bru-zha* is the Tibetan name for Gilgit), he entrusted the studies of cosmology and metaphysics (*mDzod-phug* and *Gab-rpa*). Namkha Yungdrung's disciple founded the monastery of Yeru Bensakha (*gYas-ru dben-sa-kha*) in 1072. This monastery remained a great centre of learning until 1386 when it was badly damaged by floods and later on was abandoned. With the decline of Yeru Bensakha the Dru family continued to sponsor the Bon religion but it came to extinction in the 19th century when, for the second time, a reincarnation on the Panchen Lama was found in this family. (The first reincarnation was the second Panchen Lama (b. 1663) and the second the fifth Panchen Lama (b. 1854)).

The second disciple, Zhuye Legpo (*Zhu-yas legs-po*), was assigned to maintain the Dzogchen teachings and practices. He found the monastery of Kyikhar Rizhing (*sKyid-mkhar ri-zhing*). The descendants of the Zhu family now live in India.

The third disciple, Paton Palchog (*sPa-ston dpal-mchog*), took responsibility for upholding the tantric teachings. The members of the Pa family moved from Tsang to Khams where they still live.

Meukhepa Palchen (*rMe'u-mkhas-pa dpal-chen* b. 1052) who came from the Meu clan founded the Zangri (*bZang-ri*) monastery which also became a centre for philosophical studies. Thus during the period from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries the Bonpos had four important centres of studies, all of which were in Tsang Province.

At the beginning of the 15th century the religious studies were strengthened by the founding of Menri monastery in 1405 by the great

Bonpo teacher, Nyamed Sherab Gyaltshan (*mNyam-med shes-rab rgyal-mtshan* 1356-1415). Menri monastery and the two mentioned below remained the most important centres of studies until the Chinese take over of Tibet in 1959. The monastery of Yungdrung Ling was founded in 1834 and, soon afterwards, the monastery of Kharna (*mKhar-sna*), both in the vicinity of Menri. With these monasteries as centres of study and religious inspiration, many monasteries were established throughout the whole of Tibet (except the Central Province of U), especially in Khyungpo, Khams, Amdo, Gyarong and Hor. By the beginning of the twentieth century there were three hundred and thirty Bonpo monasteries in Tibet.

THE BONPO SCRIPTURES

The Bonpo scriptures are divided into two major groups, Kanjur (*bKa' - 'gyur*) - the 'Word of Shenrab', and Katen (*bKa' -rten*) or the works dependent on the Kanjur, jointly referred to as the Canon. The Kanjur consists of one hundred and thirteen volumes which are divided into four sections: *mDo*, volumes 1-46; *'Bum*, volumes 47-66; *rGyud*, volumes 67-107; and *mDzod*, volumes 108-113. The *mDo* or treatises comprise the texts which deal with monastic rules, cosmogony, biographical literature and prayers. *'Bum* means 100,000 and is an alternative name given to the texts normally known as *Phar-phyin* or Prajñāpāramitā, the 'Perfect Wisdom'. The *rGyud* volumes contain the tantric teachings. The *mDzod* or 'Treasure' texts comprise the Dzogchen expositions and practices.

The Katen consisting of 293 volumes contains commentaries on the Kanjur, rituals, works on art, logic, medicine, astrology, and poetry.

THE BONPO PANTHEON

The Bonpo pantheon contains a great number of deities. Their classification is rather complex and can be done in several different ways. Every ritual cycle has its own complete set of divinities, the method of their visualization and worship. In the Bonpo, tantras are explained in detail, different sets of divinities belonging to a particular tantric cycle. One classification divides the deities into three groups: tranquil (*zhi-ba*), wrathful (*khro-bo*), and fierce (*phur-pa*). There is a group of deities of 'Light and Darkness' described in the Bonpo cosmogony.

The highest ranking deities are Kuntu Zangpo (*Kun-tu bzang-po*) who abides in the Perfect Sphere, Shenlha Ökar (*gShen-lha 'od-dkar*) of the Enjoyment Sphere, and the Lord Shenrab (*gShen-rab*) who is the teacher of the present world-age. The most important female deity is Satri Ersang (*Sa-trig er-sangs*), the 'Mother of All Beings', who is also known as Chamma (*Byams-ma*), the 'Loving Mother'. There is a set of one thousand Buddhas and of the Buddhas of the Three Times, past, present, and future. Then there are the guardian deities known as the Protectors of the Word (*bka'-skyong*). The most important of them are Machog Sridpe Gyalmo (*Ma-mchog srid-pa'i rgyal-mo*), Midud Champa Trago (*Mi-bdud 'byams-pa khrag-mgo*), and Tsangod Hurpa (*bTsan-rgod hur-pa*). The most general division of all the deities is the one which distinguishes between the gods of the higher spheres (*'Jid-rten las 'das-pa'i lha*), and the demi-gods and minor deities who remain active in this world (*'Jig-rten-pa'ilha*). To the second group belongs a whole host of mountain gods, local gods (*Sa-bdag*), evil demons (*gNyen*), female demons (*Ma-mo*), and many other spirits and sprites such as *'Dre*, *Sri*, *kLu* and the like.

THE RELIGIOUS VOWS

The Bonpos make a clear distinction between the highest realities of the Perfect Sphere and the phenomenal existence (*sNang-ba*) which is this world of imperfection and sorrow. The living beings who exist in this world can be born in one of the Six Realms into which the world is divided. The three higher realms are those of gods (*lha*), men (*mi*), and titans (*lha-ma-yin*). The three lower realms of rebirth are the animals (*byol-song*), tormented spirits (*yi-dags*), and hell-beings (*dmyal-ba*). All living beings born in this world are imperfect. The law of causation and the effects of imperfect deeds in previous existences bring them back to birth again and again. It is by good actions and a virtuous life that one achieves ever higher levels of spiritual perfection and once totally purified and thus freed from the laws which bind one to this imperfect world, one attains to the highest realities which are the spheres of all the Perfect Buddhas (*Sangs-rgyas*). The methods of reaching this highest goal were taught by Tonpa Shenrab himself and by successive Bonpo sages.

The Bon religion encourages all men to live a life of virtue and to strive towards the highest spiritual perfection. The most noble way to practice religion is to embark on a life of monkhood. A layman can also strive for perfection, but it is the monastic life which offers

one the best chance of attaining the levels of spiritual perfection. Through the centuries, the monastic life has formed an essential part of the Bonpo religion.

There are four grades of religious vows, two lower and two higher. The two lower ones are called nyenne (*bsNyen-gnas*) and genyen (*dGe-bsnyen*). They are normally taken by laymen who want to practice religion in a more perfect way. When taken by monks they are considered to form an initial stage of their religious life. These two kinds of vows can be taken for any period of time. The vows of nyenne are four in number and are called the root vows (*rTsa-ba'i sdom-pa*). They are listed below as the first four of the monks' vows. The vows of genyen include the four root vows and one vow of one's own choice, for example, to abstain from alcohol.

The monastic initiation proper (*rab-byung*) begins by taking the vows of tsangtsug (*gTsang-gtsug*) consisting of twenty five vows. Before taking these vows, a person is examined before the monastic community by questioning. When found worthy his hair is cut and he receives monastic robes and different items which a monk should possess: begging bowl, mendicant's staff, needle box, rosary, vase, and shaving blade. Next he receives a new name. After that he takes the vows.

The first four vows are called the root vows. They are:

1. To abstain from taking life.
2. To abstain from taking what is not given.
3. To abstain from false speech.
4. To abstain from unlawful sexual behaviour.

The next six refer to the six unvirtuous ways of behaving (*mi-dge-ba-drug*) These vows are:

5. Avoidance of idle speech.
6. Avoidance of bad language.
7. Avoiding causing division among people.
8. Avoiding wicked thoughts about others.
9. Avoiding poisoning his mind by evil intentions.
10. Avoiding abandoning his religion.

The next four refer to diet. He promises:

11. Not to drink alcohol.

12. Not to eat meat.
13. Not to eat garlic.
14. Not to take food after midday.

The next six concern the manner of sitting and worldly possessions:

15. To avoid sitting on high seats.
16. To avoid using colourful seat coverings.
17. To avoid jewelled and decorated seats.
18. Not to accept gold or silver.
19. Not to use ornaments or perfumes.
20. Not to participate in worldly celebrations and festivals.

The last five are called the additional vows:

21. He will cut his hair and finger nails.
22. He will keep clean and wash regularly.
23. He will carry and use only the personal items of a monk.
24. He will wear only his monastic robes.
25. He will use his new name.

A fully ordained monk (*drang-srong*) takes 250 vows which are fundamentally a detailed elaboration of the tsangtsug vows. The nuns take 360 vows.

Along with the monastic life, there are special methods of practicing and pursuing the higher levels of spiritual perfections. Amongst the Bonpos the most highly esteemed practices are those of the Great Perfection (*rDzogs-chen*) traditions. There are three different methods of meditation called the Atri (*A-khrid*) system, the Nyengyu (*sNyan-rgyud*) (oral transmission), and the Dzogchen itself. Another system of meditation also in use is called Cho (*gCod*), 'the destruction of ego'.

THE MOST IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES DURING THE YEAR

Roman numerals refer to the Tibetan month and Arabic numerals to the days of the month. Since the calendar is lunar, it is difficult to give western equivalents. The problem involved is similar to that of calculating the date of Easter in the Christian calendar. The Tibetan New Year generally falls between mid February and March.

- I. 4-5; *Me-tog mchod-pa (Klong-rgyas)* - a ritual consisting fundamentally of invocations to the 1,000 Buddhas. It is performed to commemorate the incarnation in this world of the Lord Tonpa Shenrab.
 7-8; *Cho-ga bcu-gnyis* - twelve rituals belonging to the *sūtras (mDo)*.
 10; *Gar-'cham dus-ston* - ritual masked dances.
 14-16; *'Dul-chog dang Me-tog mchod-pa* - one of the 12 rituals performed on the 7th and the 8th, and invocations to the 1,000 Buddhas.
 21-22; *Ma-rgyud tshogs-mchod* - the ritual of the highest tantric tradition and prayer to the 84 'Great Magicians' (*Grub-thob*).
 23-30; *sMra-seng bsnyen-sgrub* - a set of rituals in worship of *sMra-seng*, the 'Lion of Speech' (god of wisdom).
- II. 15; *Me-tog mchod-pa* - invocations to 1,000 Buddhas.
- III. 14-15; Invocations to 1,000 Buddhas.
- IV. 14-15; Invocations to 1,000 Buddhas.
- V. 14-16; *mKha'-klong gsang-mdos dang rNam-rgyal stong-mchod* - prayers and symbolic offering of the world to the highest tantric deities.
- VI. 5; *Tshe-dbang gzhung bahi'i tshogs mchod* - four rituals of *Tshe-dbang Rig-'dain*, a great Bonpo *siddha*. Performed in commemoration of the death of *mNyam-med shes-rab rgyal-mtshan*.
 14-15; *Zhi-khro'i tshogs-brgya* - rituals of the tranquil and wrathful deities.
- VII. 14-15; *Me-tog mchod-pa* performed in commemoration of the death of the last Yungdrung Ling abbot, *bsTan-pa'i rgyal-mtshan*.
 28; *mNyam-med bla-sgrub tshogs-mchod* - prayers to the Bonpo saints, especially the abbots of Menri.
- VIII. 15; *Cho-ga Mu-cho ldem-drug phebs gsung-bstan dbu-zug* - the commemoration of Mucho Demdrug's arrival in Olmo Lungring.
- IX. 30; *Me-tog mchod-pa* performed to commemorate the death of the Lord Shenrab.
- X. 4; *Ma-rgyud tshogs-mchod* - a shorter version of the ritual of the highest tantric tradition (see I. 21-22), sung according to the *gShen* tradition.

7-8; *Me-tog mchod-pa* performed in commemoration of the death of the founder and first abbot of Yungdrung Ling, *Zla-ba rgyal-mtshan*.

XI. 27-29; *dGu-gtor chen-mo* - end of the year ritual of the cycle for averting evil before the new year begins.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

Menri, our mother monastery in Tibet, and most of the other monastic establishments, lie waste and ruined. This situation is a great sadness and a concern to us. We pray and take heart that Tibet will once again become a free and religious land.

When we look back on 21 years of life here in India, we see many reasons for gratitude to those who have helped and continue helping us in the survival of our traditions. In the beginning, our conditions were hard but with the gracious help of the Indian Government and several charitable organizations, we have establish our centre. The present situation is still difficult but our traditions have taken root and grow.

Our special words of gratitude are due first to the Government of India which granted us permission to reside in this country and for helping us in many ways. Many other organizations have also helped us, especially the Catholic Relief Service who gave money for building the houses for our people here in Dolanji. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his government gave us much encouragement to continue our traditions and helped to finance the studies of our monks. For the first time in the history of Tibet, we have been recognized as a valid religion and our traditions are respected. Now-a-days, the abbot of the monastery is treated on equal terms with the heads of the four major Buddhist orders, and one layman represents the Bonpos at the Assembly of the Deputies of Tibet in Dharamsala which consists of 12 members.

In the early 60s the Rockefeller Foundation in New York sponsored a visit to Britain by three Bonpo monks. The visit was mainly organized and administered by Professor David L. Snellgrove, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Two of these three monks are Sangye Tendzin, the present abbot, and Tendzin Namdak, the chief tutor of this monastery. Per Kvaerne of Oslo University has always taken friendly interest in our Monastic Centre. Our gratitude goes to

all those mentioned above and to many other people who helped us in the past and continue to help, both in Europe and in Asia.

Bonpo Monastic Centre
in collaboration with *Tadeusz Skorupski*
Dolanji, November 1980

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF LITERATURE ON BON
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