

- SIKKIM -
The Hidden Holy Land
And
Its Sacred Lakes

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Various religious textual sources ascertain the fact that Sikkim is one of the sacrosanct hidden Buddhist zones recognized by Guru Padmasambhava, the fountainhead of Tantrayana Buddhism.

Denjong Nye-Yig (The Pilgrim's Guide to the Hidden Land of Sikkim), by Lhatsun Jigmed Pawo, based on *Lama Gongdu Cycle* revealed by Terton Sangay Lingpa (1340-1396) has the following description of Sikkim:

“བཀྲ་ཤིས་བྱིན་ཆགས། སྤུལ་ཡུལ་རིན་ཆེན་འབྲས་མོ་གཤོངས་ཞེས་བྲ་བ། དབྱིབས་བྲ་བ་
བཞི་དང་ལྔ་པ། བསམ་ཡས་ནས་གཞལ་བའི་རྫོ་ལྷུ་བ། སྤྱིན་ཐིང་གངས་ཀྱི་རྫོ་ལྷུ་བ་ལ་ཚུང་
ཉེ་བ། བར་གྲོ་མོ་ཁང་རྒྱང་ལ་གཏད་པ། རྫོ་རྒྱར་མིད་རྫོ་གངས་ཀྱི་རི་ལ་གཏད། ལུབ་
ཟར་གྱི་རྒྱང་སྤུལ་རི་ལ་གཏད་པ། བྱང་ཕྱོགས་མཚོ་མོ་དྲི་རྒྱ་ཉིད་ལ་གཏད། ལུང་པའི་ཕུ་
བྱང་བར་མཚོ་དུ་སྤྲུག་ཅེ་ལ་གཏད་པ། མདའ་རྫོ་སྤང་རྫོ་ལྷུ་བ་འབང་ཚང་ལ་གཏད་པ།
༼གཞན་ཡང་༽ འདོད་དགུ་ལོ་འབྲས་གང་ཡང་སྤྱི་བའི་འབྲས་མོ། ཡངས་ཤོང་ཆེ་བས་
གཤོངས། དེ་ལྟར་སྤུལ་ཡུལ་འབྲས་མོ་གཤོངས་ཞེས་བྲགས།”

“The auspicious Hidden Land of Sikkim, having a square topographical appearance, is situated in the southwest of Samye Monastery, Lhasa, Tibet, and is

close to the southwest face of Mt. Kyin-thing. Its eastern border touches Mt. Sidhi of India; the western border touches the mountain of Zar district of U-Tsang, Tibet, and the Northern border touches Lake Tsomo Dri-Chu”.

“The upper range of the country, the northeastern side, reaches up to Gangchen Zod-nga and the lower southwesterly range touches Banga (India). It is a fertile land which grows a large variety of fruits, crops and medicinal herbs etc., and its valleys are stretched openly and are quite spacious. Hence, it is called Demo-shong (the original name of Sikkim), i.e. “The Hidden Land”.

This prophecy and instruction was given by Guru Padma Sambhava on the request of Chogyal Trisong Deutsen and the Guru’s twenty-five disciples. Guru Rinpoche also imparted oral instructions on how to enter this Holy Land and the disciplines to be followed while entering. He further described the topographical appearance of this Hidden Valley, its edible plants, fruits and mineral resources necessary for the survival of the human race and also gave directions mentioning the suitable season for entering this land from the gates in four directions.

As per the Hidden Treasures of Tertön Rigzin Jigmed Ligpa (1730-1798),

རིག་འཇིན་འཇིགས་མེད་སྐྱིད་པའི་གཏེར་བྱང་ལས་། ཅ་རི་ཏུ་དང་སྣོ་མོན་འབྲས་
 མོ་གཤོངས་། མངའ་རིས་སྐོར་གསུམ་དབུས་གཙང་རུ་བཞི་དང་། མདོ་ཁམས་སྐང་
 འུག་སྐས་གནས་གཉན་པོའི་ཡུལ་། ལྗོངས་ལྗ་སྐྱིད་དུག་གསེར་རི་རྩུན་པོའི་སྣོ་།

Guru Rinpoche identified six countries and five valleys as sacred Hidden Lands of Buddhism, *Lho-mon Demo-shong* (Sikkim) is one of the five valleys. The other four are *Tsa-ri Gangkyi Rawa*, *Ngari Korsum*, *U-Tsang Rushi* and *Dokham Gandruk*, all in Tibet.

མངའ་བདག་ཁྱི་སྐོང་ལྗེ་འུ་བཙན་གྱི་གསང་བའི་གབ་བྱང་ལས་། དེ་དུས་པོད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་ན་
 སྐྱིད་མེད་པས་། ཚོས་བྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་སྐས་པའི་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱོས་། དཔལ་གྱི་འབྲས་མོ་གཤོངས་
 དེ་ལྗོངས་ཡུལ་། བོད་ལ་དགོངས་ཕྱིར་རྒྱལ་པོ་ང་ཡིས་རྩལ་། ཞེས་དང་།

Given below is the translation of another description found in Chogyal Trisong Deutsan’s Secret Hidden Prophecy (7th Century):

“At the time when there is no peace in Tibet, or it is facing a tense situation, all those Dharma practitioners can flee and take refuge in the Hidden Land, the glorious Hidden Land of Sikkim is a blissful heaven; I prophesise thus for the sake of Tibet.”

Given all these references, Sikkim’s special status as invaluable and sacro-

sanct Buddhist zone cannot be overemphasized. Further, the term “*Hidden Land*” is interpreted in the following way by various religious texts:

Externally, Hidden Land means the land so encircled or locked by mountain chains and cliffs that it keeps the malevolent elements away.

Internally, a Hidden Land signifies the people born on its soil who possess the virtue of kindness, are God fearing and generally refrain from indulging in negative activities which displeases the guardian deities of the land. Undesirable activities like burning of unwanted things in fire (meat etc.), slaughtering of animals and sprinkling blood on objects of worship, cutting trees which are the home of various spirits, polluting lakes and rivers and blasting of hills and rocks etc are said to be disastrous to the inhabitants of this land. (These descriptions can be found at page 31 of *Denjong Nye-Sol*).

The secret meaning of ‘*Hidden Land*’ is that Sikkim is accorded a place and importance similar to the heavenly abode of Guru Rinpoche’s Zandok Palri. The people of this land are treated as Pawos and Pamos, meaning highly enlightened and pure beings. The land was declared by the Guru as the most suitable place for meditation and practising of Buddhism, whose practitioners can attain real Buddhahood (enlightenment) within their life time itself.

The tradition of worshipping supernatural beings such as various deities, dakinis and local demigods has existed in Sikkim since ancient times. The practice of making offerings to the local guardians, demons, spirits residing in lakes, passes, rocky hills, trees, valleys and waterfalls has been a feature of monasteries of this land for an equally long period. These practices have been established for maintaining peace and harmony in this land and are cited in the special prayer text called *Denjong Nye-Sol*.³

ཕྱི་དང་ནང་དང་གསང་བའི་ལྗེ་བརྒྱད། །བཀའ་འཁོར་གངས་ལྗན་བརྒྱ་དང་སྟོང་ལྔ།
 ག་བུར་སྦྱང་བཅན་རྫོང་རིའི་སྦྱང་བཅན། རྫོན་གིང་བྲག་རི་འབབ་ཆུ་རྫིང་ཁ།
 སྦངས་གཤོངས་ལ་གནས་ལྗང་བཅན་བདུད་བཅན། ལྷ་མོ་སྦྱང་སྲིད་ལྗང་འདྲེར་བཤོས་སུ།
 གསེར་སྦྱེམས་བརྒྱན་གྱིས་མཚོད་པ་སོགས་སོ།

The basic reason of making such offerings is to escape the cruel wrath of the various presiding deities of the land and to ensure all-round peace and progress here. Any negligence on the part of the residents of Sikkim is believed to cause severe problems. The annoyance of these deities is often manifested in the form of actions of wild animals. For instance, if the Du-tsan Demon is annoyed, his wrath is manifested in the form of an angry bear creating problems in villages. The guidelines on how to keep the deities happy as per the Guru’s guidance are enunciated in various *Denjong Nye-Yigs*.⁴

THE SPIRITUAL RECOGNITION OF SACRED LAKES

The Dorjee Nyima Pilgrim Guide of Sikkim by Tertön Rigzin Godemchen (1339-1403), records as many as one hundred and nine sacred lakes in Sikkim.⁵ Some of these are: *Phutso Karpo* (the White Lake in the upper valleys), *Tsan-tso Marpo* (the Red Lake of Tsan), *Datso Nyonpo* (the Blue Lake in the lower valleys), *Tso-shug* (Khechopalri) and many others.

མཚོ་ཆེན་བརྒྱ་དང་དགུ་ལ་སོགས། ཞེས་དང་།

Tertön Rigzin Godemchen's list is supported by a similar enumeration given in *Denjong Nye-Sol*.⁶

The third Lhatsun Jigmed Pawo (19th century) has recorded the number of sacred and sanctified lakes at four hundred and four in his *Denjong Nye-Yig*⁷ and has based his addition on the *Denjong Lam-Yig*⁸ of Lama Gongdu Cycle revealed by Tertön Sangay Lingpa (1340-1396). He is said to have spent a number of years in Sikkim during which time he founded many monasteries like Phensang and Lingthem Gonpa. Lhatsun Jigmed Pawo is also believed to have visited almost all parts of Sikkim during his stay here. Although his list of 404 sacred lakes is believed to be true, there are no specific names indicated in the text leading Buddhist followers to believe that the lakes mentioned are the sacred abodes of different deities, dakinis and Tsomons (water nymphs). Therefore, they are sanctified and worshipped.

Some of the sacred lakes in West Sikkim are Khachod Palri Lake (Tso-zhug), Karthok Latso, Kagyed Latso and Phutso Karpo in the north western valley of Sikkim. The beautiful Tsomgo Lake and Memoi Tso Lake lie in the East and Tigdey Lake (Yangang) and Tso Melong Dun Lake (Dorling) lie in South Sikkim, while the most popular of the sacred lakes, Guru Dongmar and Tso Lhamu fall in North Sikkim.

Guru Dongmar Lake, in extreme north Sikkim, draws many pilgrims from all areas and is surrounded by many remarkable holy places like Tamding Rangjon, Namjom Truchu and Chorten Nyima. The lake is worshipped with hopes blessings for long life and creation of an epidemic free existence of the land. Infertile women and couples wishing a male issue seek blessings at the lake. It is also believed that sometimes predictions are also made in the lake. The devout, it is said, get to see the future in the form of letters or scenes on the lake's water after the required prayers and offerings have been made.

Guru Dongmar literally means "The Red Faced Guru" and sounds similar to Guru Dragmar, which means "The Red Coloured Wrathful form of Guru Padmasambhava". The Guru Dragmar Sadhana, which is one of the

most popular hidden Terchos (treasures) of Guru Rinpoche revealed by various Tertons, is widely practised and preserved in premier monasteries of Sikkim headed by Pema Yangtse, Phensang and Enchey with symbolic mystic dances and other rituals. Many lamas and practitioners in retreat and meditation course often choose this unique Guru Dragmar Sadhana. This is the reason why local inhabitants, all ardent devotees of the Guru, have a tradition of performing special annual pujas on Tsechu, or the first ten days of the New Year according to the Tibetan calendar, at the mouth of small cavern at the source of the lake. This is the gesture through which the people show their gratitude to Guru Rinpoche's lake and pray for peace and prosperity and general betterment of the inhabitants of Sikkim.

As such there is not a speck of doubt about Guru Dongmar lake being one of the most sacred lakes for all Buddhists. Moreover, the physical imprints of Guru Rinpoche found on rocks and caverns of different localities of Sikkim bear a testimony to the fact that the entire zone of Bayul Demojong was personally and physically blessed by Guru Rinpoche along with his fifteen disciples including king Trisong Deutsan.¹⁰

བདག་འདྲེ་ཨོ་ཀྱན་པདྨ་འབྲུང་གནས་ཀྱིས་། ཀྱལ་པོ་རྗེ་འབངས་བཙུ་ལྷ་སྐྱ་བྲངས་ནས་།
སྤུལ་ཡུལ་རིན་ཆེན་གསོངས་སུ་པོ་བྲང་བཏབ་། སོགས་སོ།

All the texts (Terchos) of Guru Rinpoche's prophecies indisputably prove the same truth and should finally put to rest any doubts on the lake's spiritual importance to Buddhists.

R E F E R E N C E S

1. Denjong Nye-Yig by Lhatsun Jigmed Pawo, p. 6.
2. Denjong Nye-Yig by Terton Padma Lingpa, Vol 13 (TSA), p. 408.
3. Denjong Ney-Sol, p. 30
4. a) Denjong Nye-Yig by Terton Padma Lingpa Vol. 13 (TSA), p. 437-440
b) Denjong Nye-Yig by Jigmed Pawo, p. 39-41.
c) Lama Gondu's Denjong Lam-Yig by Terton Sangay Lingpa, Vol. 6 (CHA) p 528-531.
5. Dorjee Nyima Pilgrims Guide of Sikkim by Terton Rigzin Godemchen.
6. Denjong Nye-Sol, p. 30.

7. Denjong Nye-Yig by Jigmed Pawo, p. 10.
8. Lama Gongdu Denjong Lam Yig by Terton Sangay Lingpa, Vol 6 (CHA), p. 506.
9. The Eight Wrathful deities of Nyingma Tradition of Tantra. The first five are transworldly deities and the rest worldly deities.
10. Denjong Nye-Yig of Terton Padma Lingpa, Vol 13 (TSA), p. 405-406.