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The Lho-Druk tradition of Bhutan

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Bhutan, the Land of Happiness, was blessed by Ugyen Guru Rinpoche in the beginning of the 8th Century. After that, great masters like Langchen Pelgi Singay, Drubchen Dampa Sangay, Ngokton Choeku Dorji, Zhang Tsundroe Drakpa, Lorepa Drakpa Wangchuk, Phajo Drukgon Zhigpo, Jamyang Kunga Singay, Palden Lotay Singay, Maha Pandit Ngagi Rinchen, Maha Siddha Thangthong Gyelpo, Barawa Gyeltshen Pelzang, Great Treasure Discoverer Dorji Lingpa, Great Treasure Discoverer Pema Lingpa, Matchless Gyelwang Choeje, Maha Siddha Drukpa Kunleg, Eminent Ngawang Chogi Gyelpo, Gyelse Ngagi Wangchuk, Mipham Chogi Gyelpo, Dungsey Ngawang Tenzin, Mipham Tenpi Nyima and so on came to Bhutan.

Although all participants here are Buddhist scholars and teachers, please allow me to introduce a brief background of the Kargyud tradition in order to introduce *Lhodruk* (Southern Drukpa) or the Bhutanese Buddhism.

History of the Kargyud Tradition

The Kargyud tradition highlights the unbroken chain of oral instructions passed down from master to student. The word *Kargyud* means "the lineage of the oral instructions." The Kargyud Lineage traces its origin back to Buddha Shakyamuni through accomplished masters namely Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa and Gampopa or commonly known as Dagpo Rinpoche. The Dagpo Kargyud of Gampopa further developed into four lineages called Barom Kargyud, Tshelpa Kargyud, Kamtshang Kargyud and Phagdru Kargyud.

From Phagdru Kargyud, eight additional schools developed namely Drigung Kargyud, Taklung Kargyud, Lingre Kargyud, Yarsang Kargyud, Throphu Kargyud, Shugsep Kargyud, Yelpe Kargyud and Martshang Kargyud. Lingre Kargyud later became known as the Drukpa Kargyud during the time of Tsangpa Jare. This regrouping happened due to the growth of the sheer number of practitioners. It was a belief that the tradition spread as far as eighteen days' flight by a vulture. Therefore, it was said that half of the population were

Drukpas, half of the Drukpas were ascetic vagabonds, and half of the ascetic vagabonds were Sidhas.

The Drukpa Kargyud Tradition

Drukpa Kargyud further developed into three sections; the Toed-druk, Bar-druk and the Med-druk. The Bar-druk also grew into two traditions known as Boed-druk and Lhodruk. The Bhutanese tradition is the Lho-druk tradition emphasizing the practice of nine deities and five sealed sacred instructions.

The practices on the nine deities are: Vajrasattva, Aksobhya, Amitayus, Avaloketesvara, the Innate Chakrasamvara, the 13 Deity Chakrasamvara, Vajrayogini, the Wrathful Vajrapani, and the Dharma Protectors led by Mahakala.

The first of the Five Sacred and Sealed Instructions is Mahamudra, the Great Seal of Emptiness, an exalted meditation on the nature of mind.

The second is meditation on the Six Yogas of Naropa. They are:

- i) Yoga of Psychic Heat
- ii) Yoga of Illusory Body
- iii) Yoga of Clear Light
- iv) Yoga of Consciousness Transference/Transmigration of the Soul
- v) Yoga of Dreams
- vi) Yoga of Intermediate state

The third is the instruction series on the Six-fold transmission of Equal Taste or six instructions on experiencing the single taste of all phenomena. They are:

- i) Taking conceptualization as a path
- ii) Taking delusions as a path
- iii) Taking illness as a path
- iv) Taking gods and demons as a path
- v) Taking suffering as a path
- vi) Taking death as a path

The fourth is the Seven-fold teachings bestowed by the seven Buddhas to Tsangpa Jare Yeshey Dorji. This practice is very exclusive to the Drukpa Tradition only and still practiced in Bhutan. The uniqueness of this practice is that, the practice consists of seven Buddhas, seven receivers, seven teachings, seven circumblances, seven prostrations and seven Mandala offerings practiced for seven months and seven days.

The fifth one is the Guru Yoga. This is the most essential and base practice for all other practices mentioned above. This Sadhana deals with the profound path of propitiation of the Guru.

Arrival of Buddhism in Bhutan

Buddhism first came to Bhutan in the 7th century during the reign of Songtsen Gampo (629-710), the 33rd Dharma King of Tibet. He built hundreds of temples in and around Tibet to obliterate the negative forces or energies prevailing in the region due to the geographical location and position of the land. It was believed that eleven temples were built in Bhutan of which eight are still intact and visible. They are Lhakhang Karpo and Lhakhang Nagpo in Haa district, Kechu Lhakhang and Pelnang or locally known as Pana Goenpa in Paro, Jampa Lhakhang, Anu Lhakhang, Geney Lhakhang and Chuchi Lhakhang in Bumthang district. It was believed that Songtsen Gampo built these temples in Bhutan to mark his return to Bhutan as Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. Songtsen Gampo was the 3rd and Zhabdrung was the 12th in the line of successive reincarnation of Avaloketeshvara as per *Phunsum Tshogpa*, affirmed by the omniscient Padma Karpo.

The Lhodruk Tradition

But ever since the arrival of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the Father of Bhutan in 1616, Buddhism became the source of peace, happiness and unity for Bhutan. The first Dzong was built in 1621 at Cheri and the Sangha was set up. It became the basis for the development of many aspects of Bhutan's unique culture and tradition. Then gradually the dual system of governance was set up and Buddhism became the state religion of Bhutan. The *Drig Lam Chos Sum* or the code of conduct, the culture, and the Buddhist belief became the three fundamental ethical underpinnings of Bhutanese tradition.

This *Lhodruk* or the Bhutanese Buddhist belief comprises of two categories, the tradition of the great fathers known as the *Phachos* and tradition of the sons or succeeding followers known as the *Buchos*.

The *Phachos* comprises *Dam-ngag Dongpo Sumdril* or the Three Sacred Sources of Instructions, namely:

1. *Togpa Gampo Lugs* – The authoritative source for a *Lhodruk* view or philosophical stand, the teachings of Mahamudra etc. was handed down to us from Choeje Dhakpo Lhaje, Gampopa Sonam Rinchen, the Sun-like disciple of the great Yogi Milarepa.
2. *Dam-ngag Rechung Lugs* – The second source for sacred instructions, such as the sixfold transmission was handed down from Rechungpa Dorji Drakpa, the Moon-like disciple of Milarepa.
3. *Tendrel Khowo Lugs* – The third source for the seven sacred instructions bestowed by the seven Buddhas originated from Choeje Tsangpa Jare Yeshey Dorji, the founding father of Palden Drukpa Karguid tradition.

The *Buchos* comprises of *Gar Thig Yangs Sum*. *Gar* refers to various ritual dances. *Thig* refers to creations of Mandalas and vocational training such as paintings. And, *Yangs* refers to ritual chants and usage of various musical instruments. These are very distinctive and unique from other traditions prevailing elsewhere in the world.

Ritual and simple practices

Ritual services in our Bhutanese tradition are very unique and vast. We have over seventeen volumes of ritual texts performed in uniquely different ways from any other traditions of the world. Musical instruments and their usage are also typically different from that of even the Tibetan traditions. Though we share many of the ritual texts, the musical cadence and melody are distinctively different. These were developed in 17th century during the reign of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the Father of Bhutan and Gyelse Tenzin Rabgay, the First Regent.

The Dharma is a path that cleanses all defilements such as attachment, anger, ignorance, and so on that are in the minds of all sentient beings. It is a method

that liberates sentient beings from endless suffering of Samsara and leads them toward enlightenment, the state of perpetual bliss. It is a path that avoids harming others and concentrates only on benefiting others.

Suffering takes so many different forms in this world. We feel there is little we can do to stop it. Apart from sickness, old age and death, we have wars, environmental disasters and poverty. Our mind or inner consciousness is also troubled constantly by the disturbing emotions. So, as sentient beings, we wish for some miracle to happen and transform all the miseries into a world of happiness and peace.

According to Vajrayana tradition, this is possible through simple practices - making aspiration prayers, dedicating the merit, and rejoicing in virtue. It is beyond just a simple good-hearted or well-intended gesture. These practices are very powerful skilful means for affecting positive changes. When practiced with sincerity, they lead us beyond our limited notions of self and other, and therefore, awaken our wisdom and compassion. Throughout the ceremony, the union of compassion and wisdom are never lost. This philosophy can actually work miracles. We can see the state of our own mind and the profound state of all phenomena, the emptiness including of our own emotions. All these components are integrated in the chant or the ritual music.

As a result of gaining greater understanding of our emotions, we develop more profound skills to monitor and transform them. We gain the ability to change the emotions that usually disturb our mind and perpetuate habitual patterns. Since emptiness is the nature of phenomena, we can make progress and realize emptiness through practice. If emptiness were not the actual true nature of phenomena, it would be an illusion and practice would bring no result. But emptiness is the state of all phenomena and therefore these ritual services lead the practitioners and all those associated with them towards seeing, hearing, feeling and visualizing to achieve peace and tranquillity, and attain enlightenment.

The four different approaches

Coming back to the practical part of the Dharma - there are four different methods or ways of approach:

1. Viewing the lower realms as suffering and craving for birth in the upper realms. This is called the 'Perfect Mundane Vehicle.' The essence and key to this practice is to have a strong faith in Karma, the law of cause and effect.
2. Understanding the whole Samsara as suffering and opting for self liberation. This is called the 'Basic or Root Vehicle.' The key essence to this practice is to take refuge in the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha).
3. Seeing Samsara as suffering and choosing the complete Liberation of all sentient beings. This is called the 'Mahayana' tradition. The key essence of this practice is the generation of Bodhichitta for all sentient beings.
4. Looking at the very nature of all phenomena and existence, and realizing enlightenment. This is called the 'Vajrayana.' The key essence of this practice is Guru Yoga or Devotion.

The first three takes the cause as path. They are called the Sutrayana. The fourth takes the result as path. This is called the Tantrayana or Vajrayana. The Sutra approach looks at the source of enlightenment, which is the accumulation of merit and wisdom. The Tantra deals with the means and methods directed towards realization of the natural state of one's own mind which is the ultimate attainment.

Conclusion

As we know, Buddhism is a religion that deals with human nature; it is the philosophy of mind and therefore of creations. The tradition deals with the philosophy of wisdom and emptiness through appropriate reasoning, and takes a systematic approach. It also deals with various means and methods directed towards the realization of the natural state of our individual mind. Thus, Buddhism enables one to get enlightenment by using powerful means such as music and chants. If one is very diligent in these practices, he or she can achieve full enlightenment within one lifetime. Among the various sects of Tibetan Buddhism, the *Drukpa Kagyu*, with its 800 years of tradition, is seen as a particularly pure and holistic teaching. It is well grounded in both theory and practice, and has been proven as a great vehicle of deliverance by the great masters of the tradition.