

In conclusion it can be said that the present study is a commendable introduction to one of the most important esoteric practices of Japanese Buddhism, which has been popular from the eighth century to the present day and counts at present a large following of twelve million adherents.

---Kottegoda S. Warnasuriya

Approaching the Great Perfection

Sam Van Schaik
Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2004

Approaching the Great Perfection, translated, annotated and introduced by Sam Van Schaik, is a work on Tibetan Buddhism. The work includes English translations of ten Great Perfection Texts written in Tibetan language by Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa of Nyingma tradition. The book is divided into three parts. In addition it includes a preface, a list of abbreviations, three appendixes, notes, a bibliography and an index.

In his preface the author has mentioned that even though he lived over two hundred years ago Tibetan tradition considers him as a recent figure. For those who practice Great Perfection his works remains vitally important. All four schools of Tibetan Buddhism honor him as a great master. We learn that his *Longchen Nyingtig* cycle has been handed down through generations of practitioners as a complete path to enlightenment. The author mentions that Jigme Lingpa is best known as a figure of the yogic side of the Nyingma tradition in Tibet. He wrote on his own experience of meditation in a colloquial style.

There is an advice given by the author to readers regarding missing something when a scholarly scrutiny is done. And he mentions that most readers might prefer to begin with the translations in part III

before turning to the discussion in part one.

Part I is the introduction which is the study. Introduction consists of three Chapters. The first chapter is Approaches to Enlightenment. In this chapter one finds a definition of the Great Perfection at the very outset. It is a Buddhist approach to salvation. Then there is a brief mention of early history of Tibet, its early rulers and expansion of political power.

Referring to early Great Perfection texts the author has mentioned that the earliest Great Perfection texts used in Tibet were from the manuscript cache found in the central Asian Monastic complex of Dunhuang. During this period Dunhuang was under Tibetan control. And also the history of The Great Perfection as a distinct system of yoga is given. In Tibetan Buddhism this is called *Atiyoga*, the highest of the three supreme forms of yoga, the other two being *anyuyoga* and *mahayoga*.

Next, in the first chapter, there is a note on *the end of the empire and the new schools*. The suppression of Buddhism by king Langdarma in mid ninth century, his assassination and revival and reestablishment of Buddhism is mentioned briefly. Arrival of Atisa, Dipankarasrijnana, in Tibet and the establishment of Kadampa tradition by this Buddhist yogi is also mentioned. There is a brief note regarding the establishment of Nyingma, Sakya, Gelugpa and Kagyu schools in Tibetan soil.

In this chapter there is a sub-section regarding the development of the *Great Perfection*. Under *Simultaneous and Gradual*, distinction between simultaneous and gradual approaches to perfection is explained in terms of Tibetan Buddhism. One should recollect in this respect that there was a heated debate on the subject of simultaneous and gradual enlightenment between Hashan Mahayana and Shantarakshita and the latter's death due to the defeat of simultaneous method.

Chapter two of the introduction is the biography of Jigme Lingpa. The reader is informed that the life story of Jigme Lingpa

has been retold many times. Specially Goodman (1992) and Gyatso (1998) have done much work by gathering the biographical materials. This chapter is completely devoted to provide a short account of Jigme Lingpa's biography. He joined the Buddhist order at the age of six at Palri monastery and had close connections with larger neighboring monastery of Mindrol Ling of Nyingma tradition. He did not receive formal religious education from Lamas. He studied extensively on his own. We are informed by the author that many of the major Nyingma texts came to Jigme Lingpa through the lineage of Mindrol Ling. The author mentions that there is no evidence as to scholastic subjects like *vinaya*, *abhidharma*, *pramana*, *madhyamika* and so forth included in his education.

Chapter Three, The Longchen Nyingtig, is regarding the Treasure Texts of Nyingma tradition. Treasure texts or *terma* are, according to Tibetan tradition, believed to be hidden by Padmasambhava during his stay in Tibet. Nyingma school considers treasure texts in par with the Buddhist canon. The author has mentioned in this chapter three modes of transmission of these texts: 1. Mind transmission which is understood as wordless transmission, 2. Symbolic transmission and 3. Oral (Heard) transmission.

The next subtitle of this chapter is Revelation, Writing and Publishing. In this, mention is made of Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa's vision regarding Longchen Nyingtig. A short description of writing down of mind-transmitted texts by Jigme Lingpa is also given in this chapter.

The Part II is named Simultaneous and Gradual. In the Chapter four, which includes in this part, mention is made of the path as simultaneous or gradual. This is connected with the origin and the goal of the path. In terms of Buddhist soteriology, these are Samsara and Nirvana.

The discussion on seminal heart in this section is worthy of mentioning. The two terms, ground (*gzhi*) and gnosis (*rig pa*) are extremely important regarding seminal heart. All these are related to the state of enlightenment. The author mentions that there is a tendency in Seminal Heart Literature to describe the nirvanic in spatial sense, a space inhibited by gnosis. Further it is mentioned that the ground and gnosis represent the ontological and gnoseological aspects of nirvanic state. The author has attempted to interpret the ground as the pure basis of all phenomena and gnosis as the enlightened form of awareness.

Chapter five, The Simultaneous Approach, begins with a quotation from Jigme Lingpa regarding gnosis. It has been pointed out that Jigme Lingpa accepted that the enlightenment or Buddhahood occurs instantaneously (*skad cig*) upon the recognition of gnosis. Further it says that no more activity is necessary as the result has been already obtained. In this respect the author has pointed out this conflicts with the gradualist position. Meditation is rejected as a requisite for buddhahood. It has been emphasized that one does not wander in Samsara due to not meditating.

Jigme Lingpa's idea of good and bad is explained in terms of cause and effect mechanism. The benefit of good thoughts is considered as much an entrapment as the harm of bad thoughts. You are not chained by the benefits of good thoughts, harmed by the evil of bad thoughts or deceived by the neutral ones. The author has mentioned in this study a non-analytical meditation. In the practice of non-analytical meditation the discrimination of arising thoughts as good or bad is rejected.

According to the author, Jigme Lingpa was not in favor of intellectual analysis. The intellect (*blo*) and concepts (*rtog pa*) are considered negative in Great perfection texts. Analysis is rejected and gnosis is not an object of knowledge. He differentiated between the knowledge gained through study and experiential knowledge gained in meditation.

Next in this chapter the author has explained Jigme Lingpa's position regarding Yogacara and Madhyamika teachings. The word, samsaric consciousness, used at the beginning of this sections is non-traditional. According to the author, the elements of Yogacara found in YLG can be traced back to earliest Seminal Heart Scriptures, the seventeen Tantras. Lingpa's explanation of the Yogacara conception of mind in terms of relative truth (*samvrti satya*) and ultimate truth (*paramartha satya*) combines Yogacara teachings with that of Madhyamikas. The relative truth is 'all is mind' and the ultimate truth is that mind is empty. Regarding the emptiness emphasized by Madhyamikas Jigme Lingpa has his own interpretation. The author has quoted following passage from Lingpa's writings.

'That which is called emptiness is empty from the very beginning, nonself, separate from the four and eight extremes of elaboration, the loose awareness of the present moment, transcending intellect; that is what we call gnosis.'

Further, he states that emptiness is present in all sentient beings. 'Emptiness transcending causes and conditions and embodying luminosity exists in the continuum of every sentient being.'

The chapter six, The Gradual Approach, is a description of the practice of gradual way of realization in the texts of Longchen Nyintig. In this chapter we are told that it is not proper to teach the simultaneous method to all. The duality of meditation and meditator is rejected. Everything is emptiness, everything is Dharmakaya. Actions and their results are not real. The author states that the meditation practices found in the Longchen Nyintig includes elements from the Great Perfection as well as from the Vajrayana.

According to the author, regarding preliminaries of meditation there are two texts of instructions. The first text is long and it is entitled Tarpai Temke. This includes seven point mind training system derived from Atisa (Dipankara Sri Jnana).

The second book, Laglenla Deblug, has six main sections.

Chapter six has sub-headings like, The Hierarchy of Great perfection Methods, Other Gradualist Aspects of Great Perfection Practice, The Four Yogas and the Paths and Stages, and Three Liberations and the Four Visions.

Interpretation and Reconciliation is the last chapter of this study. This chapter is on both Simultaneous and Gradual Realization. At the beginning of this chapter it has been mentioned that there is a distinction between practitioners of higher and lower ability. This is also true in regard to Great Perfection texts too. The Great Perfection is only for those of the sharpest faculties. According to the author, it is clear that Jigme Lingpa accepted both simultaneous and gradual way of perfection, levels of individual capacities such as best, middling and worst faculties but he did not use these terms as some practitioners were not genuine in the sense of the term.

Next we find English translations of ten Treasure Texts and their Tibetan originals in Romanized form. These are *The Great Perfection Tantra of the Expanse of Samantabhadra's Wisdom*, *The Subsequent Tantra of Great Perfection Instruction*, *Experiencing the Enlightened mind of Samantabhadra*, *Distinguishing the Three Essential Points of the Great Perfection*, *An Aspirational Prayer for the Ground*, *Path and Result*, *Vajra Verses on the Natural State*, *The White Lotus*, *The Secret Discourse of the Happy Awareness Holders and Dakinis*, *The Lion's Roar That Destroys the Deviations of Renunciants*, *Meditating on the Seminal Heart and Seeing Nakedly the Natural State of the Great Perfection: Necessary Instructions for Beginners*.

The book is supplemented by three appendices, endnotes, a bibliography and word index. Appendix I is on The Structure of the Yeshe Lama. Appendix II is Concordance of Common Words Relating

to Mind and Mental Events. Appendix III is a List of Tibetan Proper Names.

In conclusion it can be said that this is a special field of study the author undertook to do research. The Great Perfection Texts written by Jigme Lingpa includes his personal thinking and his own experiences relating to practice of meditation. Even though Jigme lingpa belonged to Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism he followed his own way in writing these texts rather than his fraternity's way of thinking. The author of this monograph undertook a tedious task in studying these texts. All the credits should go to him for explaining the contents of these texts in lucid words.

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A Collection of Inscriptions of Steles in Buddhist Temples in Sichuan

Edited by Long Xianzhao, published by Bashu Shushe, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 959 pp. ISBN 7-80659-584-8/8B.88

A huge book entitled *Pashu Fojiao Beiwen Jicheng* (《巴蜀佛教碑文集》 A Collection of Inscriptions of Steles in Buddhist Temples in Sichuan Province) was published in Chengdu, Sichuan, China, in December 2003. Led by Professor Long Xianzhao (龍顯昭), editor-in-chief, four professors of Xihua University located in northern Sichuan were responsible for the punctuation and editing work of the project. Four students working on MA programs in the same school also participated in the collection. A Ph.D. candidate and an MA student of Sichuan University assisted in editing.

Buddhism was introduced into China around the first century CE via Silk Route. Sichuan Province has been a meeting place of the so-called Northern Silk Route and the Southern Silk Route. Thus, it has been an important region for the propagation of Buddhism in China. With the evidence available now, doubt still exists as to whether Buddhism was

introduced into Sichuan from Northwest China or from Southern China. This is a huge collection of inscriptions from temples, pagodas, pavilions, stone pillars on which Buddhist scriptures were carved, Buddha halls and tombs of eminent monks, as well as temple bells. All these are useful to scholars who investigate the historical development of Buddhism in Sichuan Province.

The book contributes to our understanding of Buddhism in Sichuan region in four aspects. First, it provides reliable sources on how Buddhism was introduced and developed in Sichuan Province in the past two millennia. As we check both inscriptions and early historical records, we come to know that Buddhists came to propagate their doctrines and practices in the end of the Han Dynasty (round 220 CE). Some eminent monks and practitioners began to exert their influence in Sichuan and other provinces.

Second, the book illustrates the growth of Buddhism in Sichuan. During the Sui Dynasty (581 – 618) and Tang Dynasties (618 – 907), many huge temples were built in Chengdu. Master Xuanzang (玄奘 also spelt as Hsuan Tsang, or Hiuen Tsiang) and his brother came to live in Chengdu in order to escape wars in Central China during the end of the Sui Dynasty and early Tang period. Master Xuanzang received full ordination in Chengdu in 622. The name of the temple where Master Xuanzang stayed was changed a number of times. With the publication of this collection of stele inscriptions and gazetteers, we obtain a comprehensive understanding of the development of temples in Sichuan region.

Third, Chan masters played an important role in the propagation of Chan in Sichuan region. For instance, Venerable Zhishen (智詵 609 – 702), one of the key disciples of the Fifth Patriarch Hongren (弘忍 602 – 675), came to Sichuan to propagate Chan practices in the later seventh century. Another monk Mazu Daoyi (馬祖道一 709 – 788), a native of Shifang County (什邡) in Sichuan, was a key figure in Chan Buddhism in China. Chan Master Guifeng (圭峰 780 – 841), Venerable Zongmi (宗密 780 – 841) and Yuanwu Keqin (圓悟克勤 1063 – 1135) exerted tremendous influence in Chinese Buddhism. Readers can find information in this book about their life and work in the temples where they stayed.

In the Tang and Song periods, Buddhism suffered setbacks in Central China whereas Buddhists in Sichuan were able to built or