

*Report on a Search for the  
Book of the Golden Precepts  
in Kalimpong, March 1998*

A couple years ago, Ken Small gave me some intriguing information he had come across in his research on Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence*. A Catholic priest from India said that he, with the help of a Tibetan Lama, had compared the original (apparently Tibetan) of *The Voice of the Silence*, the "Book of the Golden Precepts," with Blavatsky's English translation, in the town of Kalimpong (north India) around 1950. The statement is found in his book, *Cosmic Ecumenism via Hindu-Buddhist Catholicism: An Autobiography of an Indian Dominican Monk*, by Anthony Elenjmittam (Alias Bhikshu Ishabodh Anand), Bombay: Aquinas Publications, [1983], p. 270:

In my return to Kalimpong I stayed in the Tibetan monastery, taking part in their choral office and learning various branches of Mahayana and Tantrism. It was in that monastery that I first read with Lama Ping the *Voice of Silence*, the Book of Golden Precepts, with the English translation by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. With the help of the Tibetan Lama I could compare the English translation made by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky with the original, taking notes from the interpretation given by the Lama.

He apparently thought well enough of Blavatsky's translation to then publish an edition of *The Voice of Silence* in Bombay, India.

Naturally, Ken and I were extremely interested in locating this original Tibetan text. So hoping Elenjmittam was still alive, Ken wrote to him asking about this text. Ken was pleasantly surprised to get a reply. But unfortunately, Elenjmittam said that it had happened too long ago, and that he did not remember

what text it was. That, then, was as far as this enquiry could be taken from Elenjimitam's end. And so it rested. In early 1998, however, I got the chance to go to India, so I determined to go to Kalimpong and investigate it from Lama Ping's end.

There are at present three Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Kalimpong. I thought I might find out something at Domo Geshe Rinpoche's monastery, which is affiliated with the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, so I tried to go there first. However, I was instead mistakenly directed to a prominently located Tibetan monastery on a high hill overlooking much of Kalimpong. This, called "Zong Dog Palri Pho-brang Monastery," and affiliated with the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, was built fairly recently. Since it was built long after 1950, it was unlikely to hold the information I was seeking. So after enjoying the panoramic view of the surroundings from this multi-storied building, I proceeded onward in my search.

My next try did bring me to the monastery I first tried to go to. It is called "Tharpa Choling Monastery," and according to a photograph I saw there it was founded in 1922. A city brochure says it was constructed in 1937, apparently referring to the currently existing structure. The large main building was being extensively renovated at the time I was there, so the library was then stored in a warehouse-type building. I was kindly allowed to see the library anyway, and noted that it has three old blockprint sets of the Kangyur, and one new reprint set of the Tengyur. I asked if anyone knew of Lama Ping, explaining what had happened around 1950, but no one had heard of him. The monastery currently has about thirty monks. The monks I asked kindly went and got a monk who had been there since before 1950, but he, too, had not heard of Lama Ping. So it seemed that I would find nothing of Lama Ping in Kalimpong. Though I had little hope left of finding anything, for the sake of completeness I went to the third monastery.

The oldest monastery in Kalimpong, called "Tongsa Gompa," is said to have been built around 1692. Also called "Bhutan Monastery," it was built by the Bhutanese, so followed the state religion of Bhutan, the Dugpa Kagyu. Dugpa, or Drukpa (*'brug-pa*), is a subschool of the Kagyu school of Tibetan

Buddhism. At the end of my visit I found out that this monastery recently became a Nyingma monastery rather than a Dugpa Kagyu monastery, but I have no details. When I arrived, the monks were assembled in the main hall, eating a meal I presumed, since I was let in. So I walked over and asked the younger Tibetan monk sitting next to the head Lama, apparently his translator, my question about Lama Ping. They were in fact in the middle of some activity, but he politely listened and then said my question could be brought up after their activity was over. I left the main building and spoke to a person on the compound, who invited me to the tea room. I was just about to leave the monastery, thinking I would not get an answer, when the translator came into the tea room looking for me.

The translator had with him an older monk who said he knew of Lama Ping. He said that Lama Ping was not the man's real name, but rather his real name was Lama Tinley (*'phrin las*). The older monk said that when he was a child he had seen Lama Tinley and another man, presumably Anthony Elenjimitsam, there at Bhutan Monastery in Kalimpong. Lama Tinley, I was given to understand, did not belong to this monastery, but was from Bhutan, and went back to Bhutan some time after meeting Elenjimitsam. I was told that Lama Tinley died thirteen years ago. My informant did not know about *The Voice of the Silence* or the "Book of the Golden Precepts," nor what Tibetan book this might be. I had learned earlier that the Bhutan Monastery in Kalimpong does not have a library. My informant assumed that the Tibetan book involved must have belonged to Lama Tinley, and must have been taken back with him to Bhutan when he returned there. I did not then have the opportunity to travel to Bhutan to try and pursue this further.

Whether or not this book was in fact the original Tibetan text of the "Book of the Golden Precepts," or was a different book on the Bodhisattva path having similar ideas, such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, thus remains unknown. Nonetheless, even these small findings merit being recorded, for the sake of future search. I unfortunately did not ask my informant's name, but he can be found at Bhutan Monastery in Kalimpong. My meeting with him took place there on March 5, 1998.