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Book Review of Jeffrey Hopkins's "Tantra in Tibet" & Alex Wayman's "Calming the Mind and Discerning the Real: Buddhist Meditation and the Middle View"

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very faithful to the original text and the explanations are scholarly. Above all, the explanations are expressions of the religious convictions of the author about the message of love preached by the religious philosopher, Sri Caitanya (1486-1534). The mass sankirtana (hymn) movement initiated by Sri Caitanya is taken to be the best means to establish the cult of Lord Krishna, which is to bring peace and harmony among men.

“The Lord (Sri Caitanya) inaugurated this system of mass sankirtana, and leaders of all countries can take advantage of this spiritual movement in order to keep the mass of people in a pure state of peace and friendship with one another. This is now the demand of the present human society all over the world” (p. 32).

The reason for this preference for the path of sankirtana can be found in Caitanya’s own words: “I have taken to sankirtana movement instead of the study of Vedanta because I am a great fool. And because I am a great fool, my spiritual master forbade Me to play with Vedanta Philosophy. He said that it is better that I chant the holy name of the Lord, for that would deliver Me from material bondage” (p. 35).

This was the beginning of a new type of spiritual movement which gave supreme importance to the chanting of the name of Krishna. The following citation beautifully brings out the central vision of Krishna-Consciousness movement: “In this age of kali there is no other religion but the glorification of the Lord by utterance of His holy name, and that is the injunction of all the revealed scriptures...So on the order of My spiritual Master, I chant the holy name of Hari, and I am now mad after this holy name. Whenever I utter the holy name I forget myself completely, and sometimes I laugh, cry and dance like a mad man. I thought that I had actually gone mad by this process of chanting, and therefore I asked my spiritual master about it. He informed Me that this was the real effect of chanting the holy name, which produces a transcendental emotion that is a rare manifestation. It is the sign of love of God, which is the ultimate end of life. Love of God is transcendental to liberation (mukti) and thus it is called the fifth stage of spiritual realization, above the stage of liberation” (p. 35).

Convinced by this teaching A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami took upon himself the great mission of preaching bhakti, love of God, which is superior to liberation. His voluminous commentaries on Bhagavata Purana and other numerous works have this central aim. As the founder of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (1966-1996), he is championing the cause of sankirtana movement in the Western world. Books fostering this movement are published by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, the publication wing of the society of Krishna Consciousness.

Thomas Kochumuttom

Tson-kha-pa,

Calming the Mind and Discerning the Real: Buddhist Meditation: and the Middle View from the Lam rim chen mo of Tson-kha-pa, Translated by Alex Wayman (New York : Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. + ix 512.

Tson-kha-pa,


Tson-kha-pa (A.D. 1357-1419) is considered to be one of the most important figures in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. However, until the recent publication of the above works by Professors Wayman and Hopkins, his work was largely unknown outside Tibet.

Tson-kha-pa is noted for three great reforms : stricter application of the rules of monkhood in the Buddhist Sangha, revitalization of the tradition of scholarship, and synthesis of the various schools contained within the Buddhist tradition as known in Tibet. Throughout his adult life, Tson-kha-pa was a prolific writer; his Gs tits ’Bum or collected works run to eighteen volumes. Two of these stand out as principal works : the Lam rim chen mo and the Shags rim chen mo. Wayman’s work includes a translation of part of the former; Hopkins’ work includes a translation of part of the latter.

Throughout his writings, Tson-kha-pa adheres to the Prasangika Madhyamika view, in keeping with Buddhapaśīta’s analysis of
Nagarjuna's philosophy. In brief, the Prasangika position states that because all things arise dependent on conditions (pratitya samutpada) there can be no inherent self-nature (svabhava) of self or other, as opposed to the Svatantrika view, which allows for a conception of essence. This philosophy was embraced by Tson-kha-pa as the best interpretation of Madhyamika. This synthesis, however, is not to systematize a number of Buddhist paths, including the transla- tion of reality, allowing for the simultaneity of nirvana and samsara.

Alex Wayman, in his Calming the Mind and Discerning the Real, translates the second half of the Lam rim chen mo, which "constitutes Tson-kha-pa's reform of Tibetan non-tantric Buddhist meditation and philosophical position" (p. 4). In this work, Tson-kha-pa reconciles the way of meditation (samatha) taught by the Yogacara of Asanga with the way of discernment (vipashyana), as advanced by Buddhapalita's interpretation of Madyamika. This synthesis, however, is not original, being an elaboration on the work of Aśoka (A.D. 982-1054). Rather, the original contribution of Tson-kha-pa lies in his thorough analysis of the Buddhist tradition; reference is made to over 90 Mahayana Buddhist texts to support his position. In his analysis, the teachings of the Yogacara school—"Calming the Mind"—are seen as a preparatory stage to the level of insight found in the Prasangika Madyamika—"Discerning the Real." This insight, the Middle Way, allows for neither nihilism nor eternalism: "When one takes it in the way that here is utterly nothing (ye med) accomplished by self-nature (svarupa) and continues that a dharma does not exist at all (ye med)—in that way, since there is positively nothing (gta m med pa) to posit of cause and fruit in the void which is void of self-existence—one falls into the extreme of nihilism. On the other hand, if one claims that a dharma exists and subsequently finds it necessary to maintain that it is accompanied by self-nature, in that way it does not happen that one regards as illusory-like the appearance there, which in fact is the cause and fruit without self-existence, and so one falls into the extreme of eternalism" (p. 203). Through his explication of the Prasangika position, Tson-kha-pa warns that absolute negation must be avoided, as well as absolute reification: all things exist dependent upon causes and in relation to one another.

The second of Tson-kha-pa's great works, the Shags rim chen mo, rather than dealing with problems inherent in the Mahayana, attempts to systematize a number of Buddhist paths, including the Vajrayana and the so-called Hinayana as well as schools of Mahayana. In his Tantra in Tibet: The Exposition of Secret Mantra, Jeffrey Hopkins translates the first part of this work, and includes an introduction by His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and current head of the Dge Lugs Pa sect which Tson-kha-pa originated. In the Shags rim, the various paths are hierarchically arranged, with the Hinayana designated as the lesser vehicle, the Mahayana the greater, and the Vajrayana the best. The Mahayana is further divided into the Perfec tion Vehicle (Pramitayana), the beginning stage; the Yogacara, the intermediate stage; and the Prasangika Madhyamika as the culmination of the Mahayana. Similarly, the Vajrayana is divided into four progressive tantras: kriya, carya, yoga, and anuttarayoga. The "lesser" tantras (kriya, carya, yoga) require dependence on some external support for meditation, while at the level of anuttarayoga the practitioner unites with his chosen deity, thus effecting enlightenment. Tson-kha-pa, quoting from the Vajradakara Tantra, emphasizes that the practice of deity yoga yields the final achievement: "Oneself is all Buddhas and all the Heroes. Through union with one's own deity, its nature is thoroughly achieved" (p. 137).

Although Tson-kha-pa advances a system of eight stages leading to enlightenment, beginning with the Hinayana and culminating in anuttarayoga, he nonetheless states that all the paths share a common goal. However, he does acknowledge differences in intensity between the paths: "... just as many rivers flow to a great ocean from different approaches, so all the water of the three vehicles flows into the great ocean of Tathagatahood. Still, it is correct that these methods differ in completeness and incompleteness and in the speed of their paths and so forth due to the superiority or inferiority of the trainees" (p. 104). Thus, Tson-kha-pa attempts to synthesize and, perhaps, homogenize diverse Buddhist schools, with Prasangika Madhyamika and the Vajrayana regarded as the "superior" vehicles.

These two translations make an important contribution to the field of Buddhist studies, being the first major English translations of Tson-kha-pa's work. However, neither is without its problems. Wayman's translation is uneven; in some places it is very clear, while in others the syntax is awkward and the meaning obscure (e.g., "If it were not that way, it would not be possible for the nonfluxional path to arise from the fluxional path, so an ordinary person could never attain the noble state, because the cause and fruit are not alike"); (p. 406). Hopkins, on the other hand, although his quality of translation is uniform and generally clear, is prone to over--translating, using English terms for Sanskrit words which are easily recognized by even the beginning student of Buddhism, such as Truth Body for dharmakaya. Similarly, he gives priority to his own English translation of various
Sutra titles, which are more readily familiar in the original Sanskrit. However, both Hopkins and Wayman provide English-Sanskrit-Tibetan glossaries and detailed bibliographies which are very helpful.

The contributions of native Tibetan scholars such as Tson-kha-pa, which have long gone unheralded, provide important insights into the history and philosophy of Buddhism. Hopefully, these two translations will lead to further study in this relatively new field.

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