



Tsundu- Becoming a Lama



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INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

About 2,500 years ago, a prince by the name of Siddhartha Gautam was born in the small kingdom of Kapilavastu (in present day Nepal.) Prince Siddhartha led a protected life: surrounded by riches and pleasures, he knew nothing of human suffering. Still, from his earliest years, Siddhartha was not very interested in royal life or worldly affairs. Instead, he was always seeking to understand the meaning of life. Venturing outside his palace one day, he saw sickness and old age, and encountered death for the first time. Profoundly disturbed, Siddhartha forsook his kingdom, and took up the life of a wandering ascetic. Many years passed in privation and meditation, before Siddhartha gained enlightenment while meditating under a Bodhi tree. The one-time prince gave his first teaching as the Buddha in a deer park at Sarnath, India. Thus Buddhism began.

Teaching of Buddha

Buddha saw life as suffering. All beings are caught in a chain of "samsara" - the cycle of birth and death and rebirth created by the "karma" (action and reaction) we create in our own lives. To break this cycle of birth and death and to attain "nirvana" (enlightenment), which brings release from samsara, Buddha taught the The Four Noble Truths and The Eight Fold Path.

The Four Noble Truths are:

- The existence of sorrow (All life is suffering. Disease, death etc. are part of suffering.)
- The cause of sorrow (The cause of sorrow is attachment to worldly life and ignorance.)
- The cessation of sorrow (There is a way to the cessation of sorrow.)
- The path to the cessation of sorrow (The way to the cessation of sorrow is by following The Eight Fold Path.)

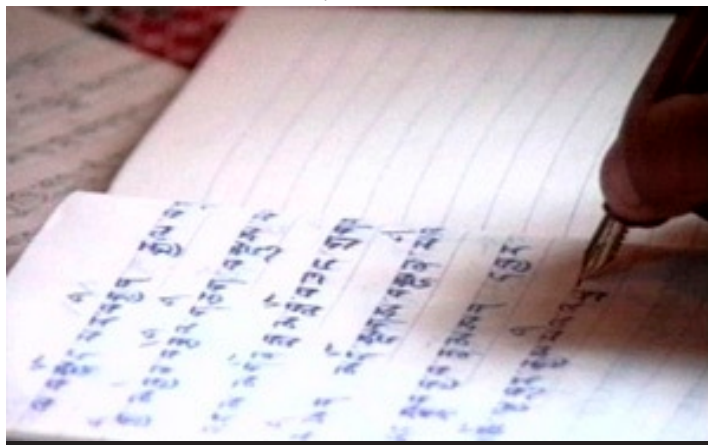
The Eight Fold Path consists of:

1. Right Understanding
2. Right Thought
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

Buddhists believe that following the Eight Fold Path will enable them to break the chain of birth and death (and thus suffering) and achieve nirvana, or supreme enlightenment. Today there are more than 300 million followers of Buddhism around the world, mostly in Asian countries such as Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Sri Lanka, Japan, Nepal, China and Tibet. There are also increasing numbers of Buddhist practitioners among people from Western countries and religious traditions.

2. TIBETAN BUDDHISM

While King Srongtsen Gampo (617-649 AD) is credited with first bringing Buddhism to Tibet, Buddhism only began to take firm root during the reign of King Kher-srong Debtsan (742-797 AD.) Prior to this a local, animist religion called Bon Po was widespread in Tibet. Bon Po followers strongly resisted the introduction of Buddhism. It was only after Padmasambhava,



a great mystic and Buddhist saint from India, came to Tibet to subdue the Bon Po priests that Buddhism was firmly established there.

There are 5 major sects in Tibetan Buddhism:

1. Nyingmapa
2. Kahdampa
3. Kargyupa
4. Sakyapa
5. Gelugpa

Nyingmapa is also called the “old school.” Sage Padmasambhava founded this school around 750 AD. This school concentrates on esoteric teaching and personal realization.

Kahdampa is associated with sage Atisha, and was founded after 1050 A.D. This school emphasizes scriptures, morality and monastic discipline.

Kargyupa began around 1060 A.D. It was founded by sage Marpa. Kargyupa embraces yogic practice as a way to enlightenment.

Salkyapa began around 1073 A.D. It embodies a very worldly outlook and focuses less on metaphysics.

Gelugpa or the “Virtuous Ones” was founded by Tsong-khapa, a reformist thinker, around 1400 A.D. , as a reform movement. Gelugpa lamas can be recognized by the yellow hats they wear. The Dalai Lama is the spiritual head of the Gelugpas. Until the Chinese took over Tibet in the 1950s, the Dalai Lama was also the political leader of Tibet. The present 14th Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to free Tibet through non-violent struggle.



3. KOPAN MONASTERY

Kopan monastery is situated on a quiet little hill outside of Kathmandu city, the capital of the kingdom of Nepal. This monastery was established in 1970 by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche as a monastery for the monks and nuns of Solo Khumbu, an area on the foothills of the Himalaya mountains in the eastern part of Nepal. It is the homeland of Sherpas, an ethnic group who are Buddhists, but also famous for climbing high Himalayan peaks. Today Kopan, which is a Gelugpa monastery, is home to about 210 monks and 100 nuns who come from Nepal,

India and Tibet. Here they live and study Tibetan Buddhism. Tsundu is one of the monks in this monastery.

Kopan monastery is a part of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), an international network of some ninety centers dedicated to the study and practice of Buddhism. It has attracted many Westerners who visit Kopan every year to attend Buddhist teaching and meditation courses.

4. MONK SELECTION PROCESS

Kopan generally accepts children that are above 12 years of age as student monks. In Tibetan religious culture, parents traditionally

send their second son to become a monk. By becoming a monk, you not only acquire religious knowledge and religious merit, but life's daily needs such as shelter and food are also provided by the monastery.

Usually parents bring their children to a particular monastery on the recommendation of friends, relatives and lamas. Tsundu's parents first talked to Lama Lhundrup, the head abbot of Kopan, after Tsundu's teacher at a secular Tibetan school recommended Kopan monastery. He was 10 years old at the time. After observing Tsundu to see if he had the potential to become a monk and after giving him some examinations, Lama Lhundrup asked his parents to bring Tsundu only the following year. When a new monk enters monastic life he is given a new name, symbolizing that he is no longer an ordinary person. Lama Lhundrup gave "Tsundu" as his monastic name.

5. TSUNDU'S FAMILY BACKGROUND

Tsundu's parents and grandparents came to Nepal from Tibet as refugees more than 20 years ago. They live in a two-bedroom apartment near the holy Buddhist shrine Swayambhu in Kathmandu. Tsundu's grandmothers from both of his parents sides live with his family. Both parents work for a Tibetan carpet factory. Tsundu has an older brother of 18



years, and a younger brother of 13 years. Both are studying in a secular school and don't wish to become monks.

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7. TSUNDU: BECOMING A LAMA

Subtitle Text

Kopan Monastery, Nepal
5:30 AM

Tsundu's Mother: Ever since he was very small Tsundu wanted to become a lama (monk). So we agreed.

Mother: Although you can send any of your sons to the monastery, in our Tibetan tradition it is usually the second son. Especially if you have many children. That's why we made Tsundu a lama.

6:00 AM

Tsundu: We believe that cleaning creates religious merit. After all, it is our own monastery.

9:00 AM

Lama Lhundrup (Abbot of Kopan Monastery): The main course of study here is Buddhist philosophy: the Pramana, Abhisamava, Madvamaka, Abhidharma Kosa, Vinava. Those are the five main subjects you must study to become a "geshe" (highest degree in religious study).

12:00 Noon

Mother: The monastery does everything for Tsundu. If he gets sick, they'll take him to the hospital. They provide clothes, food, education. What more does he need?

2:00 PM

Tsundu's Uncle: In our Tibetan religious tradition, it is not easy to become a lama. It is difficult. Once someone becomes a lama, he has to fulfill his monastic vows. For example, a lama



can't marry. And he has to remain emotionally detached from his family – his mother, father, siblings. He must concentrate on acquiring wisdom.

2:30 PM

Mother: In the future, if he decides not to be a lama, then he needs to know English. Just knowing Tibetan is not going to help him. Wherever he goes, he needs to know English. Just learning Nepali is also not useful, except for here in Nepal. That's why we chose to send Tsundu to Kopan Monastery.

9:00 PM

Debate Practice for Older Students

Lama Lhundrup: The main purpose of religious debate is to gain deep realization of a subject. By this realization, you gain right concentration and meditation. Through right meditation you become complete Buddha, or enlightened. You have full wisdom.

Lama Lhundrup: We clap two hands together like this. The sound signifies emptiness. You know, where does this sound come from, the right hand or the left hand? But there is nothing there. But between the claps then comes sound. So everything depends on cause and condition. Everything depends on mind.

10:00 PM

Last Evening Prayer

Tsundu: If I stay in the monastery for a long time, then I miss my mother. Sometimes, when I think about her at night, I cry.

Uncle: Yes, of course Tsundu misses his mother, his father. But the most important thing is that his greatest responsibility is toward his



monastery. Because, as a lama, the monastery is his home. The monastery is his inheritance. A true lama must remain separate from his family.

Saturday

Lama Lhundrup: Most of the boys are from the Himalayan mountains. For example, Sherpas from Solukhumbu, some from Chom, from Helambu, and then from Manang. Some Tamangs, and also Tibetans.

At Tsundu's Home

Mother: As for coming home for visits, if Tsundu asks permission, then he can come on Saturday and Sunday. Sometimes he comes once or twice a month. They don't send him home too often. His teacher is fairly strict. He may get spoiled if he comes home too frequently.

Tsundu: They don't send me home very often. If you go home too much, they say you'll get crazy, spoiled. If they do let me go home, it's for a couple of days a month. Maybe 15-20 days a year.



Tsundu's Father: Well, at the monastery there isn't much opportunity to play, to run around. So when he comes home, our feeling is oh, let him play once in a while, let him do what he wants. But that way he'll get spoiled, and that's the reason his teacher doesn't send him home often.

Mother: If Tsundu remains committed to the monkhood, then he won't have any worries. At most, maybe he'll worry about his mother and father. But food, clothing – wherever he goes these things will be taken care of. He won't have to work as hard as we do just to make a living. I mean, if you get married, you have a family to look after and raise. You have to earn money, you have to give your kids an education. All that will be different for him if he stays as a lama. If he doesn't, then he'll have to do the same as we do.

Mother: As for us, we've said Tsundu should be a lama. But, as people get older, their desires grow too. So whatever he ends up doing in life is his own karma (fate).

Returning to the Monastery

Mother: We would never tell him to leave the monastery and go out to earn a living. As far as possible, he should remain a lama. Now, if

he's wayward, and he goes off and gets married, that's up to him. Once we've made him a lama, then he should stay as a lama. But it's up to him after he gets older. We've fulfilled our responsibility.

Monlam Chenmo: The Great Prayer Festival

Mother: Now it's a very good thing if Tsundu does well, studies, stays at the monastery. If he doesn't get married, but leads a disciplined life, then he won't have any worries. Food, clothing, shelter, he won't have to worry about these even after he grows old. And it also creates dharma (religious merit).

Uncle: In our Tibetan tradition, what you will be in your next life all depends on what you do in this one. If you do good deeds, don't harm anyone, if you don't commit violence, if you help the poor, then you will have better karma in your next life.

Uncle: Whatever monastery a lama lives in, he considers that place home. He should feel that Kopan is his home, his wealth and his inheritance. That is the feeling he should have in his heart.

Tsundu: I have to live and study in Kopan for the rest of my life. The monastery is my true home.





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Music By
Raju Gurung
Production Assistant
Shiva Shrestha

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