

## 9. THE WAR GODS BEHIND THE MASK OF PEACE

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When Buddhism is talked about today in the West, then the warlike past of Tibet is not a topic. The majority of people understand the Buddha's teaching to be a religion with a program that includes inner and outer peace, humans living together in harmony, the rejection of any form of violence or aggression, a commandment against all killing, and in general a radically pacifist attitude. Such a fundamental ethical attitude is rightly demanded by Buddhists through an appeal to their founder. Admittedly, the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, was born as the descendant of a king from the warrior caste, however, he abandoned his family, became "homeless", and distanced himself from every aspect of the art of war. He did so not just for moral reasons, but also because he recognized that wars are the expression of one's own misdirected awareness and that the dualism taken to its limits in war contained a false view of the world. Reduced to a concise formula, what he wanted to say with this was that in the final instance the ego and its enemy are one. Shakyamuni was a pacifist because he was an idealist epistemologist. Only later, in *Mahayana* Buddhism, did the ethical argument for the fundamental pacifism of the *dharma* (the doctrine) emerge alongside the philosophical one. A strict ban on killing, the requirement of nonviolence, and compassion with all living beings were considered the three supreme moral maxims.

Both of these arguments against war, the epistemological and the human-political, today play a fundamental role in the international self-presentation of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Tirelessly and upon countless occasions over the last decades His Holiness has done what he can for world peace. For this reason he received the Nobel peace prize in 1989. His pacifist sermons and political programs were not the least reason for the fact that the Tibet of old (prior to the Chinese

occupation) was increasingly seen and admired in the West as a peaceful sanctuary, inhabited by unwarlike and highly ethically developed people, a paradise on earth. A western student of the dharma has summarized Tibet's history in the following concise sentence: "Buddhism turned their [the Tibetan] society from a fierce grim world of war and intrigue into a peaceful, colorful, cheerful realm of pleasant und meaningful living" (quoted by Lopez, 1998, p. 7). With this longed-for image the *Kundun* seized upon a thread already spun by numerous Euro-American authors (since the nineteen-thirties), above all James Hilton, in his best-seller *The Lost Horizon*.

Under the leadership of their lamas, the Tibetans in exile have thus succeeded in presenting themselves to the world public as a spiritual people of peace threatened by genocide, who in a period rocked by conflicts wish to spread their pacifist message. "A confession with which one cannot go wrong", wrote the German news magazine, *Spiegel*, in reference to Tibetan Buddhism, "Two-and-a-half thousand years of peaceableness in place of the inquisition, monks who always seemed cheerful rather than officious and impertinent religious leaders, hope for nirvana rather than the threat of  *jihad*  — Buddhism harms no-one and has become *trendy*" (*Spiegel*, 16/1998, p. 109). And the German Buddhist and actor Sigmar Solbach explained to his television audience that "a war has never been fought in the name of Buddhism" (*Spiegel*, 16/1998, p. 109). Regrettably, the opposite is the case — countless wars have been fought in the name of Buddhism just as they have in the name of Christianity. The *Shambhala myth* has rightly — as we shall demonstrate on the basis of historical events — been described as the "Buddhist  *jihad* " (holy war).

### **The aggressiveness of the Tibetan tutelary gods (dharmapalas)**

When we examine the iconography of Tantric Buddhism it literally swarms with aggressive warriors, demons, vampires, monsters, sword bearers, flame magicians, and avenging gods, who have at their disposal an overflowing arsenal of weapons: spears, spikes, darts, shields, clubs, hooks, slings, knives, daggers, and all manner of killing machines. This downright grotesque collection of repellent figures reflects on the one hand the social struggles which Indian Buddhism had to endure in the dispute with Hinduism and later with Islam. On the other it is a dogmatic part of the tantric project, which makes wrath, aggression, murder, and the annihilation of enemies the starting point of its system of rituals. A total of three types of warlike deities are distinguished in *Vajrayana* Buddhism:

- 1. The horror aspect of a peaceful Buddha, the so-called *heruka*.**
- 2. The "flesh-eating" dakini who challenges the adept on his initiatory path.**
- 3. Warlike foreign gods who have been incorporated in the tantric system as "protectors of the faith" (*dharmapala*).**

In all three cases the "wrathful gods" direct their potential for aggression outwards, against the "enemies of the faith", and without exaggerating one can say that the *heruka* aspect of a Buddha plays just as great a role in the cultural life of Tibetan Buddhism as the peaceful aspect of a compassionate Bodhisattva.

In Lamaism, Tibet's mystic history and "civilization" has always been experienced and portrayed as the coercion and enslavement of the local gods and demons. If these wanted to remain alive after their magic struggle with the magician lamas then they had to commit themselves under oath to serve in future as a protective guard under Tibetan command. Their basic warlike attitude was thus neither reduced at all nor transformed by Buddhism, rather it was used as a means to achieve its own ambitions and thus increased. This metapolitics of the Lamaist clergy has led to a systematic

extension and expansion of its grotesque pandemonium, which afflicted the country across the centuries. There was no temple in which these monsters were not (and still are) prayed to. In the gloomy *gokhang*, the chamber or hall where their cult worship took (and still takes) place, hung (and still hang) their black thangkas, surrounded by an arsenal of bizarre weapons, masks and stuffed animals. Dried human organs were discovered there, the tanned skin of enemies and the bones of children. Earlier western visitors experienced this realm of shadows as a “chaotic, contradictory world like the images formed in a delirium” (Sierksma, 1966, p. 166).

There are dreadful rumors about the obscure rituals which were performed in the “horror chambers” (Austin Waddell), and not without reason, then human flesh, blood, and other bodily substances were considered the most effective sacrificial offerings with which to appease the terror gods. If this flow of bloody food for the demons ever dries up, then according to Tibetan prophecies they fall upon innocent people, indeed even upon lamas so as to still their vampire-like thirst (Hermanns, 1956, p. 198).



*Shrine of the tibetan war god Begtse*

The number of “red and black executioners”, as the “protectors of the doctrine” are sometimes known, is legion, since every place in the land is served by its own regional demons. Nonetheless some among them are especially prominent, like the war god *Begtse*, for example, also known as *Chamsrin*. In the iconography he strides over corpses swinging a sword in his right hand and holding a human heart to his mouth with the left so that he can consume it. His spouse, *Dongmarma* the “red face”, chews at a corpse and is mounted upon a man-eating bear. Another “protective god”, *Yama*, the judge of the dead, king of hell and an emanation of *Avalokiteshvara* (and thus also of the Dalai Lama), threatens with a club in the form of a child’s skeleton in his right hand. *Palden Lhamo*, the Tibetan god-king’s protective goddess whom we have already introduced, gallops through a lake of blood using her son’s skin as a saddle.

Even for the “superhuman” lamas this hellish army is only with difficulty kept under control. Hence it is not rare that demons succeed in breaking free of their magical chains and then loosing

their wrath upon even the pious believers. For instance, in the past women were not allowed to enter the main temple of the Kumbum monastery because the “terrible gods” worshipped there would then fall into a blind rage and there was a danger that they would take it out upon all of humanity. Sometimes the rebellious spirits even seized the body of a naive monk, possessed him with their destructive energy and then ran amok in this form. Or, the other way around, a disappointed lama who felt himself to have been unjustly treated in life upon dying transformed into a merciless vengeful spirit. [1] The Tibetan government (the Kashag) and the Dalai Lama must also defend themselves time and again against acts of revenge by opposing protective spirits. In connection with the *Shugden* affair described above, James Burns refers to a total of 11 historical examples (Burns, Newsgroup 9).

The clergy in the Tibet of old was busy day and night defending themselves from foreign demons and keeping their own under control. This was not motivated by fear alone, then the fees for defensive rituals against malevolent spirits counted as a lucrative source of income if not the most significant of all. As soon as something did not seem right, the superstitious peoples suspected that a demon was at work and fetched a lama to act as an exorcist for a fee and drive it out.

The Dutch psychologist and cultural critic, Fokke Sierksma, interpreted the cult of the terror gods as an “incomplete acculturation of a warrior nation that for the sake of Buddhism has had to give up a part of itself, of a Buddhism that for that warrior nation has also had to abandon an integral part, while the two have not found ultimate reconciliation” (Sierksma, 1966, p. 168). We do not find it difficult to agree with this judgment. Yet it must be added that the abandonment of Buddhist principles like nonviolence and peaceableness did not first begin in Tibet; it is, rather, implicit in the tantric doctrine itself. Thus it was not the case that a pacifist Buddhism came out of India to tame a warlike country, rather, the Indian founding fathers of Tibetan Buddhism themselves brought numerous terror gods with them and thereby significantly added to the already existing army of native demons. *Mahakala, Vajrabhairava, Yama, Acala*, or whatever their names may be, are all of Indian origin.

### **Gesar of Ling: The Tibetan “Siegfried”**

Anybody who wishes to gain further insight into the ancient warrior mentality of the Tibetans cannot avoid studying the pre-Buddhist *Gesar* epic. Old shamanic beliefs and “heathen” uses of magic play just as great a role in the adventures of this national hero as the language of weapons. The adventures of *Gesar von Ling* have been compared with the Germanic Nibelungen epic, and not without reason: daredevilry, braggadocio, intrepid courage, thirst for revenge, sporting contests, tumultuous slaughter, military strategy, tricks, deception, betrayal can be found in both, just like joy and suffering in love, courtly love, feminine devotion, rape, mighty amazons, sorceresses, marital infidelity, jealousy, revenge of the Furies. On the basis of the similarities spanning whole scenes it may not even be ruled out that the poets composing both epics drew upon the same sources. One difference lies perhaps in that in *Gesar’s* milieu it is even more barbarically eaten and drunk than among the Germanic warriors.

Even if the name of the hero may be historically derived from a Tibetification of the Latin *Caesar* (“emperor”), his mythic origin is of a divine nature. The old soldier was dispatched from heaven to fulfill a mission. His divine parents sent him to earth so that he could free the country of Ling (Tibet) from an evil demon which, after many superhuman deeds, he also succeeded in doing. We do not intend to report here on the fantastic adventures of the hero. What interests us is *Gesar’s* thoroughly aggressive mentality. The numerous episodes that tell of the proud self-awareness and

physical strength of the women are especially striking, so that the epic can definitely not have been penned by a lama. In some versions (several widely differing ones are known) there are also quite heretical comments about the Buddhist clergy and a biting sarcasm which spares no aspect of monastic life. What remains beyond any criticism is, however, is an unbounded glorification of war. This made *Gesar* a model for all the military forces of central Asia.

As a sample of the bragging cruelty which dominates the whole epic, we quote a passage translated by Charles Bell — the song of a knight from *Gesar*'s retinue:

*We do not need swords; our right hands are enough.  
We split the body in the middle,  
and cut the side into pieces.  
Other men use clubs made of wood;  
We require no wood;  
our thumbs and forefingers are enough.  
We can destroy by rubbing thrice with our fingers.....  
The blood of the liver [of our enemies] will escape from the mouth.  
Though we do not injure the skin,  
We will take out all the entrails through the mouth.  
The man will still be alive,  
Though his heart will come to his mouth....  
This body [of our enemy] with eyes and head  
Will be made into a hat  
for the king of the white tent tribe.  
I offer the heart to the war god  
of the white people of Ling  
(Bell, 1994, pp. 13-14)*

There is little trace of ethics, morality, or Buddhist compassion here! In an anthology edited by Geoffrey Samuel, Pema Tsering and Rudolf Kaschewsky also indicate that “the basic principle [of the epic] is to seek one's own advantage by any means available. Whether the opponent is led astray by deception, whether treachery is exploited or the other's weakness brutally made use of, scruples or any qualms of conscience are entirely lacking. If there is a basic idea that runs through the whole work it is the principle that might is right” (Tsering and Kaschewsky in Samuel, 1994, p. 64).

But this is precisely what makes the pre-Buddhist *Gesar* myth so interesting for the philosophy of the Tantrics. It is for this reason that Geoffrey Samuel also reaches the conclusion that the epic is “a classical expression of the shamanic *Vajrayana* religion of Tibet” (Samuel, 1993, 55). This would indeed mean that both systems, the Tantric Buddhism of India and the pre-Buddhist shamanism of Tibet, entered into a culture-bearing symbiosis with one another.

The Nyingmapas, for example, saw in the hero (*Gesar*) an incarnation of Padmasambhava, who returned to drive the demons out of the Land of Snows. Other Lamaist interpreters of the epic celebrate *Gesar* as “lord over the three-layered cosmos” and as *Chakravartin* (Hummel, 1993, p. 53). The belief that the “Great Fifth” was an incarnation of the semi-divine warrior was and is still widely distributed. In eastern Tibet at the start of last century the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was

worshipped as *Gesar* reborn. In contrast, the supreme clerical incarnation in Mongolia, the Jabtsundamba Khutuktu, is considered to be an embodiment of *Gesar*'s miraculous horse.

A connection has also often been drawn between the rough daredevil and the *Shambhala* myth. Following his earthly demise he is supposed to have gone to the mythic country in order to wait for the prophesied final battle. After he "has left this mortal world once more, there is, according to the Tibetans, a connection between him and the Lamaist apocalypse" (Hummel, 1993, p. 37).

Even in the twentieth century, his archetype as a militant salvational figure played an important role for the Tibetan guerrillas in the fifties and sixties. In the struggle against the Chinese Communists the return of the war hero was longed for so that Tibet could be freed from the "red tyranny". The myth is currently again experiencing a renaissance in Tibetan underground circles. In 1982 there was a movement in the province of Amdo whose leader, Sonam Phuntsog, proclaimed himself to be an incarnation of *Gesar* the war hero. The group's activities were mostly of a magic nature and consisted above all in the invocation of the terror gods.

In good dualist form, these announced via a possession that „now is the time when the deities of the 'white side' hold their heads high and the demons of the 'dark side' are defeated" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 229). It is astounding how seriously the "atheist" Chinese take such magic séances and that they ban them as "open rebellion".

The *Gesar* myth is experiencing a renaissance in the West as well. For example, the Red Hat lama Chögyam Trungpa, allows the barbarian to be worshipped by his pupils in the USA as a militant role-model. In the meantime, the hero has become a symbol for freedom and self-confidence worthy of emulation for many western Buddhists who have not made the slightest effort to examine his atavistic lifestyle.

Even the Fourteenth Dalai Lama ("the greatest living prince of peace") does not criticize the war hero, but rather goes so far as to see him — this view must be regarded as a high point of tantric inversion — as a master of compassion: "Could *Gesar* return one day, as some people claim and others believe?" asks the *Kundun*, and answers, "The fact is that he promised this. ... Is it not also said that *Gesar* is an incarnation of *Avalokiteshvara*, the Buddha of boundless compassion? He is thus also a master and masters have much power ..." (Levenson, 1990, p. 83). There is speculation in Buddhist circles on the basis of such quotations as to whether His Holiness (likewise an incarnation of *Avalokiteshvara*) is not also an embodiment of the barbaric *Gesar*, particularly since the "Great Fifth" also claimed to be so. The question of how compatible such a martial past can be with the award of the Nobel peace prize remains unanswered, however.

According to Ronald D. Schwartz, in the current protest movements in Tibet the return of the mythic warrior *Gesar*, the appearance of the *Shambhala* king, and the epiphany of Buddha *Maitreya* are eschatologically linked with the „immediate and tangible possibility of the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 231). Rainbows and earthquakes are supposed to show that superhuman forces are also at work in the rebellion. [2]

However, so that *Gesar*'s martial character does not scare off western souls or bring them into conflict with their Buddhist ideals, the lamas solve the problem — as always in such cases — with a subjectification of the myth. Hence, in the adventures of *Gesar* Tarthang Tulku sees every adept's inner struggle with his bad self: "Interpreted symbolically, King *Gesar*, representing freedom and

liberation from the bondage of ignorance, is the King of the human mind. The Kingdom of Ling is the realm of restless experience that must be unified and strengthened. The treasure to win and protect is our own understanding. The enemies that we must conquer are emotionality and ignorance” (quoted by Samuel, 1994, p. 65).

Western pupils, of whom hardly any may have read the violent epic, swallow such messages with shining eyes. But if it were consistently applied to the spiritual struggles, the *Gesar* pattern would imply that one would have to employ brutality, murder, underhandedness, disloyalty, rape, coarseness, boasting, mercilessness, and similar traits against oneself in order to attain enlightenment. What counts is victory, and in achieving it all means are allowed.

The political danger which can arise from such an undifferentiated glorification of *Gesar* may perhaps become obvious if we think back to the Nibelungen epic, which, as we have already mentioned, may according to several researchers draw upon the same mythic sources. For the majority of Germans the fateful glorification of Siegfried the dragonslayer by the national socialists (the Nazis) still raises a shudder. Yet in comparison to his barbaric Tibetan “brother”, the blond Germanic knight still appears noble, honest, good-natured, and pious.

### **The Tibetan warrior kings and their clerical successors**

In the guidelines for a new form of government after the liberation of the Land of Snows from the imposition of the Chinese will, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama wrote (in 1993) that, “under the control of its kings and the Dalai Lamas the political system of Tibet was firmly anchored in its spiritual values. As a consequence peace and happiness reigned in Tibet” (Dalai Lama XIV, 1993b, p. 24).

Whether this statement is true can only be proved by the events of history. Let us cast a glance back then, into Tibet’s past. As successful and brutal military leaders, the two most important kings of the Yarlung dynasty, Songtsen Gampo (617-650) and Trisong Detsen (742-803), extended their dominion deep into China with a thorough-going politics of war. Both were, at least according to the sagas, incarnations of Bodhisattvas, i.e., compassionate beings, although the Tibetan armies were feared throughout all of inner Asia for their merciless cruelty. Reports from the Tang annals also admire the highly developed art of war of the Tibetan “barbarians”. Even modern authors still today enthuse about the good old days when Tibet was still a major military power: „These armies were probably better run and disciplined than those of late Medieval Europe and would be recognisable in their general structure to Generals of the modern era like generals like Wellington and Rommel”, we can read in a 1990 issue of the *Tibetan Review* (*Tibetan Review*, October 1990, p. 15).

After the fall of the Yarlung dynasty there were indeed no more major military incidents for centuries. But this was in no way because the Tibetans had become more peaceful and compassionate. Completely the opposite was true, the individual sects in mutual dispute and the various factions among the people were so weakened by the frequent internecine wars that it was not possible for an overarching state to be formed. It was not at all rare for great lamas and their many monastic minions to wage outright war against one another. In such conflicts, none of the orientations shied away from inviting outsiders into the country so as to take to the field against the others with their help. Up until well into the twentieth century the Chinese and Mongolians could thus in any case intervene in Tibetan politics as the invited allies of particular monasteries.

For example, in 1290 the Brigung monastery of the Kagyupa sect was razed to the ground by armed Sakyapa monks with help from the Mongolians. “The misery was greater even than among those who have gone into Hell!” (Bell, 1994, p. 67), a Red Hat text records. The only reason the numerous military disputes in the history of the Land of Snows are not more widely known about is because they usually only involved smaller groups. Hence the battles neither continued for long, nor were they spread over a wide territory. In addition, the “pure doctrine” officially forbade any use of violence and thus all disputes between the orders were hushed up or repressed as soon as possible by both parties. As paradox as it may well sound, the country remained relatively “quiet” and “peaceful”, because all of the parties were so embroiled in wars with one another. But in the moment in which it came to the creation of a larger state structure under the Fifth Dalai Lama in the 17th century, a most cruelly conducted civil war was the necessary precondition.

### **The Dalai Lamas as supreme war lords**

These days there is an unwillingness to speak about this terrible civil war between the Gelugpas and the Kagyupas from which the “Great Fifth” emerged as the hero of the battlefield. We know that the Fifth Dalai Lama called up the war god *Begtse* against the Tibetans several times so as to force through his political will. Additionally, in eastern Tibet he was celebrated as an incarnation of the ancient hero, *Gesar*. He himself was the author of a number of battle hymns like the following:

*Brave and tested are the warriors,  
sharp and irresistible the weapons,  
hard and unbreakable the shields,  
Fleet and enduring the horses.*

(Sierksma, 1966, p. 140)

This brutal call to absolutely annihilate the enemy into its third generation was also composed by him:

*Make the lines like trees that have had their roots cut;  
Make the female lines like brooks that have dried up in winter;  
Make the children and grandchildren like eggs smashed against rocks;  
Make the servants and followers like heaps of grass consumed by fire;  
Make their dominion like a lamp whose oil has been exhausted;  
In short, annihilate any traces of them, even their names.*

(quoted by Sperling, 2001, p. 318)

With these instructions to batter his enemy’s children to death against the rocks and to make their women barren, the „Great Fifth” (the preeminent historical model for the current Fourteenth Dalai Lama) turned to the Mongolians under Gushri Khan and thus legitimated the terrible deeds they inflicted upon the Tibetans. „One may say with some confidence,” Elliot Sperling writes, „that the Fifth Dalai Lama does not fit the standard image that many people today have of a Dalai Lama, particularly the image of a Nobel Peace Prize laureate” (Sperling, 2001, p. 319). Barely two centuries later (at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) a Red Hat lama sought revenge for the humiliation of his order by the Dalai Lama, and fetched the Indian gorkhas into the country.

The “Great Thirteenth” himself formed an army consisting of regular troops, a lay militia, and the “golden army” as the monastic soldiers were known. Warrior monks were nothing out of the

ordinary in the Tibet of old, although their training and their military equipment was less than desirable. They firmly believed in the law of violence, worshipped their special deities, and maintained their own secret cults. Lama 'Longear' was the leader of the troops in the lamasery, it says in western travel report of a lama commander (at the start of the twentieth century). "Although a monk, he didn't know how to say his prayers and because he had killed several people was not allowed to have part in the chanting services. But he was considered a man of courage and audacity — greatly feared in the lamasery, a mighty friend and terror to his enemies" (quoted by Sierksma, 1966, p. 130).

The Tibetan army assembled by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was composed of three services: the cavalry, equipped with lances and breastplates, the somewhat more modern infantry, and the artillery. Oddly enough, the name of *Allah* was engraved in the riders' helmets. These came from a Mohammedan army which was said to have once moved against Lhasa. A terrible snowstorm surprised them and froze them all to death. Their weapons and armor were later brought into the capital and displayed there in an annual parade. It was probably believed that the helmets would offer protection in the battle against the Mohammedans — the arch-enemy from the *Kalachakra Tantra* — since they would not dare to fire at the holy name of their supreme god.

This army of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, to a large part composed of serfs, was more or less picturesque, which naturally did their warlike, "unBuddhist" performance no harm. Yet one did not just fight with weapons in the hand but also operated magically. During the "Great Prayer Festival" for example *tormas* (dough figures) of the cavalry and the infantry were thrown into a fire so as to do harm to the enemies of the land through this fire magic. Every single sacrificial offering was supposed to later "function [like a] bomb" in reality (Chö-Yang, vol. 1 no. 2, 1987, p. 93). [3]

Of even greater martial pomposity than the Tibetan army was the so-called "monks' police". Heinrich Harrer (the "best friend of the Dalai Lama") describes the "dark fellows" who were responsible for law and order in Lhasa at the beginning of the fifties in the following words: "The figures in the red habits are not always gentle and learned brethren. The majority re coarse and unfeeling fellows for whom the whip of discipline cannot be strong enough. ... They tie a red band around their naked arm and blacken their faces with soot to as to appear really frightening. They have a huge key tucked into their belts which can serve as a knuckleduster or a throwing weapon as required. It is not rare for them to also carry a sharp cobblers' knife hidden in their pocket. Many of them are notorious fighters; even their impudent stride seems provocative; their readiness to attack is well known, and one avoids aggravating them" (Harrer, 1984, pp. 216-217).

Just like the police from Lhasa, the officers and other ranks of the Tibetan armed forces tended towards excessive corruption and of a night committed all manner of crimes. Like the western mafia they demanded protection money from businesses and threatened to attack life and limb if not paid. This was certainly not the intention of their supreme military commander, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who still in his last will dreamed of "efficient and well-equipped troops ... as a sure deterrent against any adversaries" (Michael, 1982, p. 173).

Since the once mighty Tibet has been unable to develop itself into a great military power again since the fall of the Yarlung dynasty (in the ninth century), the country all but vibrates with bottled-up military energy. This has been confirmed by a number of western travelers. The British friend of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Charles Bell, was also forced to ascertain "that the martial energy of the Tibetans, though sapped by Buddhism, has not even now been destroyed. Should Buddhism ever

go, the combative spirit will return” (Bell, 1994, p. 77). Bell overlooks here that this spirit is already a part of tantric practice, yet he seems to have an inkling of this when he continues as follows: “Indeed, Tibet expects later to fight for her religion. You can sometimes read in Tibetan books about the country called *Shambhala* ... a mystical country which, three or four centuries hence, will be the scene of hostilities, fierce and decisive, between Buddhists and Muhammadans” (Bell, 1994, p. 77). It is a Tibetan saying that “for The Buddha faced by foemen his disciples don their armor” (Bell, 1994, p. 191).

### **The historical distortion of the “peaceful” Tibetans**

The impression, widely distributed in the West, of ancient Tibet as a peaceful country is thus a deliberate and gross misrepresentation of history. Even official texts from the Tibetan tradition are seldom tempted to such pacifist exaggerations as is the Dalai Lama today, above all since being awarded the Nobel peace prize. The local historians knew full well about the fighting spirit and aggressive potential which slumbered in the Tibetan soul. They did not deny that the lamas often enough had to use violence in their own interests. The *Mani Kambum*, a book about the mythic history of Tibet from the 13th century, reported already that its inhabitants had inherited faith, wisdom, and goodness from their father, *Avalokiteshvara*, and from their mother, *Srinmo*, however, “pleasure in killing, bodily strength, and courage” (Stein, 1993, p. 37).

Lamaism’s evaluation of war is fundamentally positive and affirmative, as long as it involves the spread of Buddhism. (We shall later demonstrate this through many examples.) This in no sense implicates a discontinuity between historical reality and the Buddhist/pacifist doctrine. *Vajrayana* itself cultivates an aggressive, warlike behavior and indeed not just so as to overcome it through mental control. Wars are declared — as is usual among other religions as well — so as to proceed against the “enemies of the faith”. The state religion of the Land of Snows (*Vajrayana*) has always been essentially warlike, and a Buddhist Tantric reaches for his weapon not just in desperation, but also so as to conquer and to eliminate opponents. The virtues of a soldier — courage, self-sacrifice, bravery, honor, endurance, cunning, even fury, hate, and mercilessness — are likewise counted among the spiritual disciplines of Buddhist Tantrism.

Yet the lamas do not conduct “wars” on real battlefields alone. Many more battles are fought in the imagination. Anyone can ascertain this, even if they only cast a fleeting glance over the aggressive tantric iconography. Likewise, all (!) tantras apply military language to religious events and describe the struggle of the spirit against its besmirchment as a “war”. Along the path to enlightenment it is fought, beaten, pierced through, burned up, cut to pieces, chained, decapitated, defeated, destroyed, won, and exulted. The Buddhas take to the battlefield of *samsara* (our so-called world of illusion) as “victors”, “heroes”, “fighters”, “generals”, and “army commanders”.

Accordingly, Tibetan society has always revered the “figure of the warrior” alongside the “figure of the saint” (Buddha, Bodhisattva, or tulku) as their supreme archetype. From the half mythical kings of the 7th century to the modern guerilla leaders of the *Khampas*, the “fighting hero” is the heroic archetype adopted even today by thousands of youths and young men in Tibet and in exile. Already from the beginnings of Tibetan history on the border between “warrior” and “saint” has been blurred. A good “pupil” of the *Vajrayana* and a *Shambhala* “warrior” are still identical today.

### **Is the Fourteenth Dalai Lama the “greatest living prince of peace”?**

Since being awarded the Nobel peace prize (in 1989) the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has been celebrated in the western press as the “greatest living prince of peace”. With a self-confident and kindly smile he accepts this appellation and modestly reminds his audience what an enormous debt he owes to Mahatma Gandhi. Armed with the latter’s doctrine of nonviolence (*ahimsa*), there is no topic which His Holiness speaks of more often or with more emotion than that of “outer” and “inner” peace. “For me, violence cannot possibly be the way” is in recent years the phrase most often heard upon his lips (Levenson, 1992, p. 349).

*Ahimsa* (the rejection of all violence) was originally not a Buddhist value, especially not in the context of the tantras. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama, for example, when Gandhi encouraged him in a letter to join in with his idea, did not at all know where he was at with the term. Be that as it may — the future Tibet, freed from the Chinese yoke, is in the words of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama supposed to be transformed into a “peace and *ahimsa* zone”. There will be no army, no weapons, above all no nuclear warheads any more in the Land of Snows after its liberation. Further, the *Kundun* considers the trade in military hardware to be something just as irresponsible as the aggressive and uncontrolled temper of an individual. In an exemplary fashion he invites the Israelis and the Palestinians to lay down their weapons. He proclaims the demilitarization of the entire planet as a desirable final goal.

### *War toys*

Surprisingly, in opposition to this constantly publicly demonstrated basic pacifist attitude there stands a particular fascination for the art of warfare which captivated His Holiness whilst still a child. In Martin Scorsese’s film (*Kundun*) about the life of the Dalai Lama, this fondness is graphically depicted in a short scene. The child god-king is playing with some tin soldiers. Suddenly, with a sweep of his hand he knocks them aside and cries out emphatically, “I want power!”. This film anecdote could well be more realistic than the widespread and pious legend in which the young god-king had these tin soldiers melted down and then recast as toy monks.

As an adolescent the *Kundun* enjoyed target practice with an air gun he inherited from his predecessor and is still proud of being a good shot. Without embarrassment he reveals in his autobiography that he owns an air pistol and that he practices target shooting with it. One day he killed a hornet which was plundering a wasp’s nest. “A protector of the unprotected!” was the reverential comment of one of his biographers on this piece of sharp shooting (Hicks and Chögyam, 1985, p. 197).

The *Kundun*’s openly admitted weakness for war literature and war films has surprised not a few of his admirers. As a youth he enthused over English military books. They provided him with the images from which to construct models of fighter planes, ships, and tanks. Later he had passages from them translated into Tibetan. Towards the end of the forties the former member of the Nazi SS, Heinrich Harrer, had to recount for him the only recently played out events of the second world war. There has been little change in this passion for military objects since his youth. As late as 1997 the *Kundun* admitted his enthusiasm for uniforms in an interview: “but [they] are also very attractive. ... Every button on the jacket shines so prettily. And then the belt. The insignia” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*, March 21, 1997, p. 79). On a visit to Germany in 1998 the Nobel peace prize winner told how “even as a child I liked looking at illustrated books from my predecessor’s library, especially about the First World War. I loved all the instruments, the weapons and the tanks, the airplanes, the fantastic battleships and submarines. Later I asked for books about World War II. When I visited China in 1954 I knew more about it than the Chinese did”

(*Zeitmagazin*, no. 44, October 22, 1998, p. 24). Asked (again in Germany) about his television viewing habits, he chatted about his preference for war films: “Earlier though, I had a favorite program. You won’t believe me! ‘M.A.S.H.’ — the US series about the Vietnam War. Very funny ... (laughs)(*Focus* 44/1998, p. 272).

When he was visiting Normandy in 1986, he unexpectedly and in complete contradiction to the planned schedule expressed the wish to see the Allied bridgehead from the Second World War. “I also wanted to see the weapons, these mighty cannon and all these rifles which painfully moved me. In the vicinity of these machines, these weapons, and this sand I felt and shared the emotions of those who were there then ...” (Levenson, 1992, p. 291). Despite such pious affirmations of compassion with the victims of battle, here too his childlike enthusiasm for the machinery of war can be heard. Or is it only a mood of the “time god”, whose enthusiasm for various systems of weaponry is — as we have already reported — expressed at such length in the *Kalachakra Tantra*?

Even if such martial preferences and play may normally be harmless, we must never forget that, unlike an ordinary person, the Dalai Lama represents a symbolic figure. In the meantime, all the pious aspects which are otherwise known of the childhood and life of the god-king are, thanks to a powerful film propaganda, considered to be a wonderful omen and the indicators of a cosmic plan. Is it then not logically consistent to also interpret his fascination for the military milieu as a sign which flags the aggressive potential of his religion?

### *Reting Rinpoche and the murder of the Dalai Lama’s father*

The early life of the young Dalai Lama was anything but peaceful. In the forties his milieu was caught up in violent and bloody clashes which could in no way be blamed solely on the Chinese. Although the then regent, the discoverer and first teacher of the god-king, Reting Rinpoche, had transferred the business of state to his successor, Taktra Rinpoche, in 1941, he later wanted to regain the power he had lost. Thus, from 1945 on it came to ever more serious discordances between the Tibetan government and the ex-regent. Uncouth and feared for his escapades countrywide, the Dalai Lama’s father, Choekyong Tsering, counted among the latter’s faithful followers. In 1947 he died suddenly at the age of 47 during a meal. It is not just Gyalo Thondup, one of the *Kundun*’s brothers, who is convinced that he was poisoned by someone from government circles (Craig, 1997, p. 120).

Shortly after the poisoning, Reting Rinpoche decided to stage an open rebellion. His followers attempted to assassinate the regent, Taktra, and approached the Chinese about weapons and munitions. But they were soon overpowered by Tibetan government troops, who took captive the ex-regent. Monks from the Sera monastery rushed to his aid. First of all they murdered their abbot, a Taktra supporter. Then, under the leadership of an 18-year-old lama, Tsenya Rinpoche, who had been recognized as the incarnation of a wrathful tutelary deity (*dharmapala*) and was referred to by his fellow monks as a “war leader”, they stormed off to Lhasa in order to free Reting Rinpoche. But this revolt also collapsed under the artillery fire of the government troops. At least 200 Sera monks lost their lives in this monastic “civil war”. Reting’s residence was razed to the ground.

Soon afterwards he was charged with treason, found guilty, and thrown into the notorious Potala dungeons. He is said to have been cruelly tortured and later strangled. According to other reports he was poisoned (Goldstein, 1989, p. 513). A high-ranking official who was said to have sympathized with the rebels had his eyeballs squeezed out. Just how cruel and tormenting the atmosphere of this time was has been described later by a Tibetan refugee (!): “Rivalry, in-fighting,

corruption, nepotism, it was decadent and horrible. Everything was a matter of show, ceremonial, jockeying for position” (quoted by Craig, 1997, p. 123).

### **Tibetan guerrillas and the CIA**

In the fifties and with the support of the USA, a guerilla army was developed in Tibet which over many years undertook military action against the Chinese occupation forces. A broad scale anti-Communist offensive was planned together with Taiwanese special units and indirect support from the Indian secret service. At the head of the rebellion stood the proud and “cruel” *Khampas*. These nomads had been feared as brigands for centuries, so that the word *Khampa* in Tibet is a synonym for *robber*. In the mid-fifties the American secret service (CIA) had brought several groups of the wild tribe to Taiwan via eastern Pakistan and later to Camp Hale in the USA. There they received training in guerilla tactics. Afterwards the majority of them were dropped back into Tibet with parachutes. Some of them made contact with the government in Lhasa at that stage. Others did not shy away from their traditional trade of robbery and became a real nuisance for the rural population whom they were actually supposed to liberate from the Chinese and not drive into further misery through pillaging.

Despite the Dalai Lama’s constant affirmations, still repeated today, that his flight took place without any external influence, it was in fact played out months in advance in Washington by high military officials. Everything went as planned. In 1959, the American-trained guerillas collected His Holiness from his summer residence (in Lhasa). During the long trek to the Indian border the underground fighters were in constant radio contact with the Americans and were supplied with food and equipment by aircraft. We learn from an “initiate” that “this fantastic escape and its major significance have been buried in the lore of the CIA as one of the successes that are not talked about. The Dalai Lama would never have been saved without the CIA” (Grunfeld, 1996, pp. 155-156).

In addition, the Chinese were not particularly interested in pursuing the refugees since they believed they would be better able to deal with the rebellion in Tibet if the *Kundun* was out of the country. Mao Zedong is thus said to have personally approved of the flight of the Dalai Lama after the fact (*Tibetan Review*, January 1995, p. 10). Yes — Beijing was convinced for months after the exodus that His Holiness had been kidnapped by the *Khampas*.

In fact, the Chinese had every reason to make such an assumption, as becomes apparent from a piece of correspondence between the *Kundun* and the Chinese military commander of Lhasa, General Tan Guansan. Only a few days before the god-king was able to flee the town, he had turned to the General with the most urgent appeal to protect him from the “reactionary, evil elements “ who “are carrying out activities endangering me under the pretext of protecting my safety” (Grunfeld, 1996, p. 135). What he meant by these “evil elements” were hundreds of Tibetans who had surrounded his summer palace day and night to cheer him on. This crowd was called upon a number of times by the Dalai Lama’s political staff to abandon their “siege” since it was provoking the Chinese and there was a real danger that they would answer with artillery fire at the illegal rally and in so doing quite possibly threaten the life of the *Kundun*. But the people nevertheless remained, on the pretext of caring for the security of their “god-king”. Thereupon the latter wrote the above request to General Tan Guansan. But in a furtive maneuver he was secretly collected by a group of *Khampas* and brought to the Indian border unharmed.

The flight, organized by the CIA and tolerated by the Chinese, was later mythologized by the western press and the Dalai Lama himself into a divine exodus. There was mysterious talk of a “mystic cloud” which was supposed to have veiled the column of refugees during the long trek to India and protected them from the view of and attack by the Chinese enemy. The CIA airplanes which gave the refugees air cover and provided them with supplies of food became Chinese “reconnaissance” flights which circled above the fleeing god-king but, thanks to wondrous providence and the “mystic cloud”, were unable to discern anything.

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[www.naatanet.org/shadowcircus/shang4.html](http://www.naatanet.org/shadowcircus/shang4.html): **“Resistance fighters escorted the Dalai Lama through guerrilla-held territory. The two CIA-trained men met up with the escape party halfway on their journey and accompanied them to the Indian border, keeping the Americans updated about their progress. The Dalai Lama’s escape triggered a massive military operation by the Chinese who brutally quelled the revolt in Lhasa and went on the offensive against the resistance bases in southern Tibet. The guerrillas suffered major setbacks. Andrug Gompo Tashi and the remainder of his force had no choice but to join the exodus of Tibetans who were streaming across the Himalaya, following their leader into exile.” (From the Film *The Shadow Circus – The CIA in Tibet*)**

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Even if the *Kundun* has for years publicly distanced himself from the Tibetan guerillas, he always showed great sympathy in the community of Tibetans in exile for “his” underground fighters. His Holiness has also valued the services of his guerillas in exile and on a number of occasions since 1959 publicly stood by them. “Despite my belief”, he says in his autobiography published in 1964 “I much admire their courage and their determination to take on the fierce struggle which they began for our freedom, our culture, and religion. I thank them for their strength and their daring, and also personally for the protection which they gave me. ... Hence I could not honorably give them the advice to avoid violence. In order to fight they had sacrificed their homes and all the comforts and advantages of a peaceful life. Now they could not see any alternative to continuing to struggle and I had nothing to oppose that with” (Dalai Lama XIV, 1964, p. 190). In the new edition of the autobiography of the in the meantime winner of the Nobel peace prize which appeared in 1990 (*Freedom in Exile*), this passage is no longer mentioned. It is too obvious a contradiction of the current image of the *Kundun* as “the supreme prince of peace of the century”.

Another statement, which can be read in the biography, *The Last Dalai Lama* by Michael Harris Goodman, shows even more clearly the god-king’s two-facedness concerning nonviolence: “In [the message]”, he is supposed to have said, “I called the guerillas 'reactionaries', stated that the Tibetan people should not support them. At the same time the delegation was instructed to tell the guerillas to keep on fighting. We spoke in two tongues, the official and the unofficial. Officially we regarded their act as rebellion, and unofficially we regard them as heroes and told them so” (Goodman, 1986, p. 271).

Already in exile, at the beginning of the sixties the Dalai Lama bestowed on a distinguished rebel leader the same honors which normally accompany an appointment to the rank of general (Grunfeld, 1996, p. 142). At the same time a number of volunteer exile Tibetans flew to the USA in order to once again be trained in guerilla warfare under the supervision of the CIA. The action was mediated by Gyalo Thondup, a elder brother of the Dalai Lama.

Parallel to this, together with the Indian secret service Thondup established the *Special Frontier Force* (SFF) in 1962 with exile Tibetan recruits, a powerful and well-equipped mountain army which could be dropped into Tibet by parachute at any moment. It had 10,500 men under arms and

its own officer corps. At the same time the “National Volunteer Defence Army” was founded. It can hardly be assumed that the *Kundun* was not very well informed about these ambitious military projects of his brother. Nonetheless it continues to be officially denied up to the present day. His Holiness is also not supposed to have known anything about the \$1.7 million which the CIA provided annually to the Tibetans for military activities in the sixties.

The armed struggle of the Tibetans was prepared for at the highest political levels, primarily in Washington, Delhi, and Taipei. The only reason it was not brought into action was that at the start of the seventies Richard Nixon began with his pro-China politics and cancelled all military support for the Tibetans. But without American support the outlook for a guerilla war was completely hopeless, and from this point on the Dalai Lama publicly distanced himself from any use of violence.

Military action now no longer had any chance of success and in Dharamsala the work began of effectively reformulating the history of the Tibetan guerillas „in that one encouraged the fiction that the popular resistance had been nonviolent”, as Jamyan Norbu writes, before continuing, Tibetan officials, Buddhist followers, Western supporters and intellectuals [...] regard the resistance movement as an embarrassment [...] because it somehow detracts from the preferred peace-loving image of Tibet as a *Shangri-La*” (Huber, 2001, p. 369).

The Nobel peace prize winner’s statements on the armed struggle of the Tibetans are most contradictory and were in the past more oriented to the political situation and constellations of power than fundamental principles. At times the Dalai Lama expressed the view that “it is quite appropriate to fight for a just cause and even to kill” (Levenson, 1992, p. 135). In an interview in 1980 he answered the question of whether violence and religion did not exclude one another as follows: „They can be combined. It depends on the motivation and the result. With good motivation and result, and if under the circumstances there is no other alternative, then violence is permissible” (Avedon, 1980, p. 34).

Only since 1989, after he was awarded the Nobel peace prize, has the god-king cultivated an exclusively pacifist retrospective on the violent history of his country. A few years ago one still heard from His Holiness that there was much which was aggressive in the Tibet of old, about which one could not exactly be happy. From 1989 on, the stereotypical message is that there had only been “peace and happiness” in the Land of Snows’ past. [4] Earlier, the *Kundun* had stated that “the Tibetans are predisposed to be fairly aggressive and warlike” and could only be tamed by Buddhism (Dalai Lama XIV, 1993a, p. 18). Today, we read from the same author that “The Tibetan people are of an upright, gentle, and friendly nature” (Dalai Lama XIV, 1993b, p. 34), whilst at the same time the Indian press describes Tibetan youths in Dharamsala as “militant”, “violent”, “impatient” and “restless” (*Tibetan Review*, May 1991, p. 19). In 1994 a Tibetan youth stabbed a young Indian which led to violence breaking out against the exile Tibetan community.

### **Marching music and terror**

Are the Tibetans a peaceful people? In the camp of the Tibetans in exile a somewhat different tone is struck than at the western press conferences of the Dalai Lama. Anyone who has ever participated in the official festivities of the Tibetan national holiday (March 10) in Dharamsala and seen the uniformed groups of youths parading past the Lion Throne of His Holiness, anyone who has been able to experience the ceremonies of the flag and hear the war and fighting songs sung there, must have gained the impression that this was a military parade and definitely not a peace

festival of gentle monks. Admittedly, the *Kundun* also always introduces these festivities with a profession of nonviolence, but after his speech — in the words of the historian, Christiaan Klieger — „the tone of the event turns decidedly martial” (Klieger, 1991, p. 62). The Khampa warriors with whom we are already familiar appear in ancient leopard skin uniforms. Guards of honor salute the Tibetan flag, on which the two snow lions symbolize the twin pillars of church and state. Enthusiastically sounds the tune of “Song of the Uprising People” (*Long shog*), which was composed as a military march. Its two final verses go as follows:

*Tibet follows its true leader ...  
The Great Protector, His Holiness the Dalai Lama,  
Accepted by Tibetans in and out.  
The red-handed butcher – enemy,  
The imperialistic Red Chinese,  
Will surely be kicked out of Tibet.  
Rise up, all patriots!  
(Klieger, 1991, p. 63)*

Such warlike marching songs may be of great importance for the formation of the poorly developed Tibetan national consciousness — they are also sung with the appropriate gusto by all present — but they have absolutely nothing to do with the much invoked principle of *ahimsa*. In contrast, they reify the concept of an enemy and glorify His Holiness (“the greatest living apostle of peace”) as the “supreme military commander”.

The warlike tendencies among the Tibetans in exile are not exhausted by marching music and ceremonial displays during the national holiday celebrations. Already at the start of the sixties a small group of militants resolved “that the time had come to employ terrorism in the fight for Tibet” (Avedon, 1985, p. 146). In 1998, at a press conference in Dharamsala, Kuncho Tender, a militant who spent 20 years in the Tibetan underground, argued for a renaissance of the guerilla movement in Tibet “which would kill one Chinese after another until the country [is] free” (Associated Press, Dharamsala, May 28, 1998).

Discussion about “terror as an instrument of politics” is also very current once more among radical Tibetan underground groups in the occupied Land of Snows, for example the *Tiger-Leopard Youth Organization*: „Our non\_violent methods”, it says in a letter from this organization to the United Nations General Secretary, „have been taken as a sign of weakness. We are determined to regain our freedom, and the recent UN vote [in which a criticism of China was rejected] clearly shows us that without bloodshed, sabotage, and aggressive acts we will not gain publicity, sympathy and support. [...] So why should we not follow the destructive path?” (Schwartz, 1994, p. 224). Further the young patriots affirm that they are aware that these methods disagree with the politics of the Dalai Lama but no other option remained open to them.

Another underground organization from eastern Tibet calls itself the „Volunteer Army to Defend Buddhism” (Huber, 2001, p. 363). Calling themselves this shows that this group does not see the “destructive path” to liberation as being in contradiction to their religion. In contrast, an urgent prayer with which the terrible protective gods of the country are invoked and incited against the Chinese enemy counts as part of the daily work of the underground. In 1996 there were three bomb attacks in Lhasa.

Such activities cannot harm the *Kundun* at all, then by publicly criticizing them he furthers his image as an “apostle of peace”. This need not prevent him from secretly encouraging the “armed groups” as he already did with the Khampas. Even if this contradicts his pacifist professions, it does not contradict the principles of Tantric Buddhism.

In the meantime, discussions about Buddhism and the military are becoming an increasingly popular topic in Buddhist circles in the West. For example, there was an article in the journal *Tricycle* in 1996 with the title *Apology of a Buddhist Soldier*, in which the author gathered together arguments which are supposed to legitimate a “just” war for a Buddhist (*Tricycle*, V (3), p. 71). It is of course all very ethical, with reference to, among others, the Buddhist Emperor Ashoka (273–232 B.C.E.) who united India into a peaceful realm. Ashoka was, however, a great and cruel military commander who conducted the bloodiest of campaigns before he achieved power. Some Buddhist traditions revere him without inhibition as a merciless war hero. “Thus the need to kill”, P. J. Tambiah writes in reference to the Emperor, “before becoming a great king who can rule righteously is a Buddhist root dilemma. — Kings must be good killers before they can turn to piety and good works” (Tambiah, 1976, pp. 50, 522).

### **Political calculation and the Buddhist message of peace**

It is not the task of our analysis to make a personal choice between “armed rebellion” and the “*ahimsa* principle” or to answer the question whether violent action in Tibet is morally justified and makes sense in terms of national politics. We also do not want -as the Chinese attempt to do — to expose the *Kundun* as no more than a fanatical warmonger in sheep’s clothing. Perhaps, by and large he is *personally* a peace-loving person, but without doubt he represents a culture which has from its very origins been warlike and which does not even think of admitting to its violent past, let alone reappraising it.

Instead, Dharamsala and the current Dalai Lama make a constant propaganda project of presenting Tibetan Buddhism and the history of Tibet to the world public as a storehouse of eternal teachings about nonviolence and peace. There is thus a refusal to accept that the *Kundun* first acquired his pacifist ideas (e.g., under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi) after his flight; instead it is implied that they are drawn from the inexhaustible inheritance of a many hundred year old tradition and history. Even the aggressive “Great Fifth” and the “Great Thirteenth” with his strong interest in military matters now appear as the precursors of the current “Buddhism of peace”. On the basis of this distortion, the current Dalai Lama is able to fully identify with his fifth incarnation without having to mention his warlike and Machiavellian power politics and murderous magic: “By holding the position of the Fifth Dalai Lama I am supposed to follow what he did, this is the reason I have to interfere”, the *Kundun* explained in 1997 (HPI 006). Thus there is much which speaks for the pacifism of the Dalai Lama being nothing more than a calculated political move and never having been the expression of a principle. Jamyang Norbu, co-director of the Tibetan cultural institute, thus accuses his “revered leader” (the *Kundun*) and his exile Tibetan politicians of fostering the formation of the western myth of the good and peaceful Tibet of old. At no stage in history have the Tibetans been particularly pacifist — the terrible fighting out of the conflicts between individual monasteries proves this, as well as the bloody resistance to the occupation in the fifties. “The government in exile”, says Norbu, “capitalizes upon the western clichés, hampers a demythologization, a critical examination of its own history” (*Spiegel*, 16/1998).

There is also absolutely no intention of doing this. For the Dalai Lama the fundamental orientation to be adopted is dependent upon what is favorable in the prevailing power-political situation. Thus

a immediate *volte-face* to a fighting lineage is thoroughly laid out in his system. Neither religious, nor ideological, and definitely not historical incarnational obstacles stand in the way of a possible decision to go to war. In contrast, the Tibetan war gods have been waiting for centuries to strike out and re-conquer their former extended empire. Every higher tantra includes a call to battle against the “enemies of the faith”. In any event, the *Kalachakra* ritual and the ideology at work behind it are to be understood as a declaration of war on the non-Buddhist world. Important members of the Tibetan clergy have already reserved their places in the great doomsday army of *Shambhala*. „Many of them already know the names and ranks they will have.” (Bernbaum, 1980, p. 29, 30).

When the political circumstances are ripe the “simple monk” from Dharamsala will have to set aside his personal pacifist tendencies and, as the embodied *Kalachakra* deity, will hardly shrink from summoning *Begtse* the god of slaughter or from himself appearing in the guise of a *heruka*. “The wrathful goddesses and the enraged gods are there,” we learn from his own mouth (before he was awarded the Nobel peace prize), “in order to demonstrate that one can grasp the use of violence as a method; it is an effective instrument, but it can never ever be a purpose” (Levenson, 1992, p. 284). There is no noteworthy political leader in the violent history of humankind who would have thought otherwise. Even for dictators like Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin violence was never an end in itself, but rather an “effective instrument” for the attainment of “honorable” goals.

Even some western voices these days no longer shrink from drawing attention to the dangerous and violent aspects of the figure of the *Kundun* in fascination: “This man has something of a pouncing wild cat, a snow leopard imbued with freedom and loneliness which no cage could hold back”, his biographer, Claude B. Levenson, has written (Levenson, 1992, p. 160).

### **“Buddha has smiled”: The Dalai Lama and the Indian atomic tests of 1998**

In the opinion of the Indian military as well, the religion of the Buddha appears to be not so pacifist as it is presented to us here in the West. Why else would the first Indian nuclear weapons tests (in 1974) have been referred to under the secret code of “The Lord Buddha has smiled!”? Why were the spectacular tests in 1998 deliberately launched on the birthday of the Gautama Buddha? (*Focus*, 21/1998, p. 297; *Spiegel*, 21/1998, p. 162). In fact the sole “living Buddha” at this time, the Dalai Lama, has a profound interest in the Indian atomic tests. For him (“as the smiling third party”) a confrontation between the two Asian giants (China and India) would be of great political advantage. It was thus only logical that the “god-king” from Tibet gave the demonstration of a nuclear capability by his host country the Buddhist blessing. While the whole world, especially the heads of state of the G8 countries gathered at the time in Birmingham, protested sharply (President Bill Clinton spoke of “a terrible mistake”) the Tibetan “Nobel peace prize winner” approved of the Indian bomb. “India should not”, said the Dalai Lama “be pressured by developed nations to get rid of nuclear weapons. ... It should have the same access to nuclear weapons as developed countries. ... The assumption of the concept that few nations are ok to possess nuclear weapons and the rest of the world should not — that's undemocratic” [5] (Associated Press, May 13, 1998). But the disastrous implication of such a statement is that any nation ought to be able to acquire nuclear weapons simply because other countries also possess them. It should be obvious that the Indian public was enthusiastic about the *Kundun*'s approbation. “If a man of peace like Dalai Lama can approve of India's nuclear position,” one Mamata Shah wrote on the Internet, “Gandhi too would have no hesitation in approving it” (NospamIchow, Newsgroup 8).

In addition, the whole nuclear display between India and Pakistan symbolically heralds the *Shambhala* war prophesied in the *Kalachakra Tantra*. The bomb of the *smiling Buddha* was “the

signal for the Pakistanis to forcefully pursue the development of the *Islamic bomb*” and to test it (*Spiegel*, 21/1998) — a foretaste of what awaits us when (according to the *Shambhala myth*) Buddhists and Moslems face each other in the final battle.

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**Dalai Lama praises US approach to bombing Afghanistan: "At the same time, as a quiet fellow, I am amazed and admire that, at this moment, unlike First World War, Second World, Korean War and Vietnam War, I think the American side is very, very carefully selecting targets, taking maximum precautions about the civilian casualties." - "I think this is a sign of more civilization," said the Dalai Lama. He warned, however, that "bombing can eliminate only physical things, not thoughts or emotions. Talk and reasoning is the only long-term solution." (Strasbourg, Oct 24 – AFP)**

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### **Footnotes:**

[1] How current and far reaching such activities by “vengeful lamas” can be is shown by the *Shugden* affair described above in which the “protective god” (*Dorje Shugden*) has succeeded in overshadowing the public image of the Dalai Lama.

[2] During a cult ceremony in Kongpo in 1989, the “gods” *Amitabha*, *Avalokiteshvara*, and *Padmasambhava* appeared. Ever more mediums are emerging, through whom the *dharmapalas* (the tutelary deities) speak and announce the liberation from the Chinese yoke (Schwartz, 1994, p. 227).

[3] In 1954, Rudolf A. Stein took part in a martial ceremony in Sikkim, at which various war gods were invoked. There was one “recitation to incite the sword” and another for the rifle. The text ended with an “incitement” of the planet *Rahu* (Stein, 1993, p. 247). Such ceremonies were also performed in the Tibet of old.

[4] Only since 1997, under the influence of the *Shugden* affair has a self critical position begun to emerge. This too — as we shall later show — is purely tactically motivated.

[5] This statement stands, even if two days later the Dalai Lama, certainly under pressure from the West, stressed that he was in favor of a general disarmament. The news agency CND even reversed the statement by His Holiness into its opposite and reported on May 20 that the “Dalai Lama said on Tuesday that he was disappointed by India's nuclear test and backed China's call to ban all nuclear weapons” (CND, May 20, 1998). The unrestricted opportunism of the god-king, of which we still have numerous examples to mention, easily allows one to presume that he made both statements (both for and against India).

Next Chapter:

## [10. THE SPEARHEAD OF THE SHAMBHALA WAR](#)

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