

Diamond Way Buddhism in Poland. Recalling the Beginnings

Summary

Book describes how Tibetan Buddhism, particularly Karma Kagyu tradition, have settled down and developed through past 40 years in Poland. Thoughts and facts presented here are based on the results of research referring to social and individual memory. By exploration of reminiscences of Diamond Way practitioners, I aimed to accomplish two different methodological goals. The first was to recall, collect, and reconstruct knowledge of circumstances in which Diamond Way Buddhism appeared and domesticated in Poland, based on social and individual memory. The other was to characterize and analyze the impact of these memories on the current group of Diamond Way practitioners in Poland. To accomplish these goals I used qualitative research methods such as narrative interviews, participant observation, and analysis of existing data. Focal research question investigated the circumstances in which Diamond Way Buddhism appeared in Poland. The next one asked which elements of the past are most commonly recalled in individual and social memory. Subsequent questions were more specific and asked about the first Buddhist centers, meditations, practices, and practitioners in Poland, and also how Lama Ole Nydhal was perceived by his students and who participated in the first lectures and meetings.

Central characters of explored narrations are Ole and Hannah Nydhal: Danish couple who at request of the XVI Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dordje, after three years of intensive studies in the Himalayas, brought Tibetan Buddhism in the 70's to the West and continue to teach it today. In 1976, at the invitation of Władysław Czapnik from Krakow, for the first time they visited Poland while it was still a communist country. This event is regarded by students of Ole Nydahl as the beginning of Diamond Way Buddhism in Poland.

This book shows that social and individual memory of Diamond Way practitioners is complementary. Memories of communist reality created a coherent picture of the past. At the beginning of the 70's, Poles who were interested in Tibetan Buddhism could meet Lama Ole Nydahl during his visits once or twice a year. For the rest of the year Czapnik's family house in Krakow served as the first Buddhist center. People could meet, learn and practice there. This is how the first Diamond Way Karma Kagyu Linage sangha was established in Poland. Over time, mediation groups started to appear in different cities. People voluntarily shared their flats or houses for group meditations or lectures. At the beginning of 80's, lectures held by Ole Nydahl became more accessible to wide audience. They were no longer organized in private homes, but at public

institutions, such as universities or theaters. As practitioners recall, they were very long - sometimes even up to 12 hours. As participants mention, Ole Nydahl and listeners wanted to make the most of these rare opportunities. During that time knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism was very scarce in Poland. At Nydahl's lectures people could learn about dharma, take refuge, meditate together, and ask questions. In the 80's, thanks to activity of Ole and Hannah Nydahl, Tibetan lamas started to visit Poland¹⁶⁶.

The growth of Diamond Way Buddhism have manifested in increasing number of practitioners¹⁶⁷ and centers¹⁶⁸. As the respondents reported, all that development was based on altruism and wish for practice. At the beginning, despite tough communist reality, people started to meet, meditate and learn about Buddhism. Dharma became their new way of life, completely different from the communist daily routine.

This book begins with theoretical and methodological introduction, in which I discuss the use of theoretical concepts concerning individual and social memory and explain applied methodology. In the following part of the book I describe the history of Karma Kagyu tradition and process of its emigration from Tibet. I also explain basics terms used in Tibetan Buddhism. In the following chapters I present and discuss the results of the conducted research. In the second chapter I present the circumstances of Diamond Way/advent in Poland, I also present narratives about first Buddhist conversions. In the third chapter I characterize the political and socio-economic conditions accompanying to Diamond Way in the beginning. Chapter four deals with the most important developments and events that stimulated changes within the community. The fifth chapter is dedicated to the memory and its role in consciousness of a contemporary Diamond Way Buddhist.

¹⁶⁶ Tibetan masters such as Lobpon Tsechu Rinpoche, Jamgon Kontrul Rinpoche or Beru Khenste Rinpoche.

¹⁶⁷ At the beginning in the 70's there were tens, in the 80's hundreds and in the 90's thousands of them.

¹⁶⁸ Nowadays there are more than seventy Diamond Way centers around the country.