



A Brief Analysis of the Sacred Tenth-Day Guru Padmasambhava *Cham* (Sacred Lama Dance)

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Abstract

The Buddha Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, was born bearing the major and minor marks of enlightenment in the sacred garden of Lumbini, and subsequently attained full awakening at Vajrasana in Bodh Gaya, Magadha. At various times and places including Varanasi and Vulture's Peak, he turned the three wheels of the Dharma according to the different capacities of his followers. This Teaching gave rise to many vehicles (*Yanas*), all of which can be subsumed within the Great and Small Vehicles (Mahayana and Hinayana). Within this teaching, the elaborate ritual dances (*Cham*) of the peaceful, wrathful, and semi-wrathful deities constitute a distinct, unbroken lineage of visualization practice and Sadhana within the Vajrayana (Secret Mantrayana) of the Mahayana. The oral instructions for these practices have been transmitted intact through the authentic Tantras and the hidden treasure (*Terma*) teachings, and continue to be upheld today by the four great lineages of Tibetan Buddhism in the Himalayan region. *Cham* is distinguished above all by its external physical movements and postures, performed in accordance with the principles of Secret *Mantra*. In the Himalayan region, this tradition traces back to its transmission by the Second Buddha, the Precious Master of Oddiyana (Guru Rinpoche), who established it as a supreme and unsurpassed path for accomplishing both the temporary and ultimate peace and happiness of sentient beings. Guru Padmasambhava, the Master of Mantra, prophesied by the Buddha Shakyamuni envisioned this practice for the benefit of the teachings and beings in general, and for Tibet in particular. From this lineage of direct vision and practice arose the elaborate ritual dance of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche (Guru Tsen Gye *Cham*), which remains preserved and practiced to this

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day. Drawing on both traditional textual sources and modern scholarly methods, this paper examines the origins, purposes, and specific significance of the Guru Tsen Gye *Cham*, with the aim of offering new insight into its history and practice.

Keywords: Sacred Ritual Dance, (*Cham*) Practical Lineage, Vajrayana, Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche, Peaceful / Wrathful (Deities)

Introduction

The historical development of Vajrayana Buddhism in the Himalayan plateau is inherently linked with ritual art, sacred movement, and contemplative performance. The key element of this tradition of spirituality is *Cham*, the dance of peaceful, wrathful, and semi-wrathful deities. Contrary to what *Cham* may appear in terms of a purely cultural event or dramatic performance, the *Cham* is an uninterrupted transmission of visualization practice, *sādhana*, and bodily *mudrā* in the Mantrayana tradition. This is an ancient practice that has been transmitted throughout the major lineages of Tibetan Buddhism in its pure form as preserved in authentic *Tantras* and revealed treasure teachings (*terma*). Dating back to the foundation of Samye Monastery by Guru Padmasambhava, Śāntarakṣita, and King Trisong Detsen in the eighth century CE, *Cham* has been represented in the ritual dance of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche (Guru Tsen Gye *Cham*). Through integration of bodily postures, symbolic adornments, sacred song, and single-pointed *samādhi*, *Cham* becomes an extraordinary skill-in-means (*upāya*) meant to overcome spiritual hindrances, purification of bad *karma*, and temporary and ultimate peace of sentient beings.

In spite of having strong doctrinal and soteriological underpinnings, *Cham* in contemporary times is often misunderstood as a form of cultural entertainment, folk theater, or tourist spectacle, while its tantric ritual, meditative discipline, symbolic meaning, and transformative spiritual purpose are frequently overlooked. In an age of fast-paced globalization, commercialization, and information exchange, sacred ritual objects, costumes, and dances have become more and more available as an object of aesthetic interest and entertainment. The abundance of coverage in the media and performances without any context has blurred the line between sacred practice (*dharma*) and profane performance (folk theater). Without inner meditation prerequisites such as preliminary practices, deity visualization, and keeping up with tantric commitments (*samaya*), *Cham* is not able to perform its transformative function and may turn into a shallow imitation of the sacred practice. This misunderstanding on the part of faithful devotees, scholars, and ordinary people indicates an acute need for academic and textual research concerning sacred dance.

In this regard, the present research attempts to fill in this important void through an extensive textual and analytic study of the Sacred Tenth Day Guru Padmasambhava *Cham*. In this analysis, the Guru Tsen Gye *Cham* is explained based on references to the canonical *Tantras*, history, and the authoritative commentaries of eminent scholars like Minling Lochen Chöpal Gyatso and Mipham Rinpoche. The study is based on the classical five-step approach (*pañcaprakāra*) presented by Master Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti*, which entails explaining the purpose, summarizing, defining word meanings, drawing connections, and answering objections, combined with modern critical scholarship. Through a

systematic analysis of the difference between the sacred and theatrical *Chams*, the history of this sacred *Cham* in the eighth century as well as in its revelation through terma by Tertön Guru Chöwang and Ratna Lingpa, and ritual performance among the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, this study hopes to bring back the sacredness and doctrine of the *Cham* art. This study ultimately shows that as long as *Cham* remains true to its original tradition of being taught orally and through visual means, it is not only an essential path for Vajrayana practice, but also an essential part of living Himalayan culture.

The methodology of this research relies on traditional Buddhist scriptures, including the Tantras taught by the Buddha, later treatises, and particularly the sacred words of Guru Rinpoche and the treasure-revealers (*tertöns*) of Nyingma School. To make these teachings relevant to modern readers, this paper combines modern research principles with the classical five-fold teaching framework from Master Vasubandhu's Explanation of Methodology (*Vyakhyayukti*): explaining the purpose, providing a summary, detailing word meanings, establishing connections, and addressing counterarguments.

The Sacred Ritual Dance

As it is mentioned in Tantra of the Union of Sun and Moon, "If the historical meaning is not explained, doubts will arise regarding the definitive teachings of the Great Secret (Vajrayāna) 20. In accordance with this statement, generally speaking, regarding dancing (*cham*), there may be different scholarly explanations found in Indian and Bhot sources. However, in terms of the widely known Himalayan Bhot Buddhist tradition, if we trace the historical origins, in the 8th century, at the invitation of Tibet's Dharma King Trisong Detsen, the great master Bodhisattva (*Śāntarakṣita*) and the great master Guru Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) renowned as the Khen-Lop-Choe Sum (trio of abbot, master, and king), came together in Bhot. Subsequently, when constructing the great monastery of Samye, known as Samye Migyur Lhungyidrubpai Tsuklhakha (Unchangeable and spontaneously arisen Samye), they tamed the earth through the manner of the vajra body, subjugating all between heaven and earth, and progressively completed the construction of the temple and its sacred objects. This marks the beginning of *cham* dance. According to the book titled The Treasury of Teachings, The Immaculate Ornament of the Twelve Deeds of the Life Story of the Second Buddha, Guru Padmasambhava, page 437, King Trisong Detsen, along with his ministers and subjects, requested the Guru to tame the earth. He said 'Come,' and they proceeded to Samye. Then, through the power of dancing and singing, he said 'First *cham* (dancing) must be performed and performed ten *chams*. The single-pointed vajra step is the taming of the earth; the two-pointed vajra step is the taking of the earth; the vajra cross step is the blessing; Then the swaying dance is peaceful; Then the dakini step is peaceful-wrathful; Then the bound step of the tigress is peaceful-wrathful and so forth.

From 1212-1270, the incarnate tertön (treasure revealer) Guru Chöwang began performing *cham* dances. Subsequently, from the incarnate tertöns including Tertön Ratna Lingpa (1403-1478) and others, the earth-taming rituals, physical dancing movements, elaborate costumes and ornaments arising from each tertön's pure visions have been preserved uninterruptedly until the present day. Although there are slight variations in accordance with each one's individual visions, these include particularly the well-known root *chams* and dance-dramas of the Nyingma Kama tradition, as well as *chams* associated with the

great accomplishment practices (drubchen) of the *Sakya*, *Gelug*, *Kagyu*, and *Nyingma* Schools.

In particular, in *Nyingma* and *Kagyu* traditions regarding the elaborate dancing tradition of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Padmasambhava, widely known as the second Buddha, it gradually became known throughout Bhot through the mind treasures (*gongter*) of Tertön Guru Chöwang (Orgyen Lingpa 439). According to the Tertön Guru Chöwang's pure vision, the Black Hat Dance, one night, in a dream-like visionary experience, he went to the bank of a great river. A black hat was being carried away by the water, so he reached out with his hand. The black hat was carried into the water and then to the far shore. When he crossed to that side, there appeared to be a land of demons to the southwest, and he proceeded with some trepidation, climbing the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain until he reached its summit and arrived at the pure land of the Glorious Mountain, Padma Öd. He met Guru Rinpoche and his retinue directly. From the beginning, performing the boundary rituals, and continuing through to the horse dancing at the end, he performed dance with song, music, and ritual practices. (Orgyen Lingpa 439). Guru Padmasambhava then instructed that such sacred dance-drama and praises should be widely performed in Tibet, especially on the tenth day of the monkey month. As it was spoken to him in that way, successively the incarnate tertöns spread this throughout all regions of the Tibetan Himalayan areas, where it has been preserved uninterrupted and can be witnessed to this day.

The primary purpose of introducing the history and reasoning behind *Cham* (sacred dance) is as follows: Nowadays, there is a widespread interest in Mahayana Buddhism, and people are particularly fond of the substances, implements, and costumes related to Secret *Mantra* (Vajrayana). However, because most people utilize them based on mere whim without proper understanding, numerous faults and flaws have become visibly apparent in society, leading many to accumulate non-virtuous actions. This is mainly because the true meaning of the ancient *Sutras* and *Tantras* is not correctly understood, and literature concerning Secret *Mantra* is poorly disseminated-creating a significant gap between faithful practitioners and these sacred ritual objects. Therefore, this research paper aims to temporarily bridge this gap and provide clarity.

The Meaning of Gar and Cham (Secret Dancing)

The term 'gar' (dance in *Bhot* language) refers to gentle or soft physical movements and primarily demonstrates mudras (hand gestures), while *cham* refers to displaying physical movements through forceful or vigorous postures. Although there is recognition of these distinctions, in terms of actual meaning there is no real difference beyond the terminology. The wisdom deity assemblies manifest in various *mudra* forms appropriate to those being tamed. This is called *gar* (dance); and as a means of taming beings, they display various movements in peaceful, wrathful, and peaceful-wrathful postures, this is called *cham*. As stated in the Treasury of Teachings, quoting from Complete Explanation of *Cham*, 438), Transforming into various forms is *gar* whereas performing with vigorous postures is *cham*.

Generally, *gar-cham* is also related to various skills of physical expression and movement. So, it could be categorized merely as a form of theatrical performance (drama). However, it cannot be applied in terms of the three aspects of name, meaning, and purpose. Similarly, theatrical performances also display various physical movements, costumes, and expressions. Therefore, there may be a superficial

description as *gar-cham*, but it cannot be applied in terms of the three aspects of name, meaning, and purpose. For any worldly performing arts, each has its own name, and generally speaking, they are referred to as ‘performing theater,’ ‘performing dance,’ ‘performing song,’ ‘performing folk dance,’ etc., but the terminology ‘performing *cham*’ or ‘performing *gar-cham*’ is not used.

The difference between the worldly and transcendent deity assemblies is that the peaceful, wrathful, and peaceful-wrathful deity assemblies with their complete aspects including expressions, ornaments, costumes, implements, and postures, each deity’s complete mantra approach and accomplishment practices, serve the special purpose of pacifying the mental afflictions in the mind-streams of sentient beings and establishing temporary and ultimate benefit and happiness. The opposite of this (worldly performance) ends up in mere entertainment and, is thus, different from sacred *Cham*.

Categories and Names of *Gar-Cham*

Gar-cham, *lha-cham* (deity dance), *dorje dro* (vajra dance), *dorje gar* (vajra dance), etc. are among the principle categories of sacred dances. The names of these dances may vary in different regions.

Root *cham* (*tsa-cham*), *gar-cham* (dance-drama), black hat *cham* (*zhanak cham*), mask *cham* (*bak cham*), ging *cham*, boundary ritual (*tsam chö*), blessing bestowal (*jinbeb*), tumultuous dance (*tum ngam*), assembly gathering (*tsok ling*), Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche (*guru tsen gyé*), *torma* throwing *cham* (*zor cham*), wrathful *cham* (*drakpo cham*), peaceful *cham* (*zhiwa cham*), golden libation *cham* (*ser kyem cham*), and many other types of *cham* exist. All of these can be divided into two categories: either performed wearing hats, called ‘hat *cham*’ (*zha cham*), or performed wearing masks, called ‘mask *cham*’ (*bak cham*).

The *Cham* (dancing) of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche

The sequential order of the Eight Manifestations of Guru is: Guru Padmasambhava, Guru Loden Choesé, Guru Pema Gyalpo, Guru Nyima Özer, Guru Śākya Sengé, Guru Sengé Dradog, Guru Pema Jungné and Guru Dorjé Drolö. In the Root *sadhānā* of Guru Sangdū 14, it was stated, “Homage to the form of Padmasambhava, unstained by the fault of attachment; Homage to the form of Padma Sambhava, perfectly complete in all qualities,” and so forth.

Generally speaking, it is difficult to express exactly how many emanations the Guru manifested as means to tame beings. It is mentioned in the Biographies of the Hundred Treasures, 1-4-7ab, that One thousand nine hundred life stories were arranged and concealed for the benefit of future worthy ones. As stated, various emanations appeared according to what was appropriate to tame each being. Although this transcends the domain of ordinary perception, according to what is widely known from the treasure teachings of the Second Buddha, the great Master Padmasambhava, the *cham* of the deity assembly principally known as the Eight Manifestations of Guru includes, in sequence, boundary ritual (*tsam chö*), blessing bestowal (*jin beb*), tumultuous dance (*tum ngam*), assembly gathering (*tsok ling*), ging, Brahma, Indra, the Five Classes of *Dakinis*, and so forth and at the center, Guru Padmasambhava as the principal figure occupies the central position. To his right from the root, are Guru Dorjé Drolö, Guru Shākya Sengé, Guru Loden Choksé, and Guru Pema Tötrenge Tsal and to his left are Tsokye Dorjé, Guru

Pema Gyalpo, Guru Nyima Özer, and Guru Sengé Dradog. This is arranged according to the *cham* of Minling Lama Sangdö.

Even in the six main Nyingma monasteries of the earlier translation tradition, although the root Eight Manifestations of Guru have the same ornaments and costumes, the physical postures and the experiential qualities of slow and fast movements differ somewhat among them. This primarily depends on the individual incarnate treasure revealers (from whom these traditions originated).

Purpose for Performers and Spectators

When explained by dividing into performers and spectators, for tantric practitioners who have realized the view that *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are of equal nature and have spontaneously perfected *samādhi*, all movements of the vajra body never deviate from the conduct of *mudrā* dance. Whatever bodily conduct is undertaken, it is nothing other than the accumulation of the vast two accumulations. Therefore, there is no need to specifically wear the ornaments, costumes, and implements of individual deity assemblies and display the forms of dance eating, sleeping, coming and going all ordinary activities are none other than vajra song and dance, and there is no need to engage in elaborated practices. As stated in *Khrag thung khro bo'i brjed byang, Rngam glog*, Memoir of the Fierce Blood Drinker: Roaring Thunder p.124, if one realizes the state where all phenomena are equal, then all movements and gazes become *mudras*, as taught by the heroes.

However, in accordance with ordinary worldly appearances, to maintain the practices purely according to the *sadhānas* of transmitted teachings (*bka*) and treasure teachings (*gter*) with elaborate ornaments, costumes, and implements in harmony with the specific manifestations of peaceful and wrathful *yidams* and deity assemblies is done with the intention of providing an extraordinary method to easily accumulate the vast two accumulations at the relative level, and a wonderful means to accomplish the four activities of pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, and subjugating, as well as supreme and common *siddhis*. As stated in *Rgyud bla ma, Uttratantra* p.180, “With great compassion knowing the world, looking upon all the world, without moving from the *dharmadhātu*, through various emanation natures...” and “In impure realms, teaching for as long as existence remains.”

Even if one has not realized the ultimate meaning of the nature of phenomena, at minimum, if through hearing and contemplation about the meaning of the natural state one has a general understanding of the view, or if through the lineage of *bodhicitta* one practices dance with the pride of the *yidam* deity, performing deity dances will certainly accumulate merit, purify obscurations, and serve as an extraordinary means to accomplish activities and *siddhis* this need not be mentioned. As stated by Lochen Chopal Gyatso, whether one directly realizes the profound meaning of the nature of phenomena, or at minimum has certainty in the general meaning and practices whatever is appropriate, such as faith meditation stable in the deity of the generation stage, for such tantric practitioners to train in the wonderful vajra conduct of dance as a supplement to their activities becomes an extraordinary supreme method for accomplishing activities and *siddhis*.

In the same way, as stated in *Lung gi gter mdzod*, Treasury of Teachings, p.439, “Those with *samaya*

should strive in deity *mantras* and *samādhi* while becoming skilled and proficient in the practice of sacred dance.”

Moreover, even without actually performing the deity assemblies’ dances directly, merely wearing and touching the costumes, garments, and implements of the deity assemblies to one’s body will dispel obstacles and hindrances during this lifetime and bring the blessings of the *yidam* deity assemblies. As stated in Minling Lochen Chopal Gyatso’s Khro bo’i ‘*chams* kyī brjed byang kun bzang rnam rol, Memoir of the Wrathful Dance by Minling Lochen Dharmapāla The Display of Samantabhadra, p.125-A, in order to prevent obstacles and hindrances from harming one’s body, one should wear the costumes and garments and hold the implements.

From the perspective of the public who witness the deity dances, if they view them with great faith and confidence, obstacles and demonic hindrances will be pacified in the immediate term, life, merit, and power will increase, and seeds of liberation will be planted in their mind-streams, this is a wonderful supreme path. As stated in, *Jam dpal rtsa rgyud*, Mañjuśrīmūlatantra 19-1-112b, “Or for those with stable faith, siddhis related to that are near.” Furthermore, as it is stated in, *Klong chen snying thig*, Heart-line of Longchen Rabjam, 11-35-5b, “Taught to those with faith in secret mantra; what need to mention those with faith?” Like the supreme path of mantra that relies on the extraordinary supreme methods of substances, *mantras*, and *samādhi*, this is not merely a story of miraculous origins.

As stated by Yeshe Tsogyal, the practitioners practice their meditations in charnel grounds, mountain retreats, snow retreats, and such perfect places. Through reliance on dances, even the earth, stones, mountains, and rocks of the surrounding environment are tamed and become great sacred places of blessing. The immeasurable benefits for fortunate disciples through merely seeing and hearing are as stated in *Lung gi gter mdzod*, *Zhwa nag ma*, Treasury of Teachings, p.140, from Guru’s words, “In your land of Tibet, on the tenth days of the monkey month and such, perform these extensive dance praises. All border wars, conflicts, famines, and epidemics will be pacified, all of Tibet will be peaceful, and all beings who see, hear, remember, or touch will have the special karmic connection to be reborn in my presence in the end.”

As stated, through the perfect convergence of the bodhicitta of past victorious ones, the power of substances and secret mantras, and the unwavering faith of beings, immeasurable benefits will arise for disciples in this and future lifetimes. As stated in *Don rnam nges shes rab ral gri*, The Sword of Wisdom that Discerns the Ultimate Meaning, p.790, when the accumulation of causes is complete, it performs the function of producing results. Whatever has the nature of results depends on their respective causes. This is due to infallible interdependence, and especially the unsurpassed methods of mantra.

Identifying the Time and Dates for Performing Sacred Dances

In general, the culmination of the complete teachings of the Buddha in the Himalayan Bhot Buddhist tradition is the Early Translation Nyingma School, which is rooted in the three types of transmitted teachings (*bka*), treasure teachings (*gter*), and pure visions (*dag snang*). Through the *sadhānā* instructions and practices of the peaceful and wrathful deity assemblies within each of these, the unbroken lineage

practices of the early victorious ones continue to this day in the mother monasteries of the Nyingma School. According to the time and material conditions of each mother monastery, there are varying times for performing the five major practice assemblies of transmitted teachings, the treasure teaching great practices of bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa, and the elaborate dances of Guru's deity assemblies on the tenth day.

For example, at Mind-rolling Monastery in India, the great practice of bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa is held in conjunction with the commemoration of the passing of Terdag Lingpa in the second Tibetan month, along with elaborate dances of Guru's Eight Manifestations in the second month. In conjunction with the festival of the Buddha's descent from Tushita heaven, there are dances of transmitted teaching practice assemblies. At Namdroling Monastery in India, dances are performed in conjunction with festivals in the first month and Saga Dawa month. Similarly, at Shechen monastery in Nepal, practice assemblies are held in conjunction with Minling Terchen Rinpoche's commemoration, and elaborate dances of Guru's Eight Manifestations are performed in the second Tibetan month.

However, year-end Gutor dances and elaborate dances of Guru's deity assemblies on the tenth day have fixed annual times: the Gutor dance on the twenty-ninth of the last month of the year, and the tenth day of the waxing moon of each new month is universally recognized as the special festival of the Second Buddha, the Great Master Guru Padmasambhava.

In general, all tenth days of the waxing moon are special festivals of the Great Master Guru Padmasambhava, as stated in Slob dpon chen po padma 'byung gnas kyi zhal gsung bsam pa lhun grub ma, Spontaneous Accomplishment of Intentions: The Words of the Great Master Padmākara p.12, "Riding on rays of light and radiance, you come; on the tenth day of the waxing moon you come in person." In particular, the tenth day of the monkey month is recognized as the most excellent festival of the Guru, as stated in Gsang 'dus, (Gyuhyasamaja p.441), "On the great tenth of the mighty monkey month, and on all tenth days of every time, emanations pervade the earth; I bestow supreme and common *siddhis*." And as stated in *Lung gi gter mdzod, Zhwa nag ma*, Black hat, the Treasury of Teachings, p.140, from Guru's words, "In your land of Tibet, on the tenth of the monkey month and such, perform these extensive dance praises."

According to the intentions of the holy masters of individual monasteries, there are slightly different times for performing dances in conjunction with festivals and summer and winter seasons. While year-end Gutor dances and elaborate dances of Guru's Eight Manifestations have fixed dates on the twenty-ninth of the twelfth month and the tenth day of the waxing moon of each month, those following the traditional calendar system identify Guru's great festival of the monkey month tenth day as the tenth day of the waxing moon of the fifth Tibetan month, as stated in 'Byung rtsis zla ba'i zhal lung, The Lunar Oral Transmission on Elemental Calculation, p.9) The fifth is the beginning of summer, the monkey month; the sixth is mid-summer, the bird month.

Furthermore, in some areas of India, because the weather is extremely hot at that time and dances cannot be performed; there is also a tradition of performing them in conjunction with the tenth day of the waxing moon of other months.

The Tradition of Guru Rinpoche's Eight Manifestations Dance (Guru Tshen-Gye *Cham*) in the Four Major Tibetan Buddhist Schools

In the complete teachings of the Snowy Land, particularly in the Great Secret Early Translation Nyingma School, from the time of the Second Buddha, the Great Master Guru Rinpoche in the eighth century when dances were first established, through the successive emanated treasure revealers up to the present, the practice has spread and flourished. In the six great Nyingma mother monasteries, the root dances of transmitted teachings and the dances of individual treasure revealers, especially elaborate dances of Guru's Eight Manifestations and related deity dances, continue to this day in India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet as the unbroken lineage practice of the early vidyadharas.

In the glorious Kagyu School of Bhot Buddhism, primarily dances of Guru's Eight Manifestations and unique protector dances of *Bernagchen* and Wisdom *Mahākāla*, as well as year-end *Gutor* dances, continue to this day in India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet.

In the glorious Sakya School of Bhot Buddhism, Vajrakīlaya dances transmitted from both the Early Translation Nyingma and New Translation Schools, unique dances of *Hevajra* and protector *Panjara Mahākāla*, and year-end *Gutor* dances continue unbroken to this day in India, Nepal, and Tibet.

In the Gelug School of Bhot Buddhism, dances related to unique protectors such as Dharma King Dam Can Chogyel, Glorious Goddess, Six-Armed *Mahākāla*, and Nechung Chogyel, as well as year-end *Gutor* dances, continue to this day.

The Critical Importance of Not Confusing Sacred Dances with Theater

In general, there are many ancient cultural traditions of folk theatrical performances, songs, dances, and dramas that have been performed unbroken based on regional customs. These are mainly related to auspicious festivals and gatherings of joy and celebration, with various cultural and traditional performances. The public also views these mainly as entertainment for communal joy and diversion, watching them as photographs and video performances in various ways.

Eight Manifestations assembly dancing is the opposite of this. They plant white, virtuous seeds in the mind-stream and bring blessings, turn from the distracting phenomena of samsāra to accumulate merit and virtue, bless the ground, pacify obstacles, and have many temporary and ultimate benefits as mentioned above. However, when performing any dance, the complete preliminary, main, and concluding practices of approach and accomplishment for the respective deity assemblies must be complete one cannot simply wear the secret costumes, garments, ornaments, and implements of deity assemblies and perform at will. For the viewing public, not everyone necessarily has the karmic connection. Particularly, major practices should be conducted within the boundaries of the maṇḍala by vajra brothers and sisters, not visible to outsiders as public displays. Otherwise, this violates tantric *samaya*, especially causes obstacles and hindrances for the vajra brothers and sisters who are practitioners, and makes accomplishing the four activities and *siddhis* distant this is an extremely important point of caution.

Performing any dances casually like theatrical performances for welcoming high *lamas* and leaders, or

for opening auspicious connections, is not in accordance with the natural state, contrary to the meaning of ‘secret mantra maintained as secret.’ As stated by the Great Master, “Do not make it public; combine words and meaning.” Thus, from theatrical performance, there is no purpose of sacred dance whatsoever. Moreover, taking photos and videos and distributing them everywhere inside and outside via the internet all of this treats the profound sacred substances, costumes, implements, and articles of secret mantra as playthings, accumulates faults, and while a few faithful, fortunate ones may benefit, those without karmic connection use it as grounds for meaningless criticism. Especially, it becomes a great obstacle preventing practitioners from obtaining supreme and common siddhis. Many nowadays enjoy making things public and it becomes like a place of mutual competition, not knowing this meaning. In general, for all practices related to secret mantra, if one maintains samaya and accomplishes as much as possible in secrecy, supreme and common siddhis are swiftly bestowed; otherwise, even if one practices for eons, it is difficult to obtain temporary and ultimate results beyond mere images.

Conclusion

Eight manifestations assembly dances and theatrical performances are two distinct systems related primarily to divine dharma and worldly human dharma. In particular, the types of Eight manifestations assembly dances from Guru Padmasambhava transmitted teachings, treasure teachings, and pure visions have recorded notes that arose from the pure visions of emanated treasure revealers, specifically for the benefit of beings, so that each bodily movement, costume, garment, ornament, and implement is not lost, along with their *sādhānā* practices. If these are properly accomplished according to the authentic lineage tradition, they bestow temporary and ultimate beneficial results without doubt. As stated in *Tshad ma rnam ‘grel*, (Pramāṇavārtika): “If a cause is complete and free from defects, nothing can prevent its result.” Therefore, practicing the authentic *Cham* dance of the deity assembly of Guru Rinpoche’s Eight Manifestations without degeneration, in accordance with the sutras and tantras and the unbroken lineage of visual transmission is a path connected with the view and philosophy of Vajrayana that becomes a cause for the happiness of all beings. Furthermore, properly safeguarding the practices of the lineage of visual transmission and the lineage of oral instruction can be recognized as an act beneficial to both the Dharma and to human cultural heritage.

Otherwise, contrary to the essential points of the tantras, merely imitating forms by wearing costumes and robes and knowing superficial bodily movements even if one strives for eons, not only will results not come, but it becomes closer to worldly theatrical performances. No matter how one performs dance images, one becomes distant from temporary and ultimate beneficial results. As stated in *Gsang bdag zhal lung*, Oral Instruction of the Lord of Secrets-Vajrapāṇi p.301, tantras are connected to *sādhānās*, *sādhānās* are connected to ritual texts, ritual texts are connected to lineages, lineages are connected to the instructions of the guru- lineage. One must practice properly according to the four connections through authentic lineage practice, not making it into easy dharma or casual dharma. Even merely reciting tantric ritual texts, if done casually or arranged haphazardly, deviates from the intention of the tantras. Therefore, it is crucial that future unbiased and non-sectarian holders of the teachings (of the Buddha) do not let the root of the teachings be damaged by focusing on minor temporary purposes.

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