

Oriental Religions
09\05

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This article provides, by its own comment, "...how the sacred landscape is changing visually as the United States becomes more religiously diverse." However, I would amend this comment. Two reasons strike me as to why Oriental religions are attracting so many to "join" them within the United States. The first reason is that most American followers of Christian denominations are superficial in that they do not read and understand the sacred scriptures, both the *Old* and *New Testaments* in which Christianity is rooted and from which it grows. So denominational forms of Christianity are more externally practiced than internally embraced. One indication, but in my mind a principal one, is the fear any number of studies show that American Christians have of death and dying; yet, given the emphasis upon the resurrection in the *New Testament* (Matthew: 25: 31-46; 28:1-20; Mark: 16:1-20; Luke: 24:1-53; John: 11: 1-44; 20: 1-23 and John: 14-17.), anyone having such fear is clearly not understanding much less living the *New Testament* message of Christ.

The second reason is rooted in the former reason but is stimulated by America's and generally the Occidentals' fascination with psychology, again, as noted in the article: "In lectures, he (Trungpa Rinpoche) related Buddhist teachings to basic concepts of psychology rather than use strictly religious language, enhancing their appeal, said Carolyn Rose Gimian, editor of a collection of his writings..."

Two things are significant about this rendition of "Buddhist teachings", first, they offer a popularized way of inducing people into interest about Buddhism. But secondly, this "popularization", as did its author, renounces the essential religious discipline (Trungpa renounced his religious vows) required of a relationship with what Eliade calls *the sacred* and what others might call God, Allah, Yhwh, Jesus Christ, the Great Spirit and so forth. To have a personal relationship to the Source of Life can never be popular because such a relationship is a way of life not a passing interest or a group effort! So, given the fact that such American Buddhism lacks any relationship to an absolute and, thereby any responsibility to such an absolute, this view of Buddhism is nothing more or less than a secularization of Buddha's message lacking any spirituality to an ultimate Absolute whether Truth, or God. So, such so-called Buddhism is nothing more or less than a here and now feel-good practice and has no reference to an after life.

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Towering Buddhist Shrine Is Consecrated in Rockies

By GUSTAV NIEBUHR

RED FEATHER LAKES, Colo., Aug. 18 — Far up a dirt road in a remote Rocky Mountain valley, two Tibetan Buddhist monks in multicolored robes dipped and twirled, enacting an ancient dance describing their homeland's sacred history. Other monks blew trumpets and clashed cymbals, while 2,000 people looked on.

But what was more remarkable than either the dance or the audience in this place 8,500 feet above sea level was the object of the festivities, rising impressively behind the monks. It was a 108-foot-tall stupa, a Buddhist commemorative shrine.

The Great Stupa of Dharmakaya, whose 10-day consecration concluded today, "has been built exactly according to the Tibetan tradition," said Reginald A. Ray, a professor of Buddhist studies at Naropa University in Boulder, Colo.

It contains larger-than-life religious statuary and vividly painted mandalas, which are circular, geometric images that represent the universe. Most important, the stupa contains the ashes of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a Tibetan exile who brought Buddhist teachings to the West long before the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, achieved the celebrity status he now holds.

Before his death at 47 in 1987, Trungpa Rinpoche wrote a dozen books, founded Naropa and started many meditation centers, including the Rocky Mountain Shambhala Center, on whose grounds the new stupa stands.

Kevin Moloney for The New York Times

In a broad sense, the stupa presents a striking example of how the sacred landscape is changing visually as the United States becomes more religiously diverse.

Through immigration and conversions, the nation is home to growing numbers of Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Muslims and others, who are building temples and mosques among the churches and synagogues in urban and rural settings alike.

A decade ago in suburban Los Angeles, Buddhists from Taiwan built the Hsi Lai Temple, a landmark of Buddhist architecture in the United States. In contrast, the monument here is the largest project undertaken by native-born Americans who have embraced Buddhism. Its modern features include temperature control for its three meditation rooms and specially mixed concrete intended to keep it intact through 1,000 Rocky Mountain winters.

For some, the stupa symbolizes a new stage in Buddhism's American development. "It seems to me," said Judith Simmer-Brown, chairwoman of Naropa's religious studies department, "in the 70's, Buddhism was more of a sect." But by creating such monuments, she said, "we're moving into a culture and a civilization."

A stupa is a traditional monument, and in this form is a highly stylized rendering of the Buddha seated in meditation.

"A stupa represents the heart of the Buddha," said Zurmang Gharwang Rinpoche of Sikkim, India, who was among more than 50 monks who traveled to the consecration from Asia. "That means," he said, "when you're close to the stupa, you're close to the Buddha."

He and others were walking clockwise along the gravel path that circles the monument. By circumambulating a stupa, a person is said to gain merit and drive off negative forces.

"Generally, when you build stupas, it's to remember your teacher," Gharwang Rinpoche said. Those who knew Trungpa Rinpoche — and there were many here this weekend — described him as a singularly effective teacher with a keen sense of how to make Buddhist principles accessible for Westerners. (Rinpoche is an honorific meaning precious jewel.)

Born in Tibet in 1939, where he was recognized as the reincarnation of an important abbot in the Kagyu school, he fled into exile in India after the Chinese invaded his homeland in 1959. In the mid-1960's, he studied comparative religions and philosophy at Oxford. In 1969, he relinquished his monastic vows and, in a move criticized by his associates, married a young Englishwoman, Diana Pybus. The couple moved to the United States in 1970, where he established meditation and study centers in Vermont, Boulder and here, on 500 acres, an hour's drive northwest of Fort Collins.

In lectures, he related Buddhist teachings to basic concepts of psychology rather than use strictly religious language, enhancing their appeal, said Carolyn Rose Gimian, editor of a collection of his writings, "The Essential Chogyam Trungpa" (Shambhala Publications, 1999).

In one of his most influential books, "Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism," he wrote: "In meditation practice, we clear away the confusion of ego in order to glimpse the awakened state. The absence of ignorance, of being crowded in, of paranoia, opens up a tremendous view of life." He told his students they should not reject Western culture but claim the best of it.

"He was never someone to tell people to walk out on their Western lives," said Dr. Ray, author of two recent studies of Tibetan Buddhism. "That's the point of the dharma, to bring it into life, not to leave life."

Trungpa Rinpoche also appealed to young idealists, presenting a vision for a tolerant, enlightened society through his "Shambhala teachings," named for a legendary Asian realm of peace and harmony.

Work on the stupa began after Trungpa Rinpoche died. One of his teachers, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, urged the building of the monument and gave it a name — in full, the Great Stupa of Dharmakaya Which Liberates Upon Seeing. (Dharmakaya is Sanskrit, meaning the mind of enlightenment.)

The project, 14 years in the making, drew more than 400 volunteers, whose labor cut costs to \$2.7 million but lengthened the process.

"Everything was built here on the spot," said Joshua Mulder, the project's art and design director. "We all had to learn to do things, like cut granite."

The stupa has begun to attract pilgrims, non-Buddhists among them. Jeffrey Waltcher, the Rocky Mountain Center's executive director, has seen many get their first view of the stupa.

"They can't help but see the incredible effort and the intentions of people who created this," Mr. Waltcher said. "It just stops them in their tracks."

