

## **Tale of the Tiger** **By Richard Macgregor**

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Twelve hundred years ago, the cave that has come to be called Taktsang wasn't embellished with the temple buildings that have since sprouted like mushrooms from the cliff face. It was a simple opening in a wall of stones rising through the mists of Bhutan and time itself. Legend has it that when Padmasambhava arrived at the cave of Taktsang on his way to Tibet in the eighth century, there was no water nearby. So he threw his crystal mala, and where it landed a spring and waterfall arose, which can be seen today. In that cave Padmasambhava roused the energy of crazy wisdom and manifested his wrathful aspect known as Dorje Trollo in preparation for subduing the forces of materialism-or national neurosis, however you want to look at it-in Tibet.

Taktsang is one of the most sacred places for tantric Buddhists for more reasons than its historical significance alone. Padmasambhava's presence remains to this day as the almost tangible power and magic that pervades Taktsang. His voice echoes from the pages of the liturgy that arose from the mind of the Eleventh Trungpa Tulku, known as The Sadhana of Mahamudra. Padmasambhava had prophesied that in a future time the world would be shrouded in a dark age ruled by barbarity and materialism. "Horses will run on wheels, iron birds will fly in the sky, and the dharma will come to the land of the red men," he said. When the Vidyadhara, the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, made his way up the path to Taktsang, that time had clearly arrived.

In the five years before writing the sadhana, the Vidyadhara lived and studied in England. It became obvious to him that the rub between Tibetan Buddhism and Western culture was producing as much confusion as wisdom. His monks robes proved more fascinating to most Brits than did his teaching. The direct and simple style of the Vidyadhara was a slap in the face to those who made a nest in tea-party enlightenment. At the same time other Tibetan teachers were suspicious of Western students. They wanted to establish centers of Tibetan culture rather than places of real learning. The Vidyadhara found himself caught between the worst of two worlds: those who didn't want to hear too much and those who didn't want to say too much. It was a painful dilemma.

So it was that in June of 1968 the Vidyadhara returned to the East to regroup, so to speak. This was his first trip back, and he had brought with him his close student and personal secretary, Kunga Dawa. It was the height of the monsoon season when they landed in Calcutta, and they quickly escaped the heat in a small plane that took them to the border of Bhutan. From there they traveled by jeep to Paro and to the welcome hospitality of the Queen of Bhutan.

They spent their days with His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche who lived nearby at Kyichu, a small temple bulging with a huge statue of Padmasambhava some thirty-six feet tall. It was a time of great joy for the Vidyadhara to be with His Holiness again, and the two of them spent day after day talking and enjoying the warmth of their relationship.

During the short trip to see His Holiness Karmapa, the Vidyadhara received the abhisheka of Karma Pakshi for himself and for Kunga. When they returned, he received the abhisheka of Dorje Trollo from His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche. Armed with those two practices, he went into retreat at Taktsang with Kunga.

Not surprisingly, Taktsang is not on a major highway. A jeep from Paro will get you half-way there and a mule will get you even closer. To complete the journey as the Vidyadhara and so many others have done since the time of Padmasambhava, you must follow the trail on foot, scaling the final steps to a small ledge that prevents the temple buildings from inching down 3,000 feet of cliff.

This was a place of mythic proportions for the Vidyadhara. Throughout his youth he had heard and read stories of Padmasambhava's life. All Tibetans had. At first it was the ordinariness of Taktsang that most struck Rinpoche. Yet as the days wore on, the underlying power of the place seeped through the walls and into his very being.

For Kunga, Taktsang was magical. In the mornings he would practice the sadhana of Karma Pakshi while sitting on his bed. Looking out his window, he could see the clouds far below the valley. As the day heated up, the clouds would make the arduous climb up the cliff to his window where faint wisps of wet incense would waft in.

During his practice one morning, he had a dream or vision of seeing himself in a plane landing in New York. At lunch he described his experience to the Vidyadhara, commenting that he thought they would be going to America. The Vidyadhara replied simply that they would first go to Canada. In fact, they were both right.

In the afternoon, the Vidyadhara practiced the sadhana of Dorje Trollo. Two monks and a yogi that His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche had sent along took care of the shrine and feast-offering substances. The Vidyadhara gave them instruction in formless meditation which they considered extremely profound.

After dinner, Kunga and the Vidyadhara would talk animatedly about how to create an enlightened society. The Vidyadhara was very excited and had trouble sleeping, so he would wake Kunga up in the night to continue their discussion. Cigarette smoking was expressly forbidden in the retreat center, but Kunga had managed to sneak in a carton. They would stay up for hours, smoking and talking by a window, flicking their cigarette butts out into the night like shooting stars.

Toward the end of their three-week retreat, the Vidyadhara received the initial title of the sadhana. A couple of days later he was so intoxicated from the practice that he had to be helped to his room. The next day he wrote the sadhana and took the following few days to fine tune it.

Immediately after the sadhana was written, they set to work translating it. They left Taktsang and were staying at the guest house of the Queen Mother. They had planned to leave and continue the translation later, but right at that time there were heavy rains and flooding. Bridges were washed out and it was impossible to leave. Rinpoche said at the time that the flooding was caused by the dakinis who wanted him to finish the translation before he left.

During a walk in a brief let-up of the rain, Rinpoche and Kunga encountered a tiger lying quietly in the path. In tantric iconography, interestingly, the tiger is a symbol for dakini energy. The Vidyadhara appeared unconcerned and they parted company amicably, everyone with their respective arms, legs, and heads where they were supposed to be.

The translation was quickly completed with the same energy with which the sadhana was originally received. Because the Vidyadhara was both tertön (discoverer) and translator, the power and beauty of the sadhana came through clear as a bell. Most sadhanas are translated centuries after they were written and inevitably something gets lost in the transition. Years later, when the Sawang Osel Rangdrol Mukpo showed the sadhana to Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, he said that it was incredible. It must be terma, he said, because no one could simply compose something as profound as that.

Word spread quickly through the Tibetan community that the Vidyadhara had written an important sadhana. Sister Palmo, an English nun who had befriended the Vidyadhara in a refugee camp and had been serving His Holiness Karmapa, requested and sponsored the first abhisheka. It was held in Delhi with about fifty Tibetans and Westerners present. Obliging, the Vidyadhara gave a spontaneous abhisheka (that is, there was nothing written down for even minimal reference), half in English and half in Tibetan. It took about one and a half hours. For a tertön with the skill of the Vidyadhara, this was unusual but not unheard of.

The Vidyadhara returned to England and shortly after that came to the United States, where Kunga had arrived some months earlier. He had to stop in Canada first, naturally, to await his visa. He made the sadhana immediately available to his students without the usual procedure of entering them into the mandala by means of a lung, tri, or abhisheka. This has continued to be the case.

*Sources for this article were interviews with the Sawang (one conducted by Ken Einhorn and another by Richard Macgregor), Kunga Dawa, and Larry Mermelstein, as well as the Sadhana of Mahamudra Sourcebook.*