

## A Brief Summary On the Tulku System of Tibet

Some followers of other religions consider Buddhism to only be about reincarnation. Reincarnation is the belief that after we die, we are reborn. All sentient beings are subject to this, so of course I do not have any contradiction with that. However, Tibet has a system of recognizing reincarnations of Lamas called Tulkus, and putting them on a throne. This tradition was once a wonderful practice which has since then become twisted, and degenerated. Some people have been asking me about the origins of this system, so now I will talk about the process and history of it here truthfully.

First; the holder of boundless knowledge and compassion, the incomparable teacher, the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, cultivated the enlightened mind of compassion. Then he accumulated an ocean of merit and wisdom; and lastly, he achieved fully enlightened Buddhahood. He then rained down the great nectar of the holy Dharma three times and placed all sentient beings on the path to all knowing liberation.

After the Buddha attained his Parinirvana, at 544 B.C. to 144 B.C., the seven great noble Arhats; Kasheb, Nyewakor, Ananda, and so on, came in succession inheriting the Buddha's teachings. Also, in order for the three precious collections of scripture to not go to waste, so that they will last a long time, the countless Arhats and Bodhisattvas held three conferences to obtain the teachings, sustain them, and spread them vastly.

Four hundred to nine hundred years after the Buddha passed away; many great masters and noble individuals (the six ornamental and two supreme masters, and the two peerless masters and so on, and all the noble individuals of the Great Vehicle that arrived in succession) explained the meaning of the Sutras and the Tantras. In doing this they established a profound and vast view of emptiness, and through that, they clarified the teachings of the Buddha to the world like the sun clears away the darkness.

There were teachings that the Buddha himself taught, and the profound teachings of the Secret Mantra that the Buddha prophesied to arrive, to be taught in succession, after he passed away. There were many sublime beings that significantly spread the Buddha's precious teachings on the Sutra and Tantra through study and meditation, they were the eight Vidyadharas and the eighty four siddhas and all the noble beings that abide in a state of unity. However, at that time, there had never been a tradition of recognizing a reincarnation and putting them on a throne.

From the 7th century to early 10th century, the Holy Dharma was established and spread throughout the Tibetan Plateau through the efforts of Khenpo Shantarakshita, the Master Padmasambhava, the Dharma King and his ancestors, and all the translators and scholars. Through this kindness, the dark lands of Tibet became the same as the Noble land of India. Even at that time, there had never been a tradition of recognizing a reincarnation and putting them on a throne.

After that, the king Lang Darma, completely destroyed the monastic system of Buddhism, but not long after that, the new teachings of Dharma began to spread. The rebirth of many new scholars and siddhas in Tibet came about through many great teachers and their students such as Atisha, Loden Sherab, Gyalwe Jungne, and their students of the Kadampa lineage; the five great masters, and their students of the Sakya lineage; Marpa, Milarepa, Gambopa, and their students of the Dakpo Kagyud lineage; the yogi Kyungpo, and his students of the Shangpa Kagyud lineage; Padampa Sangyay, and his students of the Pacification lineage; the supreme yogini, Machik Labdron, and her students of the Chod lineage, and so on.

In summary, when the new school of the lineage of accomplishments, and the systems of all the great chariots that include the precious teachings on the inseparability of Sutra and Tantra, shined like the sun and moon; even at that time, there had never been a tradition of recognizing a reincarnation and putting them on a throne.

Then, in the year of the wood monkey, 1284 A.C., the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje was born and in the year of the earth rat, 1288 A.C., the great siddha, Orgyenpa Rinchenpal, recognized him as the reincarnation of his own main teacher, Karma Pakshi. All the historical documents concur, that this was the beginning of the tradition of recognizing reincarnations of previous Lamas in Tibet.

The way in which he was recognized is as follows. The Tulku remembered his past life at an early age, and went to visit the great siddha, Orgyenpa Rinchenpal, with his parents. The great siddha himself foresaw this through prophetic powers and sent his disciples to greet them. Even though the parents prostrated before the great siddha, the child did not prostrate. Although knowing, the great siddha asked the child, "Who are you?" and the child replied, "I am Karmapa. Even though my mind is completely realized, my body is not yet strong. Until my body is strong, please take care of me." From that moment, the great siddha Orgyenpa, recognized the boy as the reincarnation of his main teacher and took very good care of him, so it is said.

Even though this Tulku system originated from the Karma Kagyud lineage, it spread to all the other Dharma schools. In those times, the ones recognizing Tulkus had great prophetic powers, similar to the great siddha, and the reincarnations all became lamps to guide sentient beings on the path of Dharma.

At a certain point, around the fourteenth century, the Tulku system became corrupt. Tibetan politicians used it for political reasons through the power of high Lamas and high ranking officials; by manipulating parents and relatives; exploiting the predictions of diviners and astrologers; exploiting the dreams and delusions of finding Tulkus, and so on. Like that, many strange systems of recognizing reincarnations were established. Also, China and Mongolia got politically involved in the recognizing of all the important Tulkus that were connected with politics.

So the Tulku system became an unclean, degenerate activity. Now, even worse, people's actions have become extremely degenerate. The system of making one's child or relative's child into a Tulku through lies and falsification, through force or by deception, by using any means necessary, has spread throughout the world. Businessmen, politicians, opportunistic lay and fully ordained people who seek profit do it. Also eastern and western people who pretend to be practitioners and speak Buddha's teachings, but are looking to cultivate their own fame, position, and wealth do it. Sadly, these activities would disappoint the undisputed great masters; forget about these activities being in accord with the Buddha's teachings on the three precious collections of scripture, or the four tantras; they are an undoubted regression from even worldly standards of noble conduct.

That there are many scholars of the precious collections of scriptures, that belong to different vehicles of Buddhism throughout the world is without question. However, these days, there are also geniuses of worldly knowledge in the greatest field of study, science, which is part of conventional truth. They aren't brain damaged, blind, or deaf, so they can see and hear what we do, so one should be careful not to do activities that would be considered shameful.

If someone were to ask me; "So are you not happy for Buddha to come to this world?" this is not the case. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will come as enlightened manifestations at the exact time they are needed, through their compassion for sentient beings. So, even without being recognized or enthroned, they will have incomparable self-arising wisdom and compassion from childhood, like the sun that can't be covered up by a hand. Their common and uncommon skills in knowledge and realization will flourish like a lake during the monsoon. There have been countless such great individuals who have tamed the minds of beings that are as limitless as space by using the four methods of gathering disciples.

To list a few of them they are as follows:

The Omniscient Longchenpa and Rongzompa; Dromton Gyalwei Jungne; Sakya Kunga Nyingpo; the great siddhas, Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa; the Omniscient Budon and Dolpo Sangyay; the Victorious Lobsang Dragpa; The Omniscient Jigme Lingpa; the Bodhisattva, Paltrul Rinpoche; the nonsectarian lama Kongtrul Yonten Gyatso; the great teacher, Mipham Namgyal Gyatso; the Heruka, Dudjom Lingpa; the great scholar Zhenphen Nangwa; the great scholar, Ngawang Palzang, and so on.

Like that, there were infinite nondenominational scholars and siddhas that weren't recognized or put on a throne, and even now, there are many alive today that are like lamps that guide beings on the path of Dharma.

To discuss this further, truthfully, if you think carefully, there is no reason for Lamas to pass away and only be reborn in Tibet. There is no certainty where they will be born. Enlightened beings would not abandon sentient beings because they have a firm commitment to the generation of Bodhicitta. For example, the Buddha Shakyamuni cultivated Bodhicitta during his accumulation of merit through benefiting sentient beings, during the path of training as a Bodhisattva. He took birth in unpredictable places, higher and lower realms, in different regions, as different forms, into different religions, and so on; so why would enlightened beings take birth again and again in one small area?

The reincarnations of Bodhisattvas are infinite, it is said in the King of Aspiration Prayers:

With one hundred million manifestations,  
Through the power of will; they benefit all the sentient beings  
Of the ten directions in many ways.

Thus it is said.

However, there are also those who don't take rebirth in material realms. For example, in the final moments of the great Mipham Rinpoche's life, before his mind became one with the enlightened expanse, he wrote a final testimony to his assistant Lama Odsel. He said, he will not reincarnate in this world again. There are beings born into different religions and places, who have faith, compassion, and so on.

They are extraordinary compared to other beings, but those without prophetic powers can't possibly prove that these are Tulkus. Yet it can't be affirmed that these beings aren't emanations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

In summary, there are those who recognize Tulkus without prophetic vision for the sake of politics and increasing one's power and fame. Through various dishonest methods, they forcefully place any good looking child on a throne, so they can inherit their Lama's heritage, the monastery's property, and so on. They will do this through the fear that what they already have will fall into someone else's hands, or because they are trying to gain some wealth they didn't have before. Also it happens because some teachers can't refuse wealthy sponsors and parents. It is important not to misunderstand, this isn't talking at all about unmistakable noble Tulkus.

This tradition of recognizing reincarnations of Lamas through various ordinary methods couldn't possibly help the Buddha's teachings. Rather than that, if a noble being came to this world through their conscious awareness to benefit beings, the fake Tulkus would become obstacles to their activities. For example, a fake tulku who is very good at pretending to be noble, will gain wealth and entertainment from ignorant followers that respect him. However, on the other hand, a real tulku will not pretend to be noble but will be unchanging in his sublime conduct. So no matter how knowledgeable and accomplished he is, his activities to benefit beings will become dormant, which automatically disrupts the Buddha's teachings. The teachings of the Completely Perfect, Buddha Shakyamuni, that exist in agreement throughout the Sutras and Tantras of higher and lower vehicles, are the practice of completely perfecting study, contemplation, and meditation, to reach the goal of the all-knowing state. Those teachings are not a method for finding reincarnations.

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