THE MEDITATION NOTEBOOK OF TIPUN PADMA CHOGYAL

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SUMMARY

In 1980 the author in company with Tashi Rabgyas and Tsering Shakya was asked by the late Khamtag Rimpoché to translate the text of the meditation notebook of his lama for use by serious Western practitioners of the Dharma.

The work is a notebook from which Tipun Padma Chogyal of Chimre in Ladakh taught his yogin disciples of the Drugpa Kargyu school in Tibet. It is a basic text describing the Mahamudra mental yoga still fundamental to yogin training in the Indian Himalayas.

This article describes the life of Tipun and his own lama, Shakra Shri, a great exponent of the Ri-me tradition developed in eastern Tibet in the last century, and their importance in the training of yogins today. It also summarises the contents of the notebook which deals in depth with aspects of the Mahamudra system of meditation, its challenges and results.

Introduction

In the summer of 1980 during a research visit to the Mahe family in Leh I became acquainted with the late Khamtag Rimpoché a Tibetan refugee tulkū revered and sponsored by this family. Although he was given to a dangerous liking for alcohol, which however never seemed to affect his behaviour, I soon realised that Khamtag Rimpoché was an exceptionally accomplished yogin. When he invited me to visit him at his little mountain temple at Urgyen Dzong near Shergola I could not refuse.

Travelling with my colleague Tsering Shakya then of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and with the good fortune of having Tashi Rabgyas in our company, I visited Urgyen Dzong. After some valuable interactions with the rimpoché we discussed the need for accurate translations of yogic documents in English. He then showed us a small notebook written in neat Tibetan which he told us was one of three copies of the meditation instructions of his own teacher, the well known Tipun Padma Chogyal originally of Chimre, Ladakh. To my considerable surprise he asked

me to photograph the entire text and prepare a translation useful for Westerners seriously wishing to practice the Dharma.

The text received a preliminary translation by Tashi Rabgyas and then James Low, himself a trained Nyingma yogin and a translator of texts, undertook the final work. The text in fact contains numerous difficult technical terms specific to the practice of Mahamudra and James consulted the Venerable Gegen Khyentse, the prime meditation teacher of the Dukpa Kargyupa yogin at Manali and the mentor of the present incarnation of Tipun, Sey Rimpoche, and his own teacher the Venerable Jigmet Rigdzin Rimpoche, formerly professor of Tibetan at Visvabharati University, Varanasi, as to their precise usage.

The Venerable Gegen Khyentse asked James Low and myself to be especially careful in presenting our translation and commentary lest it be a cause for confusion rather than clarification for Westerners. He also wished to preserve the secrecy regarding meditation methods which are characteristic of the Drupka Kargyupa and which we respect. After full translation and consultation we find however that the text does not contain either Tantric liturgical sadhana nor information on the psychophysical yogas of Naropa which might indeed confuse unprepared minds working without a qualified teacher, but is rather a straightforward account of the Mahamudra meditation system (Chagya chenpo). Indeed the basic text upon which the notebook is largely based has already been translated into English by Evans-Wentz and Lama Kazi Samdup in the 1930s². We feel therefore that no harm will arise from its publication and commentarial examination³.

Tipun Padma Chogyal, although a Ladakhi, spent most of his career in Tibet, becoming perhaps the most important teacher of the Mahamudra and related mental yogic systems from the turn of the century. We turn therefore first of all to an account of his life and that of his main teacher Shakyashri, a prime exponent of the Ri-me tradition.

**Shakyashri and his lineage in Western Tibet**

Towards the end of the 19th century a renewel of religious fervour developed in eastern Tibet (Kham) as a result of a syncretic movement led by remarkable scholars including Jigme Lingpa (1730-1798) and Patrul' (1808-?). In particular a renaissance of Kargyupa and

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³ The translation and commentary forms a major contribution to our forthcoming book, *The Yogins of Ladakh* (Crook & Low), in which we also discuss the necessary reticence needed in translating yogic texts to Westerners working without a guru.
Nyingmapa scholarship produced a merging of themes into a non-sectarian viewpoint known as Ri-me (Ris.Med) meaning impartial. The force behind these developments was the need both to collect and preserve numerous disparate teachings and practices and to synthesise a system of doctrine to compete with the powerful and highly formalised viewpoint of the Gelugpa. Drawing particularly on the rich spirituality of the yogins, Ri-me became an influential force in the development of Tibetan Buddhism. Indeed, I feel it is likely that rumours of these great masters reached India to stimulate Madame Blavatski's visions of imaginary meetings with teachers from beyond the Himalayas, thus indirectly stimulating the birth of theosophy and eventually the emergence of Krishnamurti as an independent thinker whose viewpoint is in many ways a radical Buddhism.

The great collection of material was brought together by Jamyang Khentse Wangpo (1820-1892) who inspired another great scholar Jamgon Kongtrul (1813-1899) whose philosophical writings have become the basis for modern Kagyu scholarship. Another great contributor to the Ris.Med movement was Mipham Gyatso (1846-1917, see S. Hookham 1991)\(^4\). An important disciple of these teachers was Shakyashri from Kham who was to take a great interest in the revival of Buddhism in the Himalayas.

The Ris.Med movement developed primarily among eastern Tibetan scholars but it was to be a Ladakhi monk who became the main transmitter of this viewpoint from Shakyashri to the contemporary generation of practitioners. Ngawang Padma Chogyal was born in 1877 at Chemre in the Sakti valley near the home of my friend Tashi Rabgyas. At an early age he entered Tragthog Gompa\(^5\) where he completed his preliminary studies by the age of fifteen and began training in monastic affairs. Bored by administration, Padma Chogyal returned to his home and announced that he and a friend were intending to go travelling in Tibet.

The two of them journeyed to U (dBuś) and thence to the holy place of Tsari (gsang.sNgags.Chos.gLing) where there was a Ladakhi lama for whom Padma Chogyal worked for some time as a servant. In Tsari lived a high authority of the Drugpa Kagyu (the Drugpa Kyahgon, 'Brug.Pa.sKyabs.mGon) but, as he was not qualified to be a teacher, he wanted to invite to Tsari one of the great masters of the


\(^5\) Barbara Aziz's notes show Tegchog Gonpa (Theg.mChog) as Padma Chosgyal's first monastery. However there is no such named Gonpa in Sakti. Trak-thog (Bra.thog), the Nyingma gonpa close to his home is the most likely place. The only other gonpa nearby is Chendey (lCe.bDe) with which name confusion seems unlikely to have arisen.
period, Shakyashri, then living in Kham and well trained in the new movement.

When Padma Chogyal's own lama died, he too was in need of a teacher so he was receptive to the idea of travelling to Kham with a request to Shakyashri to come and work at Tsari. The journey was hazardous, for there were minor wars in the area at the time. None the less the determined traveller succeeded in locating the lama and persuaded him to return to Tsari as his personal teacher.

Back in Tsari, Padma and Shakyashri established themselves at both rTsa.ri.gChig.Char and the sKyid.Phug cave where not only did Padma Chogyal receive teachings based on Shakyashri's account of his life (rNam.thar) but many other students came to join them. Shakyashri soon had so many disciples that he could no longer effectively teach them all and he appointed assistants to help him. Among these Padma Chogyal soon became pre-eminent as a teacher and was given the title of Tipun (Khrid.Pon) which means "Chief of Questions". The title remained with him for the rest of his life and he was soon the supreme authority on the teachings of his master.

When Shakyashri died the demands on Tipun, as he was now known, gradually became excessive and he decided to go into retreat. He moved to Tsibri in Dingri in eastern Tibet where he lived alone in a cave called dGon.gSang for three years surviving on meager rations and without an attendant. On completing the retreat he moved to a location associated with Milarepa called La.Phyi where he again practiced meditation for several years. His fame was now such that many pressed him to teach them yet once again he sought solitude in mountain caves.

Dingri was already associated with the ascetic practices of outstanding yogins. In particular the Indian known as Pha.Dam.Pa Sangs.rGyas lived here in the eleventh century contemporaneously with the great Milarepa. Phadampa had brought to Tibet the Zhi.Byed system of meditation which he taught to a woman follower who became the great Yogini Ma.Chig.Lab.Kyi.sGron.ma. Phadampa and Machig jointly created the famous Chod practice wherein the yogin dances in a cemetery or wild place and donates his body to the spirits and other denizens of place to learn the nature of mental emptyness. Not surprisingly Tipun made use of their methods in his own meditations and also those of Yang.dGongs.Pa, a great Kargyu ascetic who had lived in Dingri in the eleventh - twelfth century. Certain relics of Phadampa were rescued from Dingri after the Chinese

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46
invasion and are now kept secretly presumably in India or Nepal.

Eventually Tipun agreed to give teachings but only to those resolute and determined enough to pursue a steadfast life. He built a number of small communites each composed of huts for solitary meditation. These communities were each occupied by eight to ten monks. He also responded to the needs of his women students. One community for nuns held twenty one nuns while two others held eight and thirteen respectively. In all over 100 men and women trained in higher yogas with Tipun. In addition he had a great many lay disciples. Soon even reincarnating lamas found their way to him and even the new incarnation of his original sponsor, the Drugpa Kyabgon, studied with him. His influence gradually became widespread.

Tipun Padma Chogyal assembled a great library comprising more than ten thousand carved blocks for printing. The library, mainly concerned with the practice of meditation, was housed in a building called Nye.Ring.Bar.Khang on Tsibri mountain. The manuscripts for carving onto printing blocks came from Ladakh, Sikkim and Bhutan as well as from Tibet. In addition he constructed and developed a number of small monasteries and meditation places around the Tsibri mountain. Tipun died at the age of 81 in Tsibri. On the day of his death the sky was said to be absolutely clear until there was a great shower of flowers none of which reached the ground. A few days later there was an earthquake and many people felt great faith.

Shakyashri had been no celibate lama and had several children. His youngest son was Apho Ngawang who died as a monk at the age of twenty five to reincarnate as the son of one of his brothers known as Kun.Lha. This boy was to grow into a yogin disciple of Tipun and eventually became an important yogic transmitter himself. As

8 According to Aziz (1978), Gene Smith is undertaking a study of known sources concerning this library.
9 This account of the life of Tipun Padma Chogyal I owe to Barbara Aziz who found the details for me among field notes made for her book Tibetan Frontier Families (1978). She had collected this information in interviews with the former Kogno Shega Lingba of Dingri, Japyang Tempa. He had spent his early life in Lhasa returning home to Dingri when he was 27. His parents were lay devotees of Tipun and he received teachings from him working as his secretary while remaining married and living with his family. He was 37 when his teacher died. Three years later he had to flee with other refugees from Dingri because of Chinese invasions and came to Nepal. He became a monk in a meditation centre (Churung Kharka) in Solu founded by one of Tipuns disciples and later moved to Kathmandu to serve another teacher in the same tradition.
10 A contraction; full name not known to us.
Awo Rimpoche (A.Phö) he was the prime teacher of nearly all the leading yogins James Low and I met during our study visit to Ladakh and Zanskar. Tipun asked Awo Rimpoche to marry but he was at first reluctant to do so. However, after he had had a number of auspicious dreams, he changed his mind and did as his guru wished. Then, when Tipun passed away, his incarnation was born as Awo Rimpoche’s firstborn son. This young man, Sey Rimpoche, now lives at Manali with the Venerable Gegen Khyentse as his teacher and is training as a yogin.11 Now assuming his duties, in 1993 he visited the yogin gompas of Gotsang and Khespang in Ladakh and inaugurated a new chorten at the latter.

The structure and contents of the text.

The text we have is a notebook. It is not therefore a carefully worked over text book of instructions, rather it is a relatively systematic survey of the subjects taught by Tipun to his student yogins. Because Tipun was so influential in his time and because his work laid the foundation of the prime yogic training system still actively taught in the Indian Himalayas today the text is of interest not only to practitioners but also to scholars of this subject.

Although the text is uninterrupted by headings or divisions, the work falls naturally into three parts.

1. A pithy account of Mahamudra practice clearly based on the original summary of Padmakarpo.

2. A more elaborated discussion of the nature of the obstacles to be faced in practising Mahamudra and the factors contributing positively to its main aspects, calming the mind (Zhi.gNas) and insight into its nature (Lha.Tong).

3. Tipun’s recollection of his guru Shakyashri’s oral instructions given as commentary to basic texts.

11 At Manali we were given the names of several noted teachers who received instruction from Tipun. Thuksey Rimpoche became the acting abbot of Hemis, sTagna Rimpoche governs the Lo-Drug monasteries of Ladakh and Lahoul, Gegen Khyentse is the foremost teacher of Mahamudra and the Yogas of Naropa and the teacher of Sey Rimpoche the present incarnation of Tipun. Awo Rimpoche was a fellow student with Gegen Khentse who established the monastery at Manali as a training centre and also taught for a time at Hemis after leaving Tibet. Khamthag Rimpoche, the wanderer, was based at Hemis, re-established the little gompa at Urgyen Dzong and asked Tashi Rabgyas and I to copy the meditation notebook of Tipun. Sentra Rimpoche teaches at the Parkhang Gompa near the Nepalese border with Tibet south of Ding-ri. There was also Nedun Puntog who taught Tagtsung Rimpoche and Kenpo Normang of Darjeeling on whom we have no information but whose photograph is extant in the Lhakhang of Khespang Gompa. Finally there is Drubten who lives with Gegen Khentse at Manali. Only Gegen Khentse, Drubten, sTagna Rimpoche and Sentra remain alive today.
4. Finally a discussion of the four main component yogas in Mahamudra, the practices of One Pointedness, Freedom from Limitation, One Taste and Non Meditation.

The first part of the text shows great similarities with the sixteenth century work of Padmakarpo one of the great scholars and systematisers of the Kargyupa tradition. Padmakarpo wrote his own work down at the request of a Zanskari king (Zhan.phan. bZang.po 1525-1561) who paid him in saffron for the work. This king died apparently of dropsy while on pilgrimage in Tibet and his Queen established the Kargyupa in Zanskar at Bardan. The Lama Kazi Samdup remarked to Evans Wentz that more information on these texts might be found at Hemis. Hemis was founded later than the yogin's monastery at Gotsang so we may presume that Gotsang was the location meant. Indeed, when visiting Gotsang we found that the Padmakarpo texts were the ones used in meditation training. Tipun may thus have known of these texts from his time in Ladakh but may just as well have come across them in Tibet or from his teacher. At a subsequent date the Kargyupa split into two factions but this would not have effected the distribution or use of Padmakarpo's writings from an earlier period.

The main argument of the notebook, which is richly embroidered with alternative or parallel views and the awkward numerical listings traditional in Tibetan scholarship may be summarised briefly as follows:

By "mahamudra" is meant the arising together in a co-emergence of both the discriminatory function of cognition and the pure apperceptive clarity of its basis in non-duality.

Normally these two aspects of mind are split so that the subject is caught in a devious intellectuality, however refined or coarse, that does not know its own basis.

The prime practice therefore is to calm the mind to create a basis within which the innate clarity can become apparent. To see into the depths the waves of the ocean have to have become calm.

Calming the mind may use many devices, such as looking at a pebble, watching the breath, visualising a Buddha image or gazing at nothing to cool down the fires of wandering thought.

When the mind is sufficiently calm the practitioner proceeds to question its basis endeavouring to perceive in actual experience the

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12 See our further discussion in Chapter 16 of The Yogins of Ladakh (forthcoming).

49
difference between a mind that is still and one that is active in thoughts.

Once the mind sees that both its movement in conceptuality and its stillness arise from the same basis - the practitioner abides in this meditative state practising Non Elaboration - i.e. no further investigative enquiry but a close focus on the basis itself.

Persistence in Non Elaboration leads to a state of One Pointedness where the mind is held steady in a stable focussed condition without any particular object of regard.

This practice develops into a sustained yoga of One Taste wherein everything simply appears in its own nature without cognitive discriminations deviding the mind.

Repetitive training in these yogas leads to a condition in which practice arises simply and without intentionality. There is no goal in view. The ego is then no longer the root of intention to practice with an end in view because there is no deliberative activity. This practice is then termed Not Meditation or Non Meditation. The meditator cruises like an eagle in the sky free of care and of reference to self.

We may comment here that Kargyupa practitioners argue that once this stage is reached the practitioner does not differ in his method from a Dzogchen practitioner of the Nyingma school. The difference between Mahamudra and Dzogchen lies precisely in the presence or absence of intentionality. The Mahamudra practitioner initially intends to get somewhere by his practice and his method is thus called a "way of the path ". By contrast because the Dzogchen practitioner ( when fully trained) activates a direct seeing identical to what is known in Non Meditation, the Dzogchen method is known as a "way of the fruit "- that is to say the apple has been found and one need only taste it. No more searching for the apple tree, no more path to the apple tree. When Mahamudra enters Non Meditation the practitioner has moved into a sphere not different from the way of the fruit14.

Tipun closes his notebook with the following words: "To express it briefly, when the practitioner confirms clearly and without doubt his unmistaken recognition of the natural condition of mind just as it is, the ground Mahamudra itself, he gains a definite confidence. All the adventitious obscurations of the interactions between subject and object are purified on the path of Mahamudra. By thoroughly understanding the nature of view, meditation and conduct and practicing them one pointedly day and night without a break the mind itself manifests in the mode of its own nature. For as long as Samsara

14 These ideas arose from discussions with Khamtag Rimpoch, Staglung Rimpoch, of Trag.thog Gompa at Sakti and the Gotsang yogins which are presented in The Yogins of Ladakh (loc cit).
The Meditations of Tipun Padma Chogyal

remains, the two modes of form, display and activity, effortlessly and spontaneously benefit beings. This understanding is called the resultant Mahamudra. 15

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In the initial fieldwork the assistance of Tsering Shakya and Tashi Rabgyas was invaluable. Our time together was a delight. Finally without the trust shown in us by the late Khamtag Rimpoche, I would never have received the text for translation in the first place. Conversations with the Venerable Gegen Khentse in Manali gave us much food for thought and helped to orient the writing of our book. We are also grateful for the comments of Professor Jigmat Rigidzin, Rimpoche of Visvabharati University, Bengal. Barbara Aziz has been most kind in checking through her notes on Tipun for me arising from her fieldwork for her book Tibetan Frontier Families.

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15 Translation by James Low.