

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

The Way of Power

A Practical Guide to the Tantric Mysticism of Tibet

John Blofeld



The Way of Power

First published in 1970, *The Way of Power* is an exploration of the school of Mahayana Buddhism prevalent in Tibet and Mongolia, known as the Vajrayana.

Divided into two parts, the book provides an introduction to the background and theory behind the Vajrayana before progressing to a study of Vajrayana in practice. In doing so, it provides an overview of the history, development, and contemporary status of the Vajrayana, and takes a look at the different schools and sects. The book's primary focus is the use of Tantric mystical techniques.

The Way of Power will appeal to those with an interest in Buddhism, religious psychology, and religious history.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

The Way of Power

A Practical Guide to the Tantric Mysticism
of Tibet

By John Blofeld



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

First published in 1970
by George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

This edition first published in 2019 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© John Blofeld, 1970

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

A Library of Congress record exists under LCCN: 76486860

ISBN 13: 978-0-367-65081-0 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-003-12775-8 (ebk)



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>



1. Vajrasattva Buddha

THE WAY OF POWER

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE TANTRIC
MYSTICISM OF TIBET

BY

JOHN BLOFELD

London

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

RUSKIN HOUSE MUSEUM STREET

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1970

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention. All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, 1956, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

© George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1970

SBN 04 294064 8

Dedicated to the Lamas and their pupils at Samyé Ling,
Scotland, and to John Driver



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

FOREWORD

The Vajrayana or Adamantine Vehicle is the school of Mahayana Buddhism prevalent in Tibet and Mongolia. A highly practical form of mysticism, it affords precise techniques for attaining that wisdom whereby man's ego is negated and he enters upon the bliss of his own divinity.

For more than a thousand years, these techniques—developed at Nalanda University in India at the time of the Roman occupation of Britain—were handed down from teacher to disciple and carefully guarded from outsiders. A few years ago, tragedy struck Tibet sending its people fleeing in thousands across the frontiers. Since then, the Lamas have come to recognize that, unless their homeland is recovered within a generation, the sacred knowledge may decline and vanish. Hence they are eager to instruct all who sincerely desire to learn. In this one respect, Tibet's tragic fate has been the world's gain.

Mysticism, or the search for divine truth within the mind, has always existed among small groups everywhere; but the Tantric mystical techniques have few parallels in other religions or in other schools of Buddhism; many of them are virtually unique. Besides being of absorbing interest to students of Buddhism (especially Zen) and of psychology, a study of them will reward everyone who seeks to lift aside the veil of appearances and penetrate to the very source of all divinity and wisdom.

The way of the Vajrayana is the Way of Power which leads to the mastery of good and evil. It is also the Way of Transformation whereby inward and outward circumstances are transmuted into weapons by the power of mind. It goes without saying that progress in conjuring so vast a transformation is not easy and not to be accomplished by liturgies and sacred formulas. Here as everywhere, Mind is the King. Who, without adamantine strength of will, can attain the stature of a god in this very life? The whole of the adept's being, experience and environment—good and evil—must be harnessed to his purpose.

The first requirement is indomitable resolution; the second

FOREWORD

is a teacher who teaches not only from sacred texts but also from experience and an illumined mind. In the West, such men are scarcely more plentiful than Wish-Fulfilling-Gems; but among the Tibetan refugees who have poured into India, Sikkim and Nepal are enlightened Lamas from the great monastic seats of learning and accomplished yogins driven from their mountain fastnesses. Of these, a handful have made their way to Europe and America to work in universities or to found gompas in lonely places that will become centres of meditation. Already, Samyé Ling, a small gompa on the Scottish moors, has attracted a band of Lamas and more students than it can accommodate.

Once these Lamas have mastered European languages, books like this one will be outmoded. We may expect from their pens authoritative works setting forth the teaching more openly than was ever done in Tibet because already they have come to realize that maintaining the ancient safeguards would be to threaten the Vajrayana with extinction. Not all their pupils will be Buddhists, for others may find it fruitful to adapt the Tantric techniques to their spiritual life. In the meanwhile, it behoves us Western followers of the Vajrayana to introduce the subject as best we can. Hence this book. I hesitated over writing it for some ten years, feeling that my knowledge is inadequate and knowing that it is usually best to be silent until our spiritual progress fits us to speak with authority; my decision to write it was taken at last, despite insufficient progress, because I believe there is a growing interest in the Vajrayana and it is certainly high time to clear up the grotesque misunderstandings about Tantric Buddhism to which the traditional secrecy has given rise.

In Tibet, the vital oral teachings without which Tantric works are enigmas are accompanied by an injunction not to speak of them without permission. To allow a half-fledged medical student to practise as freely as a qualified doctor would be less dangerous than to permit novices to set themselves up as the teachers of techniques able to revolutionize, not merely thought, but the mind itself. Wrongly applied, they could lead to madness and worse than madness.

FOREWORD

This book barely touches upon the history, development and present status of the Vajrayana, and upon the different schools and sects. It is chiefly concerned with Tantric *method*—the means of achieving the extraordinary results that flow from mind control and the negation of the ego. The idea that Tantric techniques could be adapted for use outside the Buddhist fold dawned on me and has grown as the outcome of two circumstances—the separate visits of an English and an American Benedictine abbot to Bangkok who were eager to study Buddhist meditational methods, and my chancing to learn of several Catholic dignitaries engaged in similar studies. Moreover, in Australia, one or two Quakers I met expressed deep interest in the Vajrayana. I have as yet no idea of how much can be gained by practising Vajrayana techniques outside their Buddhist context and I should prefer to see the entire Dharma accepted together with the techniques. Nevertheless, spiritual progress and attainment are no one religion's prerogative; they are open to all men of vision and determination.

Believing the Vajrayana to be one of the loveliest flowers of man's spiritual achievement, I am sure I have failed to do it justice. A description of the sky's immensity by a frog peering at the stars from the bottom of a well is bound to be deficient.

JOHN BLOFELD

Bangkok 28/12/68



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	9
PART I BACKGROUND AND THEORY	
i. <i>The Vajrayana</i>	23
Mystical Intuitions	23
The Need for the Sacred Quest	26
Choice of a Path	29
The Tantric Way	31
The Vajrayana in Tibet	36
The Vajrayana for the West	42
ii. <i>The Mahayana Setting</i>	45
The Roots of the Vajrayana	45
The Concept of No God	51
The Concept of No Self	53
The Concept of Impermanence	54
The Concept of 'Suffering'	54
The Concept of Rebirth	55
Samsara and Nirvana	56
Karma and Causality	60
Merit and its Transfer	61
The 'Elements of Being'	61
Buddhas and Bodhisattvas	63
Experiential Evidence	66
iii. <i>The Essence of the Tantric Method</i>	69
Purpose	69
Reasons for Secrecy	70
The Guru	73
Various Types of Adept	73
The Short Path	74
Attitude	76
Conduct	78
Visualization	83
The Interplay of Body, Speech and Mind	87
The Significance of Rites	90
	13

CONTENTS

Fruits of the Path	91
Unconventional Morality	92
iv. <i>Psychic and Material Symbols</i>	94
A Question of Reality	94
The Purpose of the Symbols and Deities	98
A Pre-Tantric Parallel	99
The Mandala	102
The Peaceful and Wrathful Deities of the Mandala	110
The Vajra or Adamantine Sceptre	117
The Wheel of Life	119
The Chorten	122

PART II PRACTICE

i. <i>Aspiration</i>	129
General	129
The Refuges	133
The Bodhisattva Vow	135
Obtaining a Guru	136
The Guru	139
The Adept as the Buddha	142
Initiation	143
ii. <i>The Preliminaries</i>	147
Purpose	147
The Grand Prostrations	150
The Refuges	153
The Generation of Bodhicitta	157
The Vajrasattva Purification	159
The Mandala Offering	163
Others	167
iii. <i>General Practice</i>	169
Introductory	169
Daily Practice	173
The Importance of the Yidam	176
The Shrine	182

	CONTENT
Regular Rites and Meditations	185
Special Rites	188
The Chöd Rite	189
Preparation for Death	190
Meditation in Cemeteries	192
Pilgrimage	192
Special Uses of Mantras	194
iv. <i>The Sadhanas</i>	198
The General Content	198
The Sadhana of the Essence of the Profound Meaning	201
The Fruits of the Practice	212
The Essential Core	215
The Arya Tara Sadhana	216
The Suitability of the Sadhana Practice for Western Adepts	216
v. <i>Advanced Practice</i>	219
The Divisions of Tantric Practice	219
Supernormal Powers	221
Transmutation of Passions and Desires	226
Yogic Practices Pertaining to the Path of Form	229
Yogic Practices Pertaining to the Formless Path	235
The Prajnaparamita	243
Conclusion	245
GLOSSARY	248
LIST OF USEFUL BOOKS CONTAINING MATERIAL ON TANTRIC BUDDHISM	252



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

ILLUSTRATIONS

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. *Vajrasattva Buddha* frontispiece

The central figure in the mandala of the five Jinas. It represents Pure Absolute Wisdom. The colour is white and the hands are in the preaching gesture. (Drawn by Sherabalden Beru of Samye Ling Tibetan Centre, Dumfriesshire).

2. *Guru Rimpoché in mature guise* between pages 88–9

‘The Precious Teacher’ in mature guise. This is the title given to Lama Padma Sambhava who introduced Buddhism from India to Tibet in A.D. 747. He is honoured as the founder of Tibetan Buddhism and as the Sacred Patron of the Nyingmapa sect.

The vajra-sceptres in his right hand and on his head-dress symbolize the adamant power by which delusion is destroyed. The skull-cup containing a vial of nectar symbolizes immortal wisdom; and the trident transfixing three human heads stands for dominion over desire, passion and delusion. (A print sold in Kalimpong.)

3. *The Buddha of the Naga Realm*

The nagas, some of whom appear at the bottom of the picture, are beings who often appear as dragons or many-headed snakes. Here they are human in form from the waist up. The Buddha who preaches to them is blue in colour and may be connected with Manjusri Bodhisattva, embodiment of supreme wisdom. (A valuable Mongolian painting.)


4. *Amitayus Buddha, an aspect of Amida Buddha*

The crown and ornaments reveal that this is the Bliss-Body of Amida Buddha, the Jina to the west of the mandala’s core. He is almost always pinkish red in

ILLUSTRATIONS

colour, but occasionally white, as here. The position of the hands identifies him. Symbolizing boundless light and (in this Amitayus form) longevity, he holds a vial of the nectar of immortal wisdom. (A valuable Mongolian painting.)

5. *A Grand Initiation Mandala* between pages 88–9

This was painted on the floor of a temple in Hangchow in the 1930s to serve for initiations conducted by the Panchen Lama when (during his previous incarnation) he visited east China. It is similar to the mandala described in this book, except that the deities are represented by signs instead of figures and that its core is not in the usual fivefold form, but ninefold, i.e. . Moreover at the very centre is a circular tower which, like those on the outer rim, is not painted but stands upon the painting. (Photograph supplied by Mr Gerald Yorke.)

6. *The Wheel of Life* between pages 120–1

The profound symbolism of this pictorial representation of the Sacred Doctrine is described in the appropriate section. (Painted by the palace artist of Sikkim.)

7. *A Chorten*

The unusual history of this reliquary tower is related in the footnote at the end of Part I, chapter 4. (A beautiful example of Tibetan metal-work from Lhasa.)

8. *Maha Arya Tara (The Green Drölma)*

The Green Tara (or Drölma), a beneficent 'deity' very widely adopted as a Yidam. She embodies compassion and protection. (Painted by the palace artist of Sikkim.)

9. *Yamantaka (The wrathful form of Manjusri Bodhisattva)*

The wrathful form of Manjusri, embodiment of wisdom. Widely adopted as a Yidam by those with fierce passions to cleanse, he is also one of the Guardians of the Gelugpa

ILLUSTRATIONS

sect. His body is blue (wisdom); the severed heads and corpses represent evil propensities conquered by wisdom. (Painted in Kalimpong.)

10. *Ritual implements* between pages 200-1

To the left is a vajra-sceptre and vajra-bell, to the right a pot of the nectar of wisdom. In the centre are three butter-lamps and seven offering-bowls. At the back is an oblong incense-burner. (The pot, lamps and water-bowls are silverware from Sikkim.)

11. *A visualization diagram*

Such diagrams are used when teaching a sadhana to beginners. In the Arya Tara sadhana, a white *Bham* appears and changes into a white lotus, from which rises a white *Ah*. This becomes a moon-disk on which a green *Dham* appears and changes into a blue lotus with a shining green *Dham* in its calyx. (Drawn in Kalimpong.)

12. *Three Guardians of the Nyingmapa sect*

These are the principal Guardians of the Nyingmapa sect, whose duty it is to uphold the Dharma and discourage breaking of the Samaya-pledge. Before their conversion to Buddhism, they may perhaps have been awe-inspiring daemonic forces.

DIAGRAMS

1. <i>The Chinese yinyang symbol</i>	100
2. <i>Outline of a mandala</i>	104
3. <i>A, B, C and D. Four keys to the core of a mandala</i>	105-8
4. <i>Key to the symbolism of the Wheel of Life</i>	120
5. <i>Key to the symbolism of a chorten</i>	123
6. <i>The method of performing grand prostrations</i>	151

(All the diagrams are fully described in the text)



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Part I

BACKGROUND AND THEORY



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

CHAPTER I

THE VAJRAYANA

Mystical Intuitions

There are moments during life when a startling but marvellous experience leaps into mind as though coming from another world. The magic that calls it forth—as though someone had accidentally whispered the ‘open sesame’ that rolls the stone back from the hidden treasure—is often so fleeting as to be forgotten in the joy of the experience. It may be a thin cadence of music: a skylark bursting into song, the plash of a wave, a flute played by moonlight. It may be a grand harmony of sound, peaceful or awe-inspiring: the murmurous voices of a summer’s afternoon or the fateful shrieking and drumming of a mountain storm. It may be something seen: a lovely smile or the curve of an arm; a single gesture, form or hue of compelling beauty; a familiar scene transformed by an unusual quality of light; a majestic panorama of interweaving colours splashed across sea or sky; a cluster of rocks suggestive of enormous beings imbued with life. Or the spell may be wrought by a sudden exaltation springing directly from the mind and jerking it, so to speak, into an unknown dimension.

That the experience is not a passing fancy but an intimation of something profoundly significant is recognized in a flash, but understanding of its significance does not always follow. A curtain hitherto unnoticed is suddenly twitched aside; and, though other veils intervene, for a timeless moment there stands partially revealed—a mystery. Then the curtain falls in place and at least a measure of oblivion descends.

‘Mystery’ is not a satisfactory term, but what else can be said of it? It has a hundred names, all of them inapt. It has been called the Good, the True, the Beautiful and all of these together. Philosophers term it the Absolute or Ultimate Reality.

THE WAY OF POWER

To Christian mystics it is known as the Godhead and to Christians in general as God. It is the Brahma and Para-Atma of the Hindus, the Beloved of the Sufis, the Tao or Way of the Taoists. Buddhist names for it vary with the context: Nirvana, the Womb of Dharmas, Suchness, the Void, the Clear Light, the One Mind. In the words of the Chinese sage Lao-tzê, 'The Way that can be conceived of is not the Eternal Way; the Name by which it can be named is not its Eternal Name.' Of late, some psychologists have displayed an awareness of it by suggesting the need for 'integration' with something reaching far beyond ourselves. William James spoke of it obliquely. Were it not that frequent and clear visions of it engender a compassionate urge to communicate the bliss, it would be best to use no name at all.

Names set bounds. Unfathomable by the keenest scientific probing, the mystery can be intuited but never grasped, how then named?

Mystics and poets are supremely fortunate in that visions of it sometimes dawn on them unsought; hearty extroverts, if they glimpse it at all, are shocked into fears for their sanity. Uncomfortably they dismiss it as a mental aberration—or run for the doctor!

Attempts to define it succeed no better than the search for a name. To say that it exists is to exclude from it the non-existent and limit it to what speaker or hearer means by existence. To say that it does not exist involves the other side of the dilemma. Both concepts are too crude to describe its subtle nature. To say, as many do, that it is pure mind is well enough in certain contexts, but it ought not to be set apart from matter with which it is inseparably united. To say that it is at once material and otherwise is to play with words.

However, man's consciousness cannot easily divest itself of symbols. Accomplished mystics tend to describe it in terms of the qualities lent to it by the filter of their senses: Clear Radiance, Immaculate Void, Ecstatic Bliss, Infinite Love, All-Embracing Unity.

Clear and profound intuitions of the mystery are not limited to any period, region, kind of person or religious faith. Knowledge of it has come from widely varied sources: the Egyptian