

The Centennial Cycle

According to H. P. Blavatsky, the Brotherhood of Adepts to which her teachers belong, known as the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood, makes an attempt during the last quarter of every century to bring to the Western world some of the teachings of the Wisdom Tradition preserved in the East.¹ The Theosophical Society founded by her in 1875 is said to be that attempt for the nineteenth century. Since such an attempt occurs each century, it has been called the centennial cycle.

A question has arisen as to the arbitrariness of this cycle in terms of its dates, since there is little reason for Eastern Adepts to use the Western calendar. Moreover, it does not match any of the other cycles described by Blavatsky that are normally based on the *yuga* computations of the Indian Purāṇas, using the ratio 4:3:2:1. This has led Dr. Roberto Fantechi in a 1963 article to assume that the real centennial cycle is one of 108 years.² But for critics of Theosophy, the centennial cycle is just one more unverifiable claim.

Such a cycle, however, does in fact exist. It is an ancient cycle found in India, recorded in both Sanskrit books and stone inscriptions, and still used in places there up to the present. It is called the cycle of the Seven Rishis (*saptarṣi*), or the seven stars of the Great Bear constellation, popularly known in the West as the Big Dipper. These stars are supposed to revolve around the zodiac of the twenty-seven lunar asterisms (*nakṣatra*), and to stay in each one for exactly one hundred solar years. Based on records giving dates in both the era of the Seven Rishis and in another era that is known, Indologists have determined the starting dates of this one hundred year cycle. "From this time up to the present day, the same commencing year of individual cycles is invariably given, namely in the year 25 of each Christian century A.D.;"³ i.e., our years 1725, 1825, 1925, etc.

Blavatsky did not say that the centennial effort made by the Brotherhood *began* the cycle, but rather that it came at a certain specified period of the cycle:⁴

Among the commandments of Tsong-kha-pa there is one that enjoins the Rahats (Arhats) to make an attempt to enlighten the world, including the “white barbarians,” every century, at a certain specified period of the cycle.

Thus the centennial effort would come at the exact midpoint of the cycle of the Seven Rishis.

This is an unusual cycle, since, astronomically speaking, the fixed stars and the constellations they make up, such as the Great Bear, have no such movement as is here attributed to them. So modern scholars, and now modern Indians following them, regard it as a mythological cycle. But since this cycle is ancient lore found in the Purāṇas and taught by the venerable astrologer/astronomer Vṛddha Garga, or Garga the Elder, it had been accepted as true by Indians down through the ages. Vṛddha Garga’s treatise explaining it is lost. All we have is a brief eleven verse summary of his teachings on it in Varāha Mihira’s *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, and eight and a half verses on it quoted from his lost treatise in Bhaṭṭotpala’s commentary.⁵ So even though we have a clear description of this cycle, and can ascertain its dates, we do not know what it was supposed to apply to.

There is another source in modern esoteric literature that apparently relates to this cycle. In Alice Bailey’s book, *The Rays and The Initiations*, is a statement regarding the sounding of the OM by Sanat Kumara from the council chamber of Shamballa (Śambhala), and the consequent gathering of the council at that time:⁶

. . . the O, sounded out at intervals of one hundred years by Sanat Kumara. It is this sound which gathers together the responsive Units into the Council. This Council is held at one hundred year intervals, and as far as our modern humanity is concerned, these Councils have been held—under our arbitrary dates—in 1725, 1825, 1925.

This passage goes on to say that at these councils those who are responsible for planetary development make decisions as to new unfoldments regarding the evolution of consciousness in the three worlds. This, of course, would be in keeping with Tsong-kha-pa's reported commandment to the Arhats to make an attempt every century to enlighten the world, including the white barbarians.

Moreover, these periodic attempts were not originated by the great Tibetan reformer Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419 C.E.), but according to Blavatsky began much earlier:⁷

The messengers [are] sent out westward periodically in the last quarter of every century—ever since the mysteries which alone had the key to the secrets of nature had been crushed out of existence in Europe. . . .

She elsewhere tells us that this was in the first century B.C.E.:⁸

. . . the first hour for the disappearance of the Mysteries struck on the clock of the Races, with the Macedonian conqueror [Alexander the Great, 356-323 B.C.E.]. The first strokes of its last hour sounded in the year 47 B.C. [in] Alesia the famous city in Gaul. . . . It was during the first century before our era, that the last and supreme hour of the great Mysteries had struck. . . . Bibractis, a city as large and as famous, not far from Alesia, perished a few years later. . . . Such was the last city in Gaul wherein died for Europe the secrets of the Initiations of the Great Mysteries, the Mysteries of Nature, and of her forgotten Occult truths.

This provides the background for a proper perspective on this centennial effort, and explains why it would occur. For as pointed out by Nicholas Weeks when he cited the above-quoted passages, this effort is not something that we in the West have called forth because we are so spiritually advanced:⁹

Perhaps our Western egotism has once again blinded us to the *reason* for this recurrent grace from the Masters. It was not because the Adepts saw us as so spiritually advanced as to have

earned this assistance, but because we had blindly destroyed our own original sources of truth and inspiration. We in the West were, and are, being helped primarily because of the vast Compassion of the Brotherhood, not because we deserve it.

Indeed, this is so true that, as Blavatsky reports, failure has followed failure in these attempts. She continues, immediately after her above-cited statement informing us of Tsong-kha-pa's commandment to make these attempts:¹⁰

Up to the present day none of these attempts has been very successful. Failure has followed failure. Have we to explain the fact by the light of a certain prophecy? It is said that up to the time when Pan-chen-rin-po-chhe (the Great Jewel of Wisdom) condescends to be reborn in the land of the Pelings (Westerners), and appearing as the Spiritual Conqueror (Chom-den-da), destroys the errors and ignorance of the ages, it will be of little use to try to uproot the misconceptions of Peling-pa (Europe): her sons will listen to no one. Another prophecy declares that the Secret Doctrine shall remain in all its purity in Bod-yul (Tibet), only to the day that it is kept free from foreign invasion.

As we all know, that day ended in 1950, with the Chinese communist invasion of Tibet. This led to the dispersal of a large number of Tibetans, including many high lamas, or teachers, who fled to India. By 1975 some of these Tibetan teachers had begun coming to the West to teach Tibetan Buddhism there. These teachings have increased dramatically up through the end of the century. Some Theosophical students consider this to be the Arhat's attempt to enlighten the white barbarians for the twentieth century. Most Theosophists do not, because they regard Tibetan Buddhism as an exoteric religion, and they are expecting further esoteric revelations.

The twentieth century is now over, and the world has not seen any large esoteric movement arise during its last quarter, such as did the Theosophical Society in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. If the coming of Tibetan Buddhism to the West during this time was not the centennial effort made by the

Brotherhood, then those who hold this tenet will have to point out what that effort was. That effort, according to Alice Bailey's 1925 book, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, is supposed to be on a larger scale than was H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophical Society:¹¹

A very interesting period will come about the year 1966 and persist to the end of the century. It is one for which the Great Ones are already making due preparation. It concerns a centennial effort of the Lodge and of the Personages taking part therein. Each century sees a centennial effort of the Lodge along a particular line of force made to forward the ends of evolution, and the effort for the twentieth century will be upon a larger scale than has been the case for a very long time, and will involve a number of Great Ones. In a similar effort during the nineteenth century, H.P.B. was concerned, and a fairly large number of chelas.

There is always the problem of recognizing the expected teachings when they come, especially when they do not take the expected form. The classic example of this known in the West is Jesus of Nazareth, who was recognized as the expected Messiah by some, later known as Christians, but not by others, the Jews. The expected centennial effort of the Brotherhood, if it came in the twentieth century, does not seem to have been in a form recognized by either Theosophists or students of the Bailey books. This, however, is not surprising, when we recall that the form taken by the Bailey teachings is very different than the form taken by the Theosophical teachings of Blavatsky, and that consequently most Theosophists do not recognize the Bailey teachings as being authentic. The Bailey teachings purport to come from the same Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood as do the Theosophical teachings. Blavatsky presented the Theosophical teachings as part of a once universal Wisdom Tradition that had long been hidden, and attempted to show this by tracing these teachings in many and diverse ancient sources. Bailey presented the esoteric teachings as the Ageless Wisdom for the New Age, directed at a modern Western and primarily Christian audience by the use of current references and appropriate terminology,

and avoided reference to ancient sources. Both of these groups expected something esoteric in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the former something esoteric and ancient, and the latter something esoteric and modern. Nothing that arose then seems to have met these expectations.

We may therefore consider again the idea that the coming of Tibetan Buddhism to the West was the Arhat's attempt to enlighten the white barbarians for the twentieth century. The criterion shared by both groups who expect this attempt is that whatever teachings come out as a result of it should be esoteric. Although not esoteric in the same way as the Theosophical and Bailey teachings are, that is, as coming from a secret tradition, many of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism can legitimately be considered esoteric. This is true in two ways. First, whatever teachings were exoterically known in Tibet but were unknown anywhere else during the last millennium were in fact esoteric everywhere but in Tibet. A prime example of this is Maitreya's *Abhisamayālamkāra*, the text used in all the monasteries to teach the path to enlightenment. It was the most widely studied book in Tibet, yet it disappeared in India a thousand years ago, and was never taken to China. So its teachings were quite esoteric everywhere else in the world. Second, the Buddhist Tantras, known to Theosophists as the Books of Kiu-te,¹² were esoteric even in Tibet. Access to them was restricted to only those who had received initiation. Tantric initiations were harder to get in old Tibet than they are in the modern West, where Tibetan teachers now give them frequently. Further, the non-esoteric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism have spread their primary idea of compassion more widely in the world than Theosophy could spread its primary idea of brotherhood, or the Bailey teachings their primary idea of service. Clearly, a similar aim, one greatly desired by the Brotherhood, has thus been achieved. It has even been achieved without recourse to the idea of God, an original aim of the early Theosophical teachers that fell by the wayside.¹³ Thus, leaving aside other expectations, there is good reason to believe that the coming of Tibetan Buddhism to the West is the large-scale effort of the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood made in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Moreover, a direct connection between Blavatsky's own Trans-Himalayan teacher and the coming of Tibetan Buddhism to the West can be traced. Paul Brunton wrote in his notebooks that he met a Mongolian teacher at Angkor Wat who told him of "a secret tradition which has combined and united Hinduism, the religion of many Gods, and Buddhism, the religion without a God," and that "Vedanta and Mahayana are corruptions of this pure doctrine, but of all known systems they come closest to it." The lama further told Brunton that this secret tradition had been handed down in an unbroken line of adepts, who were then centered in Tibet, but they would be leaving Tibet in 1939. Brunton reports the statements of his Mongolian informant:¹⁴

"You ask me if they are the same adepts as those spoken of by H. P. Blavatsky. When she was a girl and fled from her husband, she accidentally met a group of Russian Buddhist Kalmucks who were proceeding by a roundabout route on pilgrimage to the Dalai Lama of Tibet. She joined the caravan as a means of escape from her husband. One of them was an adept. He took care of her and protected her and brought her to Lhasa. She was initiated in due course into the secret tradition. . . . Later, she was introduced to a co-disciple, who eventually became a High Lama and a personal advisor to the Dalai Lama. He was the son of a Mongolian prince, but for public purposes took the name of 'The Thunderbolt'—that is, 'Dorje.' On account of his personal knowledge of and interest in Russia, he gradually altered it to 'Dorjeff.' Before their guru died, he instructed Blavatsky to give a most elementary part of the secret tradition to the Western people, while he instructed Dorjeff to follow her further career with watchful interest. Dorjeff gave her certain advice; she went to America and founded the Theosophical Society. . . . Her society did an enormous service to white people by opening their eyes to Eastern truths. But its real mission is over, hence its present weak condition."

According to this source, Blavatsky and Dorjeff, or Dorzhiev (1854-1938), were co-disciples of the same teacher, or guru, or lama ("lama" is the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit "guru").

One of Dorzhiev's disciples, Geshe Wangyal (1901-1983), was the teacher who first brought Tibetan Buddhism to the West.¹⁵ Not only was he the first to bring Tibetan Buddhism to the West, but he also trained the first generation of American professors of Tibetan Buddhism, such as Robert Thurman and Jeffrey Hopkins, who have in turn had hundreds of students widely spreading these teachings in the West.¹⁶ So a direct connection can be traced between the coming of Tibetan Buddhism to the West and the teacher of Dorzhiev and Blavatsky.¹⁷ This may be taken as supporting evidence that this was the large-scale effort of the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood made in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

There remains a question as to why the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood of Tibet would follow a cycle apparently known only in India. As we have seen, the source work on this cycle is the lost treatise of Vṛddha Garga. Vṛddha Garga is thought to have written a voluminous work treating not only the cycle of the Seven Rishis, but many other cycles as well. There are many manuscripts of such a work by him found in Indian libraries today, but none of these have yet been published.¹⁸ Nor do we yet know how complete or incomplete any of these may prove to be. Blavatsky speaks of a treatise by Vṛddha Garga giving the secret attributes of astronomical cycles of the Hindus that is "now the property of a Trans-Himalayan Matha (or temple)."¹⁹ Since she is our original source on the centennial attempt made by the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood, we have equal grounds for accepting her information that they have Vṛddha Garga's treatise. So the cycle of the Seven Rishis taught by Vṛddha Garga would be known to them, and they have apparently followed it in their efforts now known to us as the centennial cycle.

In summary, there is a one hundred year cycle, known in India as the cycle of the Seven Rishis, that commences with the year 25 of each century as reckoned in the Western calendar, or common era. It is an ancient cycle, taught by Vṛddha Garga, and already considered ancient when it was summarized by Varāha Mihira more than 1500 years ago. It is not astronomical, in that the stars of the Great Bear do not have the motion that it attributes to them. The extant Indian sources do not tell us

what it applies to. But, the effort of the Eastern Brotherhood to enlighten the Western people during the last quarter of each century, spoken of by Blavatsky, would come at the midpoint of this cycle; and the gathering of the council at one hundred year intervals to make decisions on planetary unfoldments, reported by Bailey, would coincide with the starting point of this cycle. This centennial effort is supposed to have been occurring for more than two millenniums now, with failure following failure. The effort in the nineteenth century is said to have been the Theosophical Society. As to the next effort, Blavatsky wrote:²⁰

If the present attempt, in the form of our Society, succeeds better than its predecessors have done, then it will be in existence as an organized, living and healthy body when the time comes for the effort of the XXth century.

Although the Theosophical Society certainly was in existence as an organized body in 1975, so that it was more successful than any previous effort, it had just as certainly lost the influence in the world it earlier had, and few outside observers would regard it as a living and healthy body at that time. So it is unlikely to have been chosen as the vehicle for the next effort; and indeed, there is no evidence that it was so employed. Rather, the most obvious spiritual movement that occurred in the last quarter of the twentieth century was the coming of Tibetan Buddhism to the West. The Dalai Lama has become, second only to the Pope, the most visible spiritual leader in the world in this brief span of years.²¹ The world has not seen anything like this movement for a very long time, not since the coming of Buddhism to Tibet a millennium ago. It seems, then, that the centennial effort of the Brotherhood, following the cycle of the Seven Rishis, has in fact occurred for the twentieth century, even though most of those who expected it have not recognized it.

Notes

1. *The Key to Theosophy*, by H. P. Blavatsky, 1889; reprint, Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1972, pp. 306-307; see also, "Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, Preliminary Memorandum," published in *The Original Programme of the Theosophical Society and Preliminary Memorandum of the Esoteric Section*, by H. P. Blavatsky, Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1931; reprint 1966, pp. 70-71; and in *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 12, Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1980, pp. 491-492. Some of the material in the present article was previously published in my letter to the editor of *The Canadian Theosophist*, vol. 75, no. 5, Nov.-Dec. 1994, pp. 117-119.

2. "The Centennial Cycle," by Dr. Roberto Fantechi, translated by Mrs. Ida Schneider from *Alba Spirituale*, August 1963, and published in *The Canadian Theosophist*, vol. 44, no. 6, Jan.-Feb. 1964, pp. 126 ff.; reprinted in vol. 75, no. 2, May-June 1994, pp. 26-30.

3. *Traditions of the Seven R̥ṣis*, by John E. Mitchiner, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982, p. 148.

4. "Tsong-kha-pa.—Lohans in China," *The Secret Doctrine*, by H. P. Blavatsky, 3rd ed., vol. 3, London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1897, p. 412; 5th ed., vol. 5, Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1962, p. 396; *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 14, Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1985, p. 431.

5. This eleven verse summary forms chapter 13 of the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* by Varāha Mihira, and Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary thereon cites eight and a half verses on this cycle from Vṛddha Garga. The *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* is generally thought to have been written about 500 C.E. The Sanskrit edition used by me, including the commentary of Bhaṭṭotpala, is *Bṛihat Saṃhitā*, edited by AvadhāVihārī Tripāṭhī, 2 vols., Varanasi, 1968; Sarasvatī Bhavan Granthamālā, vol. 97, where this chapter is found in vol. 1, pp. 254-258. This chapter, without the commentary, was first translated into English by H. Kern in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1871, pp. 79-81, as part of his unfinished translation of the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*. The first complete English translation of this book was done by a Theosophist, N. Chidambaram Iyer, under the title, *Bṛihat Saṃhitā of Varaha Mihira*, published in two parts, Madura, 1884, and Madras, 1885, where this chapter occurs in part I, pp. 80-82. This book was again translated into English by V. Subrahmanya Sastri and

M. Ramakrishna Bhat, and published as *Varahamihira's Brihat Samhita*, in 2 parts, Bangalore, 1947, with a new edition published in 1981 by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, under the name of M. Ramakrishna Bhat only. In the 1947 edition, chapter 13 occurs in part 1, pp. 155-158; in the 1981 edition it occurs in vol. 1, pp. 161-164. Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary has not yet been translated.

6. *The Rays and The Initiations*, being vol. 5 of *A Treatise on the Seven Rays*, by Alice A. Bailey, New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1960, p. 207. See also her book, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. 2, New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1955, p. 318:

Occasionally (usually once in a century after Their Conclave at the close of the first quarter) there is the imparting of a more advanced body of teaching. This teaching will only be recognised by a few of the foremost disciples in the world; it will, however, prove to be the ordinary form of occult teaching during the next developing cycle. It is this type of work which I have been endeavouring to do with the aid of A.A.B.

On the Śambhala connection to a one hundred year cycle, the Kālacakra texts state that the kings of Śambhala each reign for exactly one hundred years. I have called attention to this parallel to the cycle of the Seven Rishis in my booklet, *The Lost Kālacakra Mūla Tantra on the Kings of Śambhala*, Talent, Oregon: Eastern School Press, 1986, p. 9. A reference given there on p. 3 from Helmut Hoffmann's *The Religions of Tibet*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1961, p. 125, is pertinent here:

According to tradition, Sucandra was the first of a line of seven 'Priest-Kings' of Shambhala, who were succeeded by a line of twenty-five rulers known as 'Kulika' or 'Kalki', each of whom reigned for one hundred years. The neatness of this arrangement makes it quite clear that behind the formality of these figures there must be some definite astrological symbolism which we are not yet in a position to unravel.

However, these reigns are generally thought to begin in the year 27 of each century as reckoned in the Western calendar, or common era. I cannot explain this two-year discrepancy.

7. This paragraph with its two quotations is based on Nicholas Weeks' letter in response to Roberto Fantechi's article referred to above (note 2). See note 9 below. This quotation is from, "The Cycle Moveth," *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 12, p. 120.

8. "The Last of the Mysteries in Europe," *The Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., vol. 3, pp. 298-299; 5th ed., vol. 5, pp. 294-295; *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 14, pp. 294-295.

9. Letter to the editor by Nicholas Weeks, *The Canadian Theosophist*, vol. 75, no. 5, Nov.-Dec. 1994, pp. 119-120.

10. *The Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., vol. 3, pp. 412-413; 5th ed., vol. 5, p. 396; *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 14, p. 431. This prophecy was first reported in "Tibetan Teachings," published in *Lucifer*, vol. 15, 1894, pp. 9-17, 97-104; reprinted in *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 6, 1954; 2nd ed., Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1975, pp. 94-113, where it occurs on p. 105.

11. *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, by Alice A. Bailey, New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1925, p. 753. See also p. 456, and especially pp. 1036-1039, where the well-known hundred year cycle is placed in perspective against several other unknown cycles. Nonetheless, she there says, "the work it initiates is endorsed by the Lodge as a whole, for it is part of the force emanation of the planetary Logos."

12. "Kiu-te" is an early transcription of the Tibetan term, *rgyud sde*, i.e., the Tibetan Buddhist Tantras, used in Horace della Penna's 1730 "Brief Account of the Kingdom of Tibet" (published as an appendix in Clements R. Markham's *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet, and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa*, London: Trübner and Co., 1876), and adopted in Theosophical writings; e.g., "The Secret Books of 'Lam-Rim' and Dzyan," *The Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., vol. 3, pp. 405-406; 5th ed., vol. 5, pp. 389-390; *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 14, pp. 422-424. See: *The Books of Kiu-te, or the Tibetan Buddhist Tantras: A Preliminary Analysis*, by David Reigle, San Diego: Wizards Bookshelf, 1983.

13. See: "God's Arrival in India," by David Reigle, *Fohat*, vol. 7, no. 1, Spring 2003, pp. 6-11, and no. 2, Summer 2003, pp. 35-39, 46-47; also available on the internet at: www.easterntradition.org

14. *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton, vol. 10, The Orient: Its Legacy to the West*, Burdett, New York: Larson Publications, 1987, chap. 4, section 7, "The Secret Doctrine of the Khmers," p. 201. This material was first brought to the attention of readers of *Theosophical History* by Joscelyn Godwin in, "H.P.B., Dorjeff, and the Mongolian Connection," vol. 2, no. 7, July 1988, pp. 253-260. On Dorzhiev's life, now see: *Buddhism in Russia, The Story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa's Emissary to the Tsar*, by John

Snelling, Shaftesbury: Element Books, 1993. In the quotation cited by me, the material from where the second ellipsis stands is relevant to another question, that of the identity of Blavatsky's adept teacher. It is as follows:

Her guru had forbidden her to give out his name. Moreover, she knew much more of the teachings than she revealed. But she was always fearful of saying too much, so she constantly created what she called 'blinds' and wrapped her truthful secrets in imaginary clothes. I may say no more. However, the poor woman was unjustly maligned by her enemies. Her sole desire was to help humanity. They could never understand her peculiar character nor her Oriental methods.

15. Geshe Wangyal's American student Joshua Cutler writes about him in the preface to the 1995 edition (Boston: Wisdom Publications) of his 1973 book, *The Door of Liberation: Essential Teachings of the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition*, pp. xv-xvi:

Geshe-la . . . was swept up quickly by the great lama, Agvan Dorzhiev. Although Lama Dorzhiev was a Buryat Mongolian from the Siberian region of Russia called Buryatia, he was very devoted to the Kalmyks. From time to time throughout his life he would visit Kalmykia to teach and promote the religion. Lama Dorzhiev had established there two monastic colleges for the study of Buddhist philosophy, known by the Kalmyks as the *chö-ra* (*chos grva*), a Tibetan term meaning "religious institution." Hearing of Geshe-la's great abilities, he conscripted him into one of these *chö-ra*. Lama Dorzhiev was a man of such immense presence and reputation that there was no question of Geshe-la's considering whether he would go or not. In awe, he went.

Thus started a teacher-student relationship that shaped the rest of Geshe-la's life. Lama Dorzhiev became his root lama, giving him all the principal vows and initiations. He was such a strong role model that when Geshe-la came to America in 1955, he too worked to establish a center for learning amongst the Kalmyks, a group of whom had emigrated from the European refugee camps after the Second World War and settled in central New Jersey.

Geshe Wangyal founded the Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America in 1958. Joshua Cutler informs us about his work here, p. xxvi:

Although he intended to teach the young Kalmyks, Geshe-la was open to anyone who wanted to learn about the teachings that he so cherished. Soon he was teaching many more new Buddhists from America than new immigrants from Kalmykia. . . . These teachings were delivered with great devotion, some understanding of which is conveyed in the stories I have told. That devotion and Geshe-la's strong character inspired his students to transform their lives through the practice of the teachings and also to do what they could to assist Tibet and its teachings. Many of these students are now teaching in universities and colleges throughout the country.

16. Robert Thurman is Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies at Columbia University. In 1984 was published his translation of what is regarded by Gelugpa tradition as Tsong-kha-pa's highest, and therefore most difficult, philosophical work. It is called *Tsong Khapa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). It is dedicated to Geshe Wangyal. Thurman writes about him in the preface, pp. xiv, xvi-xvii:

The late Venerable Geshe Wangyal first urged me to translate this book. He himself had memorized it during his "graduate studies" at Drepung Monastic University near Lhasa. . . . By the workings of *karma* or history, he eventually migrated to New Jersey, where I met him and studied with him at the first Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America. Seven years later, he started me off on the *Essence of True Eloquence*. . . .

I must end where I began, with a special homage to the late Venerable Geshe Wangyal, as this work has only been possible because of his infinite kindness and consummate skill as a teacher. He led me into the heart of the Tibetan language and gave me the keys to this *Essence of True Eloquence*. A simple, unassuming man, he preferred to tend the flowers in his garden in the gentle hills near the Delaware, shunning a highly merited acclaim in the forums of philosophy in Tibet, India, or America. But he was the most profound philosophical genius I have encountered, from the little bit I was able to recognize.

Jeffrey Hopkins is Professor of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at the University of Virginia. He "has done more than anyone else to present Buddhism according to the Tibetan Gelukba tradition to a Western

audience” (Daniel Cozort and Craig Preston). This was done through the many translations of Tibetan texts that he and students of the program he founded there published. He studied with Geshe Wangyal from 1963-1968, learning Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan language from him before going on to get his Ph.D. in 1973. For his thesis he translated part of a monastic textbook used at the college in Tibet where Geshe Wangyal had studied. This was later published as *Meditation on Emptiness*, London: Wisdom Publications, 1983 (see his Introduction, p. 12). His full translation of this textbook was published as *Maps of the Profound*, Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2003.

After Geshe Wangyal’s death in 1983, Joshua Cutler has continued his work at the Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America, now called the Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center. In the early 1990s a team of fourteen scholars under Cutler’s direction undertook the translation of what is widely considered to be Tsong-kha-pa’s greatest and most influential work, the *Lamrim Chenmo*. This has now been published as *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, 3 vols., Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2000-2004.

17. It is also noteworthy that Dorzhiev, with considerable difficulty, established a Buddhist temple in Russia’s then capital in 1915. See: “Agwan Dorjiev and the Buddhist Temple in Petrograd,” by Alexandr Andreev, *Chö Yang: The Voice of Tibetan Religion and Culture*, [no. 4], 1991, pp. 214-222. According to Andreev, note 1, p. 222, “It is a common belief of Buddhists in the city that Kalachakra was the chief deity of the Temple although no evidence of it has been found so far in the written sources.”

Further, it was in connection with the construction work on this temple that Nicholas Roerich met Dorzhiev, and first learned of the Shambhala prophecy (part of the Kalachakra teachings) that was to inspire Roerich’s work for the rest of his life. He writes in his book, *Himalayas: Abode of Light*, Bombay: Nalanda Publications, and London: David Marlowe Ltd., 1947, p. 110:

It was during the construction of a Buddhist temple in the Russian capital that I first heard of Shambhala. Being a member of the committee, I met with a very learned Buriat lama who was the first to pronounce the name of Chang Shambhala. It will be known one day why this name pronounced under such circumstances had a great significance.

18. For a listing of these manuscripts, see: *Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit*, by David Pingree, Series A, Vol. 2, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1971, pp. 116-120, under the entry, Garga.

19. "Cycles and Avatāras," *The Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., vol. 3, p. 349; 5th ed., vol. 5, p. 339; *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 14, p. 357.

20. *The Key to Theosophy*, 1889 ed., pp. 306-307.

21. This was pointed out by Leslie Price in his article, "Madame Blavatsky, Buddhism and Tibet," first given orally at the Theosophical History Conference held in London, June 15, 2003, and then published in *PsyPioneer: An Electronic Newsletter from London*, vol. 1, no. 14, June 2005, pp. 172-179. This may be downloaded from:

www.woodlandway.org/PSYPIONEER_NEWS.HTM

Bibliographic Note

As far as I know, the cycle of the Seven Rishis was first made known to the Western world by Captain F. Wilford, who refers to it on pp. 83-86 of his article, "On the Kings of Magadha; Their Chronology," published in *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 9, 1811. It was then described by H. T. Colebrooke on pp. 357-365 of his article, "On the Indian and Arabian Divisions of the Zodiack," also published in *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 9, 1811.

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