

Some interesting views on Kalachakra

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

During the Manjusri Empowerment in New York City in 1998:

"If one can engage on the Vajrayana path on the basis of a clear understanding of the tantric path, then it can be truly profound and effective. Some Tibetan masters of the past have emphasized many of the significances of the Vajrayana teachings by the representation of the vajra and bell. The Tibetans say that if one utilizes these implements with a full awareness of their significance and a full understanding of the Vajrayana path, then when one rings the bell it will have a profound symbolism and meaning. But the simple act of playing a bell doesn't really have any profundity. One can see that even cows have bells around their necks and make loud noises.

The reason I point this out is that unfortunately sometimes people in their rush to attain Vajrayana teachings because of the way in which it is promoted as the best, highest and quickest, people hastily rush to receiving initiations without full realization of what it involves and what is its true significance. There is a real danger that one's ringing a bell is like the cow's. This is very true even of the Tibetan Buddhists as well. When they hear there is an initiation everyone rushes to it with great enthusiasm. But if someone hears there is a series of lectures taking place on Buddhism then they say, "Oh yes, ..." Sometimes I exploit this weakness and use it to my advantage. I announce there is a Kalachakra initiation and everybody rushes to it. I do the Kalachakra ceremony last and very fast but I spend much more time explaining the key elements and a general overview of the Buddhist path. That way they have to sit and listen to them. This is my skillful means! Although I thought I was rather smart but some of the students are even smarter. They make sure they arrive only exactly on the Kalachakra initiation day."

Shar Khentrul Jamphel Lodrö

From 'The Realm of Shambhala'

Three things differentiate the Kalachakra from other systems of Buddhist tantra. The first is its expansive scope. Within a single source, there are detailed explanations of a variety of scientific subjects such as cosmology, astrology, medicine, psychology, and philosophy. In many ways, the Kalachakra is a "theory of everything." The second is its remarkably clear presentation. In other tantras, the more profound the wisdom, the more hidden and symbolic the language becomes. The Kalachakra reverses that relationship, providing detailed and clear descriptions of the deepest levels of primordial wisdom. The third aspect is the profound methods it contains for achieving the direct realization of the ultimate nature of reality. While some systems tend to emphasize the method aspect of working with the pure forms of deities, others emphasize the wisdom aspect of cultivating increasing degrees of blissful awareness. The Kalachakra finds a balance between these two. It is considered nondual in its approach, because it emphasises these two aspects of method and wisdom as an inseparable union. For all of these reasons, the Kalachakra became known as the king of all tantras.

At its core, the Kalachakra offers a powerful method for reconciling apparently contradictory ideas and

removing all limitations. Through a middle-way approach, it is uniquely positioned to act as a bridge for the many extremist views that dominate our world. ... the way forward is not black and white, good versus evil. It is the appreciation of an infinite display of diversity arising out of a unity with our own enlightened nature. Kalachakra is the method for realizing this reality.

Gavin Kilty

If I may just share with you a few of the things that have impressed me about this tantra:

Its overlap with Indian Hindu thought. The Mahayana in Tibet has great reverence for Indian source material - the works of Nagarjuna, Asanga, Chandrakirti, Naropa, the Mahasiddhas and countless more. However, Buddhism in ancient India was at great pains to distance itself from other philosophies of the day, such as those of the non Buddhist Sankhya. This was probably unavoidable given the many differing philosophies in co-existence at the time. Debate between them was inevitable. This spirit of refutation and self identification has been carried on in Tibet. Even though there has been no other dominant religious thought there apart from Buddhism non-Buddhist philosophy is roundly refuted. Fair enough. But I have a great love affair with India, and a sneaking regard for some of its spiritual paths. Moreover, India is the mother of the spiritual path, the cradle of Buddhism, and the place where I and so many fortunate others have glimpsed the possibilities of an exit through spiritual doorways. Therefore, I was pleasantly surprised to discover the Kalachakra's Sankhya leanings - its introduction of the gunas or qualities such as those of sound etc (very Vedic!) in its presentation of the formation of the world, its description of space particles, the concept of empty form, and of course its astrology which is very Sankhya because it was formulated by Rigden Yashas in his attempt to win over the Hindu sages and convert them to the Vajra Caste. All in all the Kalachakra feels a very Indian tantra.

The 'as without, so within' concept. This is truly wonderful. While most tantras correspond the outside world to inner manifestations of enlightenment, Kalachakra goes further and matches up outer cosmological phenomena to inner channel and wind activity. The idea of matching up, in the completion stage, the movements of the planets, the delineations of time, etc to the movements of the winds etc and the practice of parcelling oneself out to fit in with outer cosmological phenomena is truly mind boggling.

The astrology. Before starting on this text I had no knowledge of astrology, eastern or western. Now I have a smattering, and what a fascinating discipline it is. My work has led me to Tibetan, western and Indian astrology. I know nothing of any of them really but I am willing to learn. Astrology in Kalachakra, of course, is not for predicting future events in the world or in one's personal life. Nor is it primarily for the constructing of the calendar each year, but its main purpose is, as mentioned above, to be able to regulate the inner workings of the winds, etc with the outer movements of the planets through the constellations. And all in order to attain enlightenment for the sake of others. If that is not the most amazing practice, then I don't know what is

Its ability to interpret. As you know Kalachakra has had its critics - both in India and Tibet. Even Rendawa, Tsongkhapa's guru, expressed doubts about its authenticity as a Buddhist tantra. Part of the reason for these doubts was its stark differences in presentation to other tantras and to the Abhidharma.

The description of Meru was different, in size and shape. The continents around Meru are not the same as described in the Abhidharma. There are many differences in cosmology. The chakra description is at odds with, for example, the Guhyasamaja - the main authority for tantra presentation. Even the introduction of empty forms is quite unique. However the Vimalaprabha beautifully presents a critique of what can only be described as 'objective versus subjective truth' in which the idea of an external world there for all to perceive in the same way is given short shrift. I found it very helpful in dealing with the modern scientific perception of our world. It loosens those, 'but there must be a truth out there somewhere' nagging doubts.

Finally, I admire its **community spirit** and its relevance to today. Kalachakra has a uniting purpose about it. This is seen in Yashas uniting the Hindu sages into the Vajra caste as protection against an uncertain future, in its final battle where good triumphs, and these days in His Holiness the Dalai Lama carrying on the tradition of king Yashas, bestowing the initiation with great love wherever he can. Boy, we need it.

DAVID REIGLE

From his book 'Kalacakra Sadhana and Social Responsibility'

Although the vast range of teachings which must be mastered to understand Kalacakra may indeed place it beyond the ken of all but a specialized few, these teachings have never been more accessible than they are today. Whoever will exert the necessary effort can now obtain them, and thus prepare themselves to understand Kalacakra, the teachings of Shambhala.

Today we have the unprecedented opportunity to actually practice the Kalacakra sadhana, and thereby participate in the well-being of our planet. This is planetary social responsibility.

Alex Berzin

From his book 'Taking the Kalachakra Initiation'

The Kalachakra description of the universe is quite different from that presented in the other major Buddhist system of metaphysics: abhidharma, or topics of special knowledge. There are, of course, common elements in both, found in non-Buddhist Indian descriptions as well.

It is significant that Buddhism offers two descriptions of the universe. Each is valid for a different purpose, and in neither case is that navigating a ship. This allows for the modern scientific depiction to be perfectly acceptable in Buddhism as valid for the purpose of travel, and there being no contradiction in having multiple portraits. The description of any phenomenon, then, is not only dependent on the conceptual framework of the author and the audience, but also the use to which that description is put. We would certainly explain the plans to send a manned mission to Mars in a different manner to the politicians who are deciding the budget than to the engineers who are designing the machinery. Both portrayals of the mission, however, are valid, useful and necessary. Appreciating this point helps us understand voidness. Nothing exists with inherent characteristics on its own side rendering only one correct way to conventionally perceive, apprehend or describe it.

... The Kalachakra version ... is to provide the Buddhist equivalent of a unified field theory that explains the structure and workings of the cosmos, atoms, the human body and the experience of rebirth in a parallel manner. The need for this unified theory is to provide a comprehensive basis, covering as much of samsara as possible, at which to aim the meditative practices of alternative Kalachakra for gaining liberation and enlightenment.

Vesna Wallace

From her book 'The Inner Kalacakratantra'

By incorporating the ideas characteristic of other philosophical systems into its own theoretical framework, and by attributing conventional validity to them, the Kalacakratantra attempts to accomplish two objectives: namely, to provide rational explanations pertaining to human psycho-physiology, and to convert heterodox groups. Textual study of this tantric tradition reveals the following two goals of the Kalachakra tradition's theoretical syncretism: the conversion of heterodox groups, and the modeling of conventional reality for meditational purposes. (p.35)

... In addition to the aforementioned instances in which the Kalacakratantra adopts and redefines concepts characteristic of non-Buddhist systems, it also incorporates non-Buddhist cosmological views without reinterpreting them. For example, in its classification of the infernal realms and its description of the size of Meru, the kalachakra tradition closely parallels the Jaina cosmological view; and its description of the four cosmic mandalas also parallels those in the puranas. (p.39)

... For this tantric tradition, those diverse scientific disciplines provide a systematic analysis of the natural world, provisionally viewed as an object of purification, and humans' place and interactions in that world. Thorough understanding of the structures and functions of conventional reality is considered here indispensable for the realization of ultimate reality, or Buddhahood. (p.45)