



His Holiness The Late 16th Karmapa

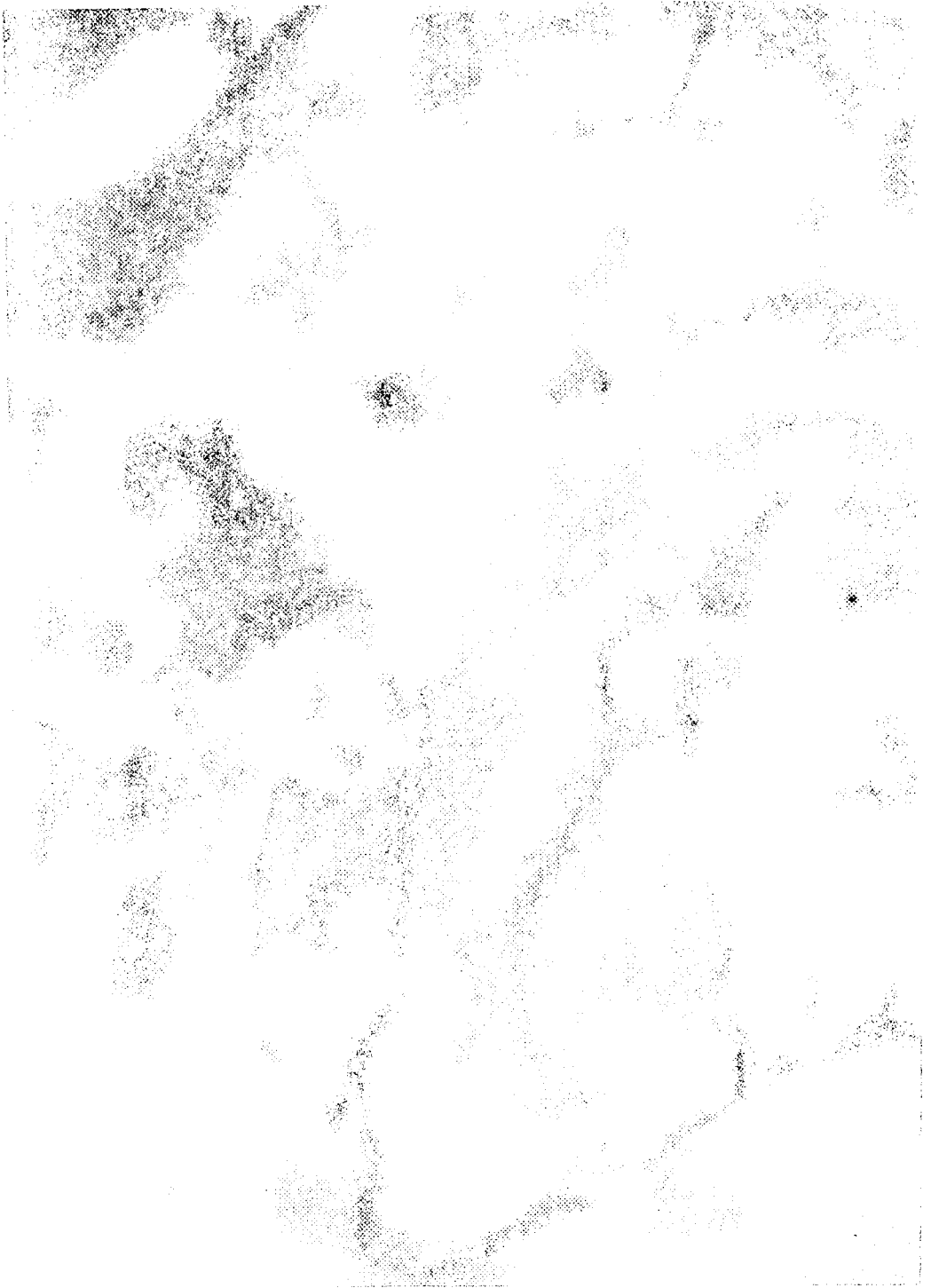


Figure 1. A large, irregularly shaped object, possibly a piece of fabric or paper, with a dark, textured border and a lighter, speckled interior.

His Holiness The Late 16th Gyalwa Karmapa (RANGJUNG RIGPE DORJI)

- P. B. Chakrabarty -

The Karma Kagyudpa school of Mahayana Buddhism in Tibet (belonging to Mahayana Buddhism) is based on the famous Six Religious Doctrine (Chos, Drung, bDus, Pahi and bRis) as propounded by the four celebrated Buddhist saints, Tilopa (975 A.D.), Naropa, Marpa and Milarepa (1052-1135 A.D.). The school stresses the metaphysics of "Sunyanata" or the unqualified void which means undifferentiated unity, a unity between subject and object residing completely in itself. This concept was adopted by the early Vajrayana sect from the Sunyavadins and it formed the essential under current in the spritual ilfe of the Buddhist Trantriccists in Tibet. The Kagyudpa School developed a special system of meditation as expounded and practised by the four Buddhist saints (Siddhas) mentioned in the foregoing.

The Divine Guru of Kagyudpa Sect, Dorje Chang (Dharma Kaya Vajra Dhara) had imparted the teaching of "Maha Mudra" meditation to Tilopa who conveyed it orally, as an esoteric doctrine to his deciple Naropa, the renowned Buddhist Pundit and Yogi who had been once the Chancellor at the ancient Nalanda University. The Six Doctrines of Naropa are the doctrine of Inner Fire (Tibetan -Tumo), the doctrine of Illusory-body (Tib-Gyu-Lu), the doctrine of the Dream State (Mi-lam), the doctrine of the Clear Light (Tib-Ho-Sal), the doctrine of Intermediate State (Tib-Bar-Do) and the doctrine of the Tranference of Conciousness (Tib-Pho-Wa). Naropa had propagated the doctrine to Marpa, the great Tibetan Yogi and scholar-translator who having attained perfection in spritual meditation and devotional practices and mastery over the sacred text (Sutras), transmitted the doctrine to Tibet for the first time. Marpa was followed by his illustrious disciple Milarepa whose fame as a towering Buddhist saint and yogi spread throughout the Mahayana Buddhist world in those times.

Milarepa's spritual practice lies in the Yoga of Inner Fire or "Tumo". Marpa gave him the religious texts on "Tumo" along with Naropa's mantle as a symbol of spritual supremacy. Milarepa had unloosened the knots of his own being and attained ultimate integration, the light of united wisdom.

The great Tibetan saint-scholar Cho-Je-Gampopa was Milarepa's chief disciple whose deciple Dhusum Khyenpa was the first Karmapa. By virtue of his attainment of the highest spritual wisdom, the Karmapa became a seer of the

past, present and the future and gave indications of his being as incarnation (Avatar) of the Bodhisattava Avalokiteshvara, personification of boundless compassion who refused to attain Buddhahood (Nirvana) in order to dedicate himself to the deliverance of living beings from the ills and sufferings of this world and to guide all human beings to the Path of Dharma.

The Karmapa Line began in 1110 A.D., with Dhusum Khyenpa of Dresod in east Tibet as the first Karmapa who had founded monasteries in eastern and central Tibet, including the Tsurphu Gumpa where all the Karmapas lived. The Karmapas shine resplendant for their integrity of character, erudite scholarship and rare excellence in yogic practices. In human form they symbolised supreme compassion and kings, lamas and the laity in Tibetan, the Chinese and the Mongolian communities honoured and followed their path.

The Karmapas travelled widely all over Tibet, China, Mongolia, Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and India. Mighty rulers, namely Kublai Khan of Mongolia, the Khakhan of Karakoram and the Emperor Toghan Temur would honour the Karmapas and listen to their teachings. Time and again the powerful rulers of Central Asia invited the Karmapas and accepted them as their spiritual Gurus. Sometimes those rulers even abandoned their plans of conquest on the advice of the Karmapas. The rulers of Sikkim (till 1975), Bhutan, Nepal and Ladakh also had been great devotees of the Karmapas. His Holiness the Dalai Lama both in the past and in the present recognised the Karmapas as the supreme heads of the Karmapa sect. In fact, the Karmapas of the Black Hat Sect always received the goodwill of the Dalai Lamas in their task of leading their followers to the goal of liberation, peace and tranquility. Some gompas in Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Ladakh form the nucleus of the spiritual activities of the Karmapa sect.

It has been a traditional practice of all Karmapas to predict their next birth before their demise. The fifteenth Karmapa's prediction about his next birth came true in all details. His Holiness the Late 16th Gyalwa Karmapa was born in eastern Dokham in Tibet in 1923. Three days after his birth, the baby incarnation uttered the mantras of "Manjushri" (God of learning, Tibetan-Jampeyang) and Avalokiteshvara - Lotus - in hand (In Mahayana Buddhist pantheon, Avalokiteshvara is the diety symbolising infinite compassion). At the age of eight, he was ceremoniously taken to Sharpul Palpung Chos Khorling in Kham province in eastern Tibet where he was solemnly enthroned amid all the avatars, lamas, disciples, officers and laymen of Dokham -Chuzhi-Gandruk and Tsurphu, the principal seat of the Karmapa Sect. Hundreds of thousands of devotees assembled there and had the first "Darshan" and his blessings. Thereafter the assemblage there, after all religious ceremonies, saw him off for Tsurphu. On his way, he called upon the 13th Dalai Lama, Thupden Gyatso who graciously recognised him as the 16th Karmapa. When he Tsurphu, the ceremony of recog-

nition was again performed. Representatives of the rulers of Sikkim, Bhutan, Ladakh and eminent Incarnate Lamas (Avatars) from all Kagyudpa monasteries attended the holy function. The Tibetan Government too sent its high dignitaries to be present on the solemn occasion.

Till the age of 13, His Holiness the Late Gyalwa Karmapa received teachings in different branches of Buddhism and Tantric practice. He then left for Sarpul Palpung in Kham and performed many a miracle on the way. At Dongtok he left on a stream on footmark which could be seen on the frozen river in winter even today. He was invited by the Li-Thang-Wa, a local ruler who was never at peace with the Chang-Zhang-Wa, another tribal ruler. The Gyalwa Karmapa's arrival ended the dispute without any bloodshed. He left here another footprint which could still be seen at Li-Thang Pangphuk monastery.

The Royal Government of Bhutan was represented by a large team consisting of the Representative of H.M. the King, Ashi Sonam and her husband, and other members of Bhutan's Royal family.

During the cremation ceremony, a supernatural phenomenon was observed by all present at the occasion. While his mortal body was burning in the funeral pyre, a rainbow arched across the sunlit sky although it did not rain at all. It is a common knowledge that the rainbow, a physical phenomenon, is seen in the sky only when the sun shines after a shower. And yet the rainbow without any shower was seen by all. Another unusual phenomenon that took place was also mind boggling for the Karmapa's heart, tongue and eyes remained unburnt. They have been kept along with his holy ashes inside a newly built stupa (Relic receptacle) made of gold. Thus passed away the 16th Karmapa, leaving behind his imperishable religious perfume to guide us to the path of virtue and Dharma.

His Holiness the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa dedicated his whole life to the noble cause of Buddhism to liberate all sentient beings from sufferings. By virtue of his fathomless compassion and dominant personality, he founded with the help of many Kagyudpa lamas, 240 Dharma Centres in the U.S.A., Canada, Europe, Latin America, India and Southeast Asia.

His Guru and prominent avatars (incarnates) gave him special initiations (Tib-Kah Wang) in Kham in Tibet. At the age of 18, he left for Tsurphu and stayed there till 1944. He penetrated into the depths of Buddhist philosophy and mysticism and mastered canonical scriptures and meditation in all their branches. Quite some years ago being invited by the then King of Bhutan, he came to Bhutan and stayed with His Majesty for about 45 days, giving "Darshan" and blessings to the King, monks and laymen. Later on he made a pilgrimage to Nepal, visiting all the sacred places there. The Prime Minister of Nepal's residence was graced by the solemn Vajra Mukut Ceremony (Thunderbolt Hat Cer-

emony). Following his Nepal visit, his Holiness visited all the sacred places of pilgrimage in India. On his arrival at Buddha Gaya, the then Chogyal (King) of Sikkim invited him to visit Sikkim. In Sikkim he gave "Darshan" and blessings to the lamas and the laity. Before returning to Tsurphu, he visited Khunu and Kailash.

On his return to Tsurphu in 1953, the 16th Incarnate Gyalwa Karmapa ordered the rebuilding of the monastery of the Karmapas in Tsurphu and during the period between 1953-56, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama graced Tsurphu by his visit. Then H.H. Gyalwa Karmapa revisited India on a pilgrimage during 2500th Buddha Jayanti celebrations, returning to Tsurphu in Tibet via Sikkim in 1957. During this period Tibet was facing the onslaught of Chinese military occupation. Apprehending the calamity that was overshadowing Tibet after the Chinese invasion, he left Tibet and came to India via Bhutan in 1959, leaving almost everything at Tsurphu and bringing with him a large number of monks along with important images, scriptures and essential ceremonial objects. At the invitation of the then Chogyal of Sikkim, Late P.T. Namgyal, he stayed at the ancient monastery at Rumtek village, a few miles to the west of Gangtok for about four years until a new monastery complex was built in 1963 close to the old one for him and his disciples by the Government of India. Since then he had been staying in the new monastery till his demise. He founded the International Dharma Chakra Centre at Rumtek, his seat in exile since 1959.

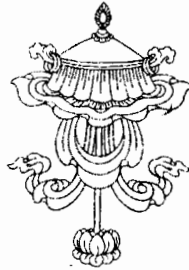
The Karmapa, an incarnation of the Bodhisattava Avalokiteshvara, adopted the practice of giving darshan of the sacred Vajra Mukut (sacred Thunderbolt Crown). The original crown is said to have been woven out of the precious hair of 100,000 "Dakinis" or Celestial Beings and offered to Dhusun Khyenpa, the first Karmapa who had sanctified and blessed it with the indefinable miraculous virtue of "Deliverance on Sight". The "Vajra Mukut" was shown to the public during a special ceremony held on auspicious days at Rumtek monastery.

On November 6, 1981, H.H. the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa suffering from throat cancer for some time, passed away in Chicago, U.S.A.. His death plunged Buddhists all over the globe in deep grief. In keeping with the Buddhist tradition, religious rituals were held at Rumtek monastery where his body was kept embalmed for 49 days. The cremation ceremony was held on December 20, 1981, an auspicious day, in the presence of hundreds of devotees who had come from all over the world. Among distinguished personages present at the solemn ceremony were the then Governor of Sikkim, Homi J.H. Taleyar Khan, the former Governor, Bepin Behari Lal, Sikkim's then Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari and members of Sikkim Cabinet

Under his guidance, 500 sets of the immortal Buddha's Kangyur were printed and he donated this to monasteries of all sects and reprinted many valuable religious books to restore Lord Buddha's teachings. He blessed countless peo-

ple regardless of race, caste and religion and many new monastic colleges and meditation centres came to be established through his direct and indirect influences.

There is a confidential and prophetic will left by His Holiness for the recognition of his new incarnation. Rumtek monastery is now the Dharma Chakra Centre and the International Kagyudpa Headquarters.



FOOTNOTES

(1) The writer of this article had the good fortune to witness twice, the most auspicious "Vajra Mukut Ceremony" (the sacred Thunderbolt Crown Ceremony), performed by His Holiness the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa at Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim.

(2) Karma Pakshi, the second Karmapa in the lineage, convinced the Chinese Taoists of the excellence of Tibetan Buddhism with all its yogic practices. He threw away the costly presents offered to him on his travels into a spring near Shang Tu in China and recovered them from a pool near Tsurphu in Tibet. Miracles performed by the 5th Karmapa, Dezin Shekpa are inscribed on a big silkbacked scroll in five languages. The Karmapas travelled widely over Tibet, China, Mongolia, Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and India, studied the rare religious manuscripts in ancient monasteries there and contributed their own spiritual experiences and knowledge to Tibetan Literature.

(3) In 1952, the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa accompanied H.H. the Dalai Lama on his political mission to China.

The Karmapa Lineage

I	Dhusum Khyenpa	-	1110 - 1193 A.D.
II	Karma Pakshi	-	1204 - 1283 A.D.
III	Rangjung Dorje	-	1284 - 1339 A.D.
IV	Rolpei Dorje	-	1340 - 1383 A.D.
V	Deshin Shekpa	-	1384 - 1415 A.D.
VI	Tongwa Donden	-	1416 - 1453 A.D.
VII	Chodrag Gyamtso	-	1454 - 1506 A.D.
VIII	Mikyo Dorje	-	1507 - 1554 A.D.
IX	Wangchuk Dorje	-	1556 - 1603 A.D.
X	Choying Dorje	-	1604 - 1674 A.D.
XI	Yeshe Dorje	-	1676 - 1702 A.D.
XII	Changchub Dorje	-	1703 - 1732 A.D.
XIII	Dadul Dorje	-	1733 - 1797 A.D.
XIV	Thegchog Dorje	-	1798 - 1863 A.D.
XV	Khakhyab Dorje	-	1871 - 1922 A.D.
XVI	Rangjung Rigpe Dorje	-	1924 - 1981 A.D.

