

Chapter 23 Manchen Lupon:  
*Vajrayana Buddhist Master*

About three months later, the dreams started once more. I kept seeing a temple, or a fortress really, next to two streams of water. I remembered grey stone, sunken rooms, and a thin snake-like dragon flying counter-clockwise around the granite sentinel. Protecting the fortress, the dragon guarded what was inside. And something incredible was *inside* the temple, a box that speaks and monks who jealously guard it. The head of the order was a realized master, a high lama with messages for our planet.

I wasn't quite sure what to think of the dreams. So I began to draw. Buying colored pencils and paper, I drew sketches of the temple, pictures of the dragon, and outlines of the rooms. I wasn't brave enough to show anyone my work. I learned the lesson of secrecy during my mishap in Guatemala. And what would I say? "Yes, these are drawings of a temple and the monk living inside, who speaks to me in dreams. The rooms are sunken, the structure is made of grey stone, and there is a long thin dragon that flies around at night and protects it." *Right.*

I also dreamt of soldiers with Kalashnikovs who were guarding something ancient, something hidden. A miraculous site too holy and too provocative to reveal. The temple and site were somehow connected.

Still, it seemed my mission was not yet complete. I needed to track down one last shaman. And a name kept floating in my head. It sounded vaguely familiar, yet I had

never seen it on a map or nor read anything about it. The name was Bhutan. And I began my search in earnest.

Known as *Druk Yul*, or Land of the Thunder Dragon, Bhutan is the last remnant of pure Buddhist culture in the entire world. Other places have long since disappeared. Tibet fell to the empty, cold shell of Chinese Communist logic. Nepal is mostly Hindu and secular. But Bhutan is special. It is the home of a mysterious sect of Buddhism, one that may someday hold the answer to our collective salvation. The Buddhists call it *Vajrayana*, which means Diamond Vehicle or Diamond Thunderbolt. This form is indestructible, like diamond, and all-powerful like a bolt of lightning. But why was the temple important, and what would the Buddhist Master tell us about our planet?

I started with the internet, contacting guides, reading travel sites, applying for visas, looking at schedules. I had a feeling luck and timing would be important on this trip. After saying good-bye to a soulless job, I packed my gear once more, hugged my family goodbye, and boarded a plane. In Bangkok, I was nearly denied access to Bhutan because of visa issues, but my luck prevailed again. Soon, I was in the air skirting the Himalaya and Mount Everest. A short time later, we landed in Paro.

With one of the largest valleys in the Bhutan, Paro is home to the country's only airport. One way in and one way out, by air. There are also three land routes out of the country, complete with armed checkpoints. Not quite the best way to leave if an escape was necessary. But I hoped my luck would hold out, one more time.

The first lesson of Buddhism is reverence for every living being. Every leaf, every flower, every animal, every blade of grass. Everything having the sacred life force is to be respected. For every living thing has a soul. And just as we're reborn as people, we can easily be reborn as animals, plants, or trees. In this shared life journey, all living beings seek but two things: to escape suffering and to achieve happiness. It is in this quest, in this seemingly endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, that we seek escape from *Samsara*, our mortal prison which keeps us from ascending and becoming fully awakened beings of light.

Buddhists also believe that much of what happens in our lives is due to *Karma*. Karma is the idea of action and reaction. That every action we make, every decision we take, resonates in eternity and ultimately affects us. That all choices eventually return to either help us or haunt us. And that nothing goes unnoticed on the path and practice of *Dharma*, or the "Do" known as the *Way* of life. Did you open the door for that stranger that was struggling with boxes outside your building? Did you pick up that piece of trash in the park, the one that blew right past your feet? Did you make a call on Mother's Day and wish your mom well? Karma is all these things and more. As I kept thinking about Karma, the reality of the airplane flight brought me back to Earth.

After a high-performance landing with three severe banking turns and a razor sharp descent, we arrived in the Paro Valley. The airport in Paro is amazing. More temple than facility, its two stories are painted with protective dragons and Garudas (magical griffins) serving as its primary guard force. Buddhist symbols both inside and out served two goals: keeping the good luck in and frightening

unwanted spirits away. Still, there were armed military police to meet us. I made a mental note of their weapons, Indian-issued short-barreled SLRs. Full automatics. A gift from a protective and wise tiger, charged with holding back the hungry bear called China. I also took a closer look at the dragon paintings. The red and green scales of the *Druk* or dragon, contrasted sharply to its jagged white fangs. One can almost imagine the slim form compressing and tensing, right before bellowing out a deadly breath of blue flame.

Outside the airport, a small, wiry Bhutanese man of about 120 pounds met me. With the grip of a lion, he shook my hand and said, "My name is Sonam. I'll be your guide." After walking to a small, red, four-door sedan, we loaded my gear and were off.

Sonam looked like a character from a book. With a thick, jet-black mane, tan skin, and focused eyes, he looked like a fresh sprout from the bush or veld, ready to adventure through the savannah. Today, we would make a short stop for tea and then drive to Thimpu, the capital city. And then the search would begin, visiting temples, talking to monks, and showing the drawings. I would try to unmask the riddle of the temple, the box, and the dragon. Who had called for me? And what were the messages?

After about an hour of dusty driving through the mountains, we ground our way to a dead halt. A road widening project, financed by the government of India, was underway. Teams of workers broke rock with sledgehammers, moved rubble, and carved a new two-lane road through eons-old stone. I stepped out of the coach. I wasn't sure if it was the dust, heat, or curvy road, but within seconds, I was standing over the piles of freshly-ground

*Elemental Shaman*

Copyright 2007

granite filler, violently throwing up. All I had in my stomach was water. And thankfully, after a moment, my belly was clear. I walked to the right side of the road, and peered over the edge to see the clear blue-green waters of the adjoining river. Water from the roof of the world, washing away our sins. Water from the roof of the world, washing away our tears.

The effort to remove our accumulated Karma, and free ourselves from suffering and prison of Samsara occurs along what Buddhists call the Wheel of Life. In the Wheel of Life, we embark along a journey. A path to enlightenment along three upper quadrants, and three lower quadrants.

Buddhists feel that all of our acts during life, both good and bad, are measured at the time of our passing. Upon our death, at the judgment, the Lord of Death named *Yama* measures our actions on a set of scales. Good deeds or merit become white tablets and are placed on the left side of the scale. Bad deeds or sins become black tablets and are placed on the right. Arguing to and fro, pleading with the judge of the soul is the White God and Dark Demon. Each side asks, each side hopes that their side of the scale will be heavier. When the scales are filled, the lot is cast. And the person is sent to either an *Upper* realm or *Lower* realm . . .