

I have seen in my wanderings great temples and
shrines, but none are as blissful as my own body.

– Mahāsiddha Saraha, 8th century

Tibet's Secret Temple

BODY, MIND AND MEDITATION
IN TANTRIC BUDDHISM

Tibet's Secret Temple

The Lukhang, or 'Temple to the Serpent Spirits', rises from an island on a lake behind the Potala Palace in Tibet's capital city of Lhasa. Built in the late 17th century as a private sanctuary for the Dalai Lamas – Tibet's reincarnated rulers – the Lukhang's uppermost chamber conceals intricate wall paintings that guided the Dalai Lamas on the path of spiritual enlightenment. This exhibition presents a digital recreation of those murals and brings together a wide array of related objects and artefacts to explore the practices they illustrate.



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Myanmar

Naypyitaw

Tibet

Lhasa

Thimphu

Bhutan

Tibet Autonomous Region

Tibetan cultural areas

Himalayan mountain range

The Lukhang

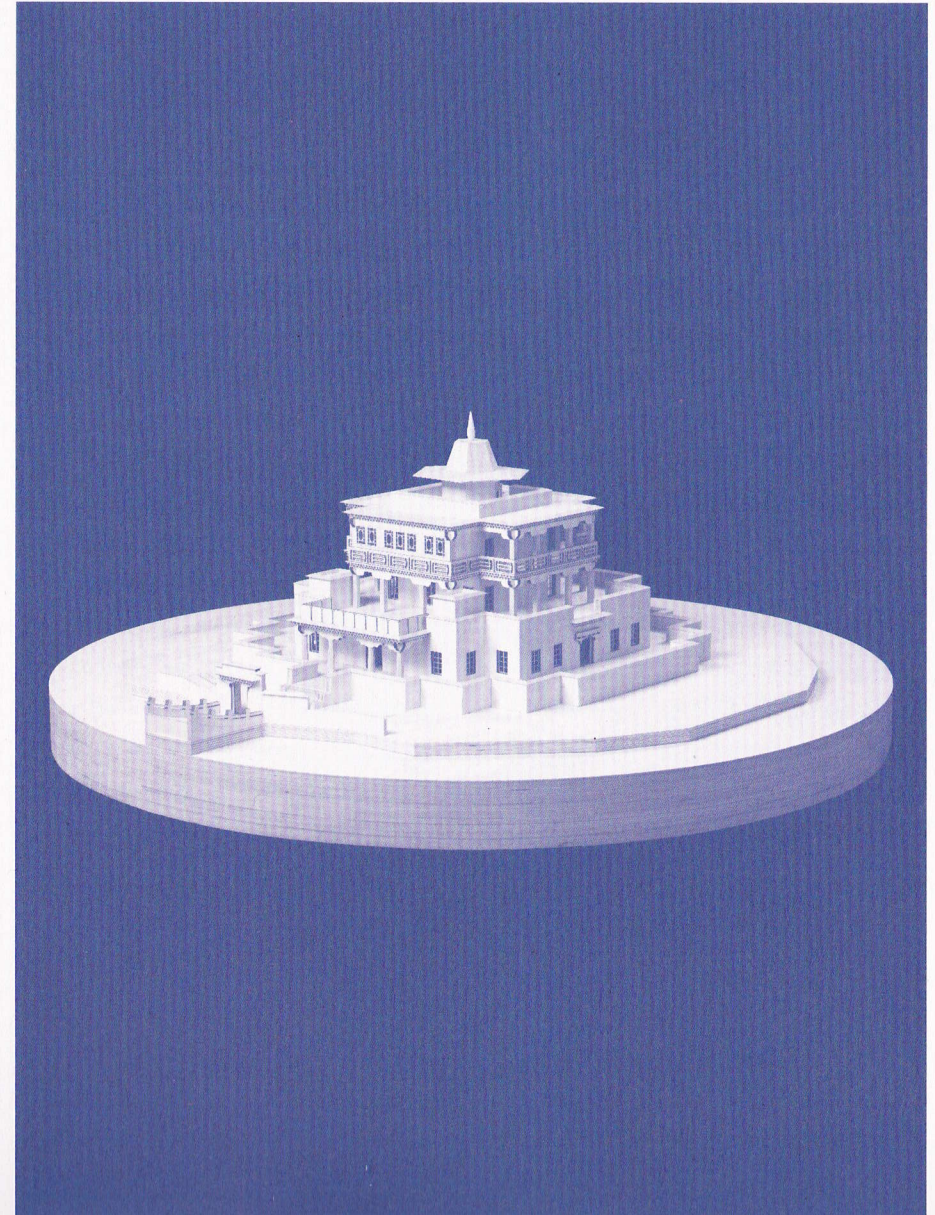
Rising out of a copse of willows on an island beneath the **Dalai Lamas'** Potala Palace, the Lukhang could originally only be reached by boat. The temple's symmetrical design and ascending levels form a three-dimensional *maṇḍala*, a Buddhist representation of the integral harmony of the cosmos and the human psyche. This ideal of harmony is further reflected in the Lukhang's integration of three distinct architectural styles – Tibetan, Chinese and Mongolian – representing Tibet's complex political alliances at the turn of the 17th century.

The Lukhang's lower level, built in Tibetan style, honours the elemental, serpentine forces of nature that Tibetans call *lu*. The temple's second storey, in Chinese style, houses a shrine to the mythical Lord of the *lu*, flanked by statues of the **Sixth Dalai Lama** and **Padmasambhava**, the revered Indian master who introduced Tantric Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century. A sweeping Mongolian-style roof shelters the meditation chamber on the Lukhang's uppermost floor and its wall paintings depicting advanced practices of Tantric yoga and '**Great Perfection**' teachings on the essence of enlightenment. A thousand-armed statue of **Avalokiteśvara**, the embodiment of universal compassion that Tibet's Dalai Lamas are said to represent, stands at the heart of the once-secret chamber.

All terms shown in bold are defined in the glossary in this exhibition guide.

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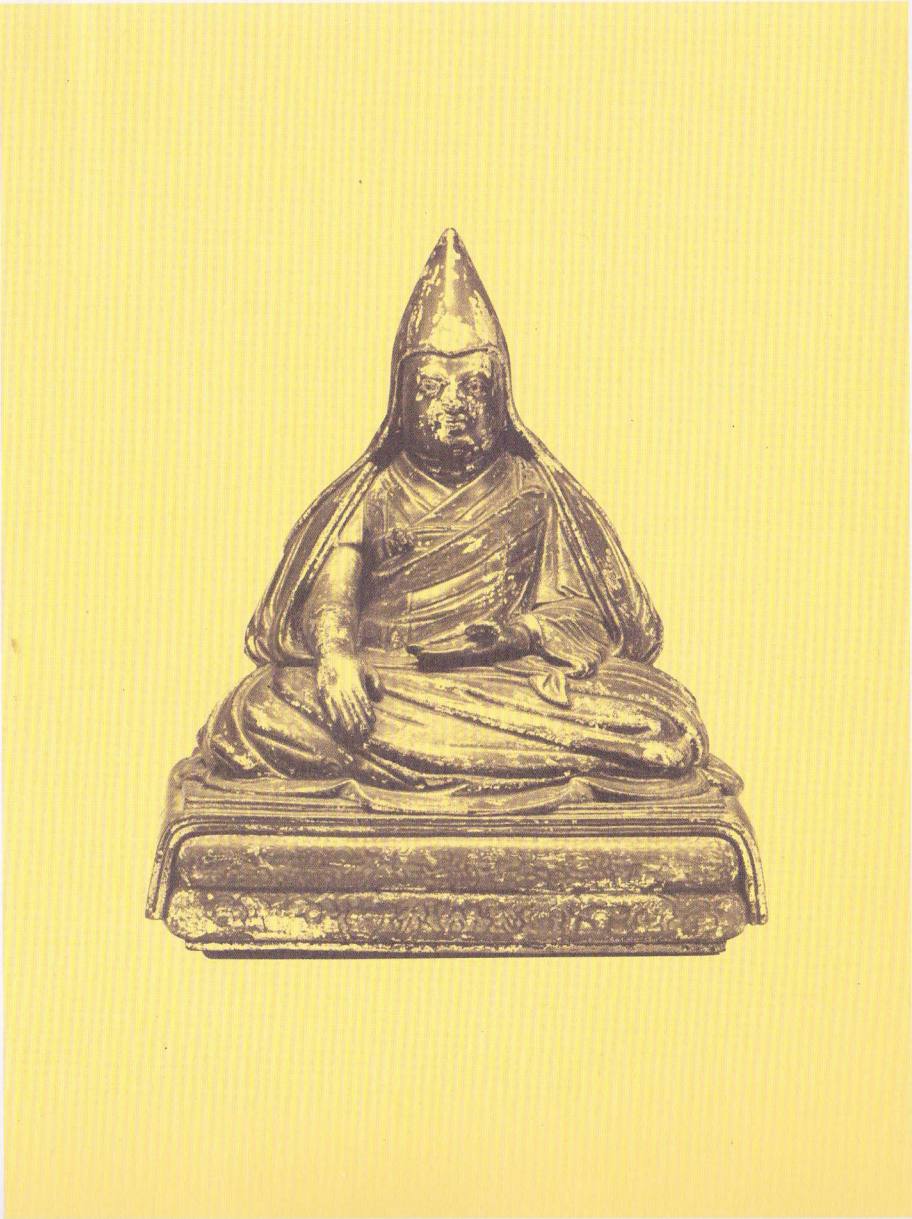
Model of Lukhang (1:50).



The Lukhang's historical and cultural origins

Lukhang means 'Temple to the Serpent Spirits' and refers to its origins in a vision that came to Tibet's **Fifth Dalai Lama** (1617–1682). A serpent-like water deity called a *lu* appeared to him during his meditations and warned that construction of the Potala Palace was disturbing the *lus'* subterranean realm. In an act of reconciliation, the Fifth Dalai Lama vowed to build a temple to appease the *lu* once the Potala Palace was completed. This promise was fulfilled during the lifetime of the **Sixth Dalai Lama** (1683–1706), who made the resulting island temple his primary residence; there, he satisfied his controversial preference for romantic trysts and poetic composition over affairs of state. Over succeeding centuries the Lukhang continued to serve Tibet's **Dalai Lamas** as a place of spiritual inspiration and contemplative retreat.

The wall paintings in the Lukhang's uppermost chamber illustrate *Dzogchen*, or 'Great Perfection', teachings of the eighth-century Tantric master **Padmasambhava**. These teachings were revealed in a text by **Orgyen Pema Lingpa** (1450–1521), an enlightened Tantric master from Bhutan who was a direct ancestor of Tibet's Sixth Dalai Lama.

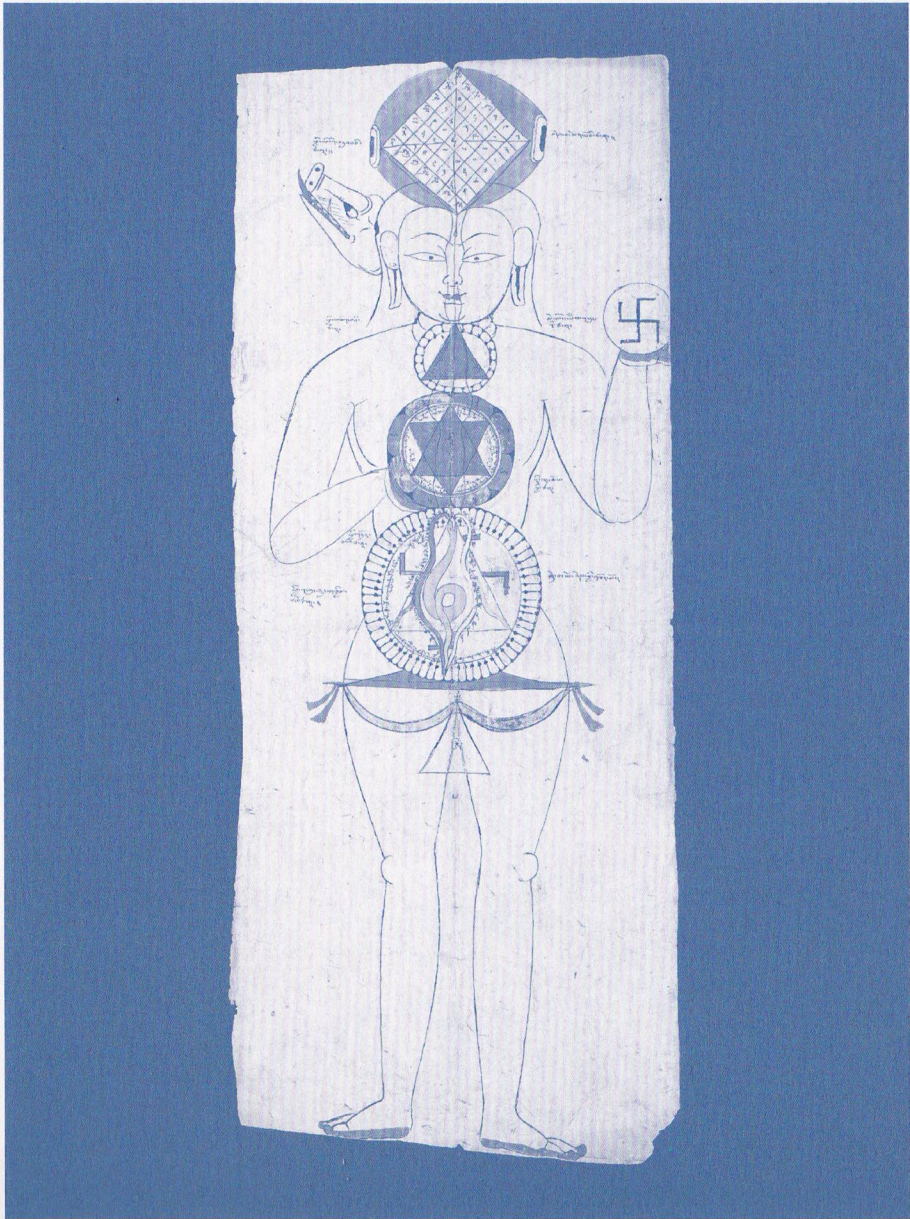


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Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso (1617–1682).

Tibetan medicine and subtle anatomy

The Lukhang murals are believed to have been commissioned by **Desi Sangye Gyatso** (1653–1705), the acting governor of Tibet between the death of the **Fifth Dalai Lama** in 1682 and the enthronement of the **Sixth Dalai Lama** in 1697. In the same period, Sangye Gyatso also commissioned a series of 79 scroll paintings outlining Tibetan medicine's understanding of the human body and approach to optimal health. 20th-century versions of several of these scroll paintings are exhibited in this room.

Traditional Tibetan medicine draws extensively from Indian and Chinese sources in its description of subtle energy currents within the body that determine physical and mental wellbeing. Representations of the three most important energy channels and their anatomical focal points occur repeatedly in the Lukhang's northern mural and signify the enhanced flow of energy and awareness achieved through Tantric Buddhist practice. Other visual representations in the murals of internal experiences of yoga and meditation include figures contemplating geometric representations of earth, water, fire, air and space, symbolising the five constituents of consciousness and the material world.



Early Tibetan ritual diagram for Tantric meditation.

Tantra: embodying enlightenment

Tantra arose in medieval India as a cultural movement that sought to reconcile spirituality with sensory experience and the creative imagination. With the Sanskrit root *ten*, meaning 'to expand', and *tra*, meaning 'methodology', Buddhist texts called '*Tantras*' expanded the scope of existing Buddhist doctrines and extended their applicability beyond monastic institutions. The core texts of Tantric Buddhism appeared in India between the eighth and eleventh centuries. The anonymously authored works modulate Buddhism's earlier emphasis on life's inevitable dissatisfactions and promote actively cultivating joy and compassion. Unbound from Buddhism's originally ascetic character, the 'indestructible vehicle' of **Vajrayāna** (or Tantric) Buddhism offered a means for positive change in individual and collective lives. To that end, Tantric deities were conceived not as objects of worship but as representations of the human potential to transcend egocentric concerns and embody universal qualities of wisdom and compassion.

The Tantric journey depicted in the Lukhang murals encompasses rapture, terror and self-transcendence. The murals and the following rooms present specific methods used in Tantric Buddhism for freeing the mind from its limitations and embracing all experience with insight and compassion.



The daemonic divine

Tibetan monasteries typically include chapels dedicated to 'wrathful' guardian deities representing wisdom and compassion in dynamic form. As seen on the opposite page, the doors leading into the Lukhang's ground-floor chapel are adorned with intertwining *lu*, volatile serpent spirits that also signify untamed energies of human consciousness. The Tantric Buddhist deity visible at the shrine beyond, Senge Dra, rides on a snow lion and – wielding a ritual trident – both subdues and illuminates the psychic forces that the *lu* embody.

Like the ground-floor chapel in the Lukhang, this room represents a threshold: a transition from mundane reality to engagement with the primal aspects of the human condition. Ornaments of human bone, such as those worn by Tantric practitioners, boldly display life's fundamental impermanence, and ritual instruments fashioned from skulls and thighbones are widely used in Tantric rites to cultivate unconditional awareness. Pilgrims in Tibet typically pay homage to these integral forces of mind and body in their journey towards a state of being beyond self-identification, suffering and strife.

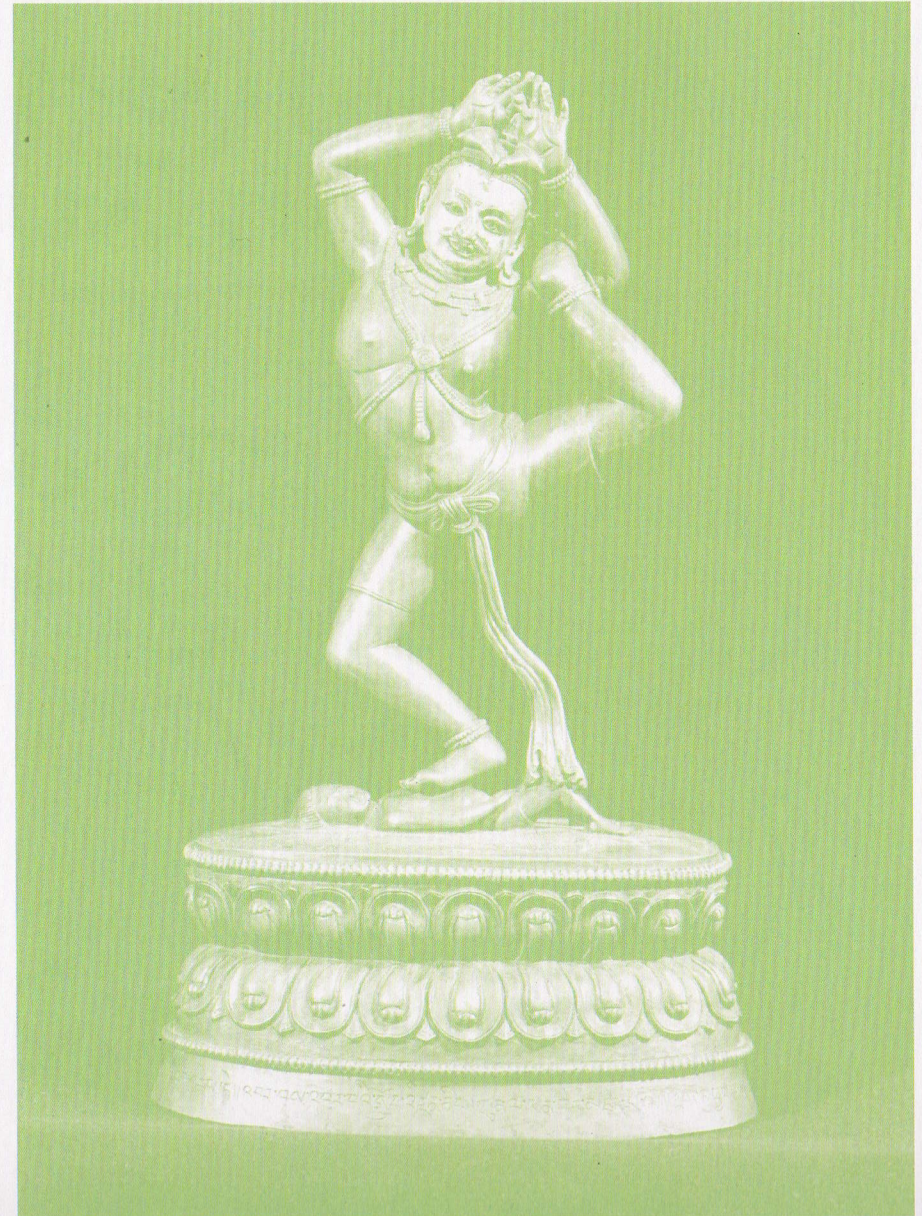


Lukhang entrance.

Tibetan yogas of body, breath and mind

Beyond Tibetan Buddhism's outward forms lies a hidden world of yogic practices that cultivate subtle awareness through physical exercises, breath control and focused visualisation. Based on Tantric principles of bringing all aspects of experience onto the spiritual path, practices of Tibetan yoga range from masked dance ceremonies to sequenced exercises that concentrate attention, energy and sensation in the body's central core to induce self-transcendent awareness. This unification of body, breath and mind is illustrated in the manuscript folio on the following page, which depicts a series of yogic postures and exercises accompanied by a specially designed meditation belt.

Combining stillness and movement, receptivity and creative imagination, the practices of Tibetan yoga bring strength and flexibility to both mind and body. Because of their dynamic effects and potential for misapplication, the practices of 'channels and winds' (*tsa lung*) and 'magical movements' (*trul khor*) are traditionally held to be secret and practised only under close supervision by a qualified teacher. Nonetheless, His Holiness the **Fourteenth Dalai Lama** has increasingly encouraged scientific study of Tibetan yoga's potential for enhancing physical health, cognitive abilities and emotional wellbeing.





Yogas of fire and light

In Tibetan Buddhism, the physically demanding practices of *trul khor* commonly precede more subtle Tantric practices undertaken during states of waking, sexual union, sleeping, dreaming and dying. The so-called 'Six Yogas' are designed to cultivate lucid awareness within all phases of human experience and to focus energy and concentration in the heart centre. Visualising the body as a translucent network of energy channels (Illusory Body Yoga), practitioners engage in the Yoga of Inner Fire (*tummo*) to increase vitality and sensation. The Yoga of Radiant Light and the Yoga of Conscious Dreaming are practised while sleeping and reveal possibilities that normal waking consciousness obscures. The Yoga of Transitional States (*bardo*) prepares practitioners for the possibility of psychological continuity after death, and the Yoga of Transference (*powa*) (pictured prominently on the Lukhang's northern mural and at the far end of this room) offers a method of projecting the mind into a paradisiacal Buddha Realm at the moment of death. The supplementary Yoga of Union, practised either with a real or visualised partner, further enhances subjective states of bliss and luminosity.



Milarepa meditating in a mountain. Detail.

Tibet, 18th century

Mindfulness, meditation and beyond

The Tibetan word for meditation is *gom*, meaning mindfulness of one's inherent 'Buddha nature', a self-transcendent state of empathy, insight and spontaneous altruism. Although Tantric Buddhism includes a multitude of meditation techniques, the Lukhang murals reveal a system of mental cultivation called **Dzogchen**, or '**Great Perfection**', that was introduced in Tibet in the eighth century by **Padmasambhava**. Based on present moment awareness of the mind's intrinsic freedom from discursive thought processes and conditioned behaviour, *Dzogchen* is presented as the innate human potential to live beyond limiting beliefs or psychological stress. When integrated into all aspects of one's experience, *Dzogchen* is upheld as the culmination of the spiritual path in which mind and body, reason and intuition, and intention and application function in unison. Although physical yoga, breathing practices and mindfulness training help to align the mind with its fundamental nature, *Dzogchen* ultimately does not require them. Padmasambhava described *Dzogchen* as "the mind looking directly into its own essence" – a seamless continuum of perceiver, perceived and the act of perception. This open presence and **non-dual** awareness at the heart of Tantric Buddhism is vividly illustrated throughout the Lukhang murals.



Sculpture of Garuda.

Approx. 12th century.

The Lukhang murals

This room contains life-size digital images of the north, west and east walls of the meditation chamber in the Lukhang, taken by photographer Thomas Laird. Copies of a guide to the murals can be found in dispensers on the back wall of the room.

**The world we see is a painting
Born from the brush of discursive thought.
Within or upon it nothing truly existent can be found.
Knowing this one knows reality;
Seeing this one sees what is true.**

– Second Dalai Lama (1475–1542)

Tibetan Buddhism, meditation and mindfulness today

The Tibetan Buddhist teachings depicted on the walls of the Lukhang are widely practised today both within and outside of Tibet. Tibetan Buddhism's diverse approaches to mental cultivation are also the subject of scientific investigations into their potential impact on physiological and psychological health and enhancing human potential.

The health benefits of diverse meditation practices from an array of Asian Buddhist lineages awakened the interest of Western scientists in the 1960s, when fascination with Eastern spiritual traditions was burgeoning in the West. Collaborations between Tibetan Buddhism and Western science began after the (current) **Fourteenth Dalai Lama's** first visit to the USA in 1979. His interest in science – coupled with his willingness to allow Tibetan Buddhist monks to participate in scientific experiments – encouraged a range of investigations into the neurological correlates of meditation, which continue to this day through initiatives of the Mind and Life Institute and related organisations.

The health benefits of mindfulness, a practice central to all Buddhist lineages, have also been the subject of scientific research in the past 35 years, which has led to the development of a variety of stress-reduction programmes. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, for example, has become a clinical tool recognised by the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence for the treatment of anxiety and depression.

With the encouragement of the **Dalai Lama**, scientists are beginning to investigate the reputed physiological and cognitive benefits of Tibet's once-secret Tantric yogas of breath control and dynamic movement, as illustrated in the Lukhang murals.

**Stimulate the vital points of the subtle Vajra Body
And direct the energies flowing in the side channels
into the mystic channel at the centre,
Thus revealing the mind's Clear Light...
Indivisible from bliss and wisdom.**

– Second Dalai Lama (1475–1542)

EVENT SERIES

See the full list of events and book tickets at: wellcomecollection.org/secrettemple

Secret Yogas, Tantric Masters

THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER, 19.00–21.00

FREE | BOOK FROM 27 NOV

What happens when secret practices and sacred objects are taken out of their intended context? Why were they secret and what happens to the sacred? This event will explore Tantric Buddhism from monastery to museum, with stories of unorthodox methods of teaching and unconventional and revered masters. The discussion will be followed by a demonstration of the body–mind practices of Tibetan Yoga.

Bodies in Balance

SATURDAY 16 JANUARY 2016, 10.30–17.30

FREE | DROP IN

A lively day of activities and talk exploring Tibetan medicine and healing, from pulse reading and urine analysis and other classical methods of observational diagnosis to the application of Tibetan Yogas in contemporary medical settings. Challenge your notion of the universe – from macrocosm to microcosm – and come and observe the creation and offering of a Medicine Mandala, made from tiny grains of vibrantly coloured sand.

Lucid Dreaming and Tibetan Dream Yoga

THURSDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2016, 19.00–20.30

FREE | BOOK FROM 29 JAN

Have you ever woken up *within* a dream? Can anyone learn to guide their own dreamscapes and can we harness the power of conscious dreaming to therapeutic ends? What does science tell us about lucid dreaming, and what does Dream Yoga tell us about the potential of the human mind? Join a Dream Yoga expert in discussion with a sleep scientist and a dream researcher.

Mindfulness Unpacked: Symposium

SATURDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2016, 10.30–17.00

£18/£15 CONCESSIONS | BOOK FROM 27 NOV

Mindfulness: panacea or fad? Both? Neither? Meditation can be used as a tool for changing our brain and can provide insight into our extraordinary ability to train the mind. But what happens to mindfulness when it's removed from the Buddhist worldview and applied as a supplement for modern living? Who practises it, and should we be more sceptical about its benefits? This symposium will be a dynamic day-long meditation on mindfulness.

YOUTH AND SCHOOLS

Saturday Studio: Mandala Making

SATURDAY 23 JANUARY 2016, 14.00–17.00

FREE | DROP IN

Mandala creation workshops, inspired by *Tibet's Secret Temple*.

Are you aged 14–19 and looking for something new and creative to do in your free time? Come along to Saturday Studio, our series of monthly drop-in events. Meet new people, learn from experts in a range of creative fields, and have a go at practical activities inspired by Wellcome Collection's content.

Mindfulness for Secondary School Teachers

WEDNESDAY 10 FEBRUARY, 13.00–16.30

FREE | EMAIL US TO BOOK

Ever wished you could focus on the moment, forgetting stressful situations that have already occurred and not dwelling on those that might be ahead? Join us for a half-day introductory session to mindfulness techniques, for your own life and for the classroom.

Programmed to accompany our temporary exhibition, *Tibet's Secret Temple*, you'll have the opportunity to find out a little more about what mindfulness is and its links to Buddhism, visit the exhibition, and learn some mindfulness techniques that you can put into practice straight away. Find out more about the Mindfulness in Schools Project and hear the first hand experiences of a local school where this was piloted.

Ideal for teachers curious about mindfulness as a tool for managing stress, emotions and mental busyness, both for themselves and their students.

Places are limited to two teachers per school.

To book, or to find out more about activities to accompany the exhibition for school and youth groups, contact youthprogrammes@wellcomecollection.org

SOUVENIR BOOK

A postcard book, showing exquisite details from the temple murals alongside key artefacts from the exhibition, is available from the Wellcome Shop RRP £9.99. Contains 25 large-format postcards.

Glossary

Avalokiteśvara: The embodiment of universal compassion and Tibet's patron deity. The Dalai Lamas are thought to be incarnations of Avalokiteśvara.

Bardo: A visionary, intermediate state of existence between death and rebirth.

Bodhisattva: A spiritual practitioner motivated by great compassion who vows to attain Buddhahood, or enlightenment, on behalf of all beings.

Chakra: Focal points of subtle energy within the human body. The principal *chakras* are located at the crown of the head, the throat, the heart and the navel (see **subtle body**).

Cham: Masked dance ceremonies, performed throughout the Himalayan region, that fuse ritual movement, yoga and focused meditation to harness turbulent forces within the mind and environment.

Channels: Conduits of subtle energy and consciousness within the human body. The three primary channels (*nāḍī* in Sanskrit) are depicted as white (associated with 'male' energy), red (associated with 'female' energy) and a blue central channel running from the base of the spine to the crown of the head.

Consciousness: In Buddhism, pure consciousness is held to be 'luminously wakeful', empty of intrinsic content and free of deluded dualistic perception (see **non-duality**).

Dakini: A female Tantric deity or highly realised female practitioner. *Dakinis* often act as guardians and transmitters of Tantric Buddhist knowledge.

Dalai Lama: A title meaning 'Ocean of Wisdom' that was bestowed on a line of reincarnating lamas, originating in the 14th century. The Dalai Lamas served as political rulers and spiritual leaders of the Tibetan people from the 17th century to the 20th century.

Desi Sangye Gyatso: The acting governor of Tibet between the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1682 and the enthronement of the Sixth Dalai Lama in 1697. He oversaw the building of the Potala Palace and the Lukhang. He also commissioned its murals as well as a series of 79 scroll paintings outlining the Tibetan medical system and its understanding of the human body.

Dzogchen: Also known as 'Great Perfection', *Dzogchen* is the culmination of the Tantric

Eightfold Path: The foundational Buddhist approach to cultivating awareness of the true nature of reality and eradicating greed and delusion: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Meditation.

Emptiness: The concept that all phenomena, and the self, are ultimately impermanent and void of any abiding essence or existence, although material things continue to manifest.

Enlightenment: Perfect knowledge of the true nature of reality; awakening to one's intrinsic Buddhahood.

Fifth Dalai Lama: Lobsang Gyatso (1617–1682), a highly revered scholar with a keen interest in philosophy, medicine and Tantric Buddhist practice who became the spiritual and political ruler of Central Tibet in 1642. Construction of the Potala Palace began during his reign.

Fourteenth Dalai Lama: Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935) assumed full temporal power in Tibet in 1950, only weeks after the Chinese invasion. He fled Tibet in 1959 as the political situation in Tibet deteriorated and re-established a Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India. He has never visited the Lukhang or seen its murals firsthand.

Garuda: Mythical bird of prey that is held to control the negative forces of *nāgas*, or *lu*, and symbolises the spiritual freedom of fully awakened consciousness.

Great Perfection: See *Dzogchen*.

Karmapa: Reincarnate lamas originating in the 12th century who head the largest sub-school of the *Kagyu*, one of Tibet's four principal Buddhist lineages.

Lama: Tibetan Buddhist master and spiritual teacher.

Lu: Snake-like divinities, held to dwell in earth and water, who often serve as guardians of hidden knowledge. The *lu* (*nāgas* in Sanskrit) are widely believed to exert control over the weather, especially rainfall.

Mahākāla: A wrathful Tibetan Buddhist deity and wisdom protector who, despite his ferocious appearance, embodies compassion and who acts for the benefit of all beings.

Mahāsiddha: 'Great perfected one'; a fully realised Tantric Buddhist practitioner.

Maṇḍala: A symbolic representation of the integral harmony of the cosmos and the human psyche, commonly depicted – in either two or three dimensions – as the palace of a Tantric deity with four gates in the cardinal directions.

Nāga: See *lu*.

Orgyen Pema Lingpa: A 15th-century Tantric Buddhist master from Bhutan who is revered as one of the greatest revealers of *terma*, Buddhist treasure texts that are attributed to Padmasambhava.

Padmasambhava: The semi-legendary 'Lotus-born' Indian Tantric master credited with having introduced Tantric Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century.

Phurba: A highly symbolic ritual dagger used in Tantric ceremonies of subjugation.

Prāṇa: The 'winds', or energy currents, that circulate within the subtle body and that are the basis of higher Tantric practices for transforming consciousness.

Rainbow body: A metaphor for the ultimate attainment in *Dzogchen* when, at the time of death, the body dissolves into five-coloured light.

Samantabhadra: 'All-pervading Goodness'; the primordial Buddha signifying the innate, self-existing purity of the enlightened mind.

Sixth Dalai Lama: Tsangyang Gyatso (1683–1706), during whose reign the Lukhang was constructed and its murals conceived and painted. A gifted poet, he withdrew from formal monastic training and adopted the lifestyle of a Tantric *mahāsiddha*.

Subtle body: The intangible energy system within the body, comprising a network of interconnecting energy channels and *chakras*, whose harmonious functioning assures mental and physical wellbeing.

Tantra: Esoteric Buddhist texts that offer accelerated methods and yogic practices for freeing the mind from delusion. Tantric Buddhism is practised both within and outside of monastic environments.

Terma: Buddhist treasure teachings, attributed to Padmasambhava, that are said to have been hidden by his consort Yeshe Tsogyal in the eighth century and revealed by his later disciples.

Tertön: A highly realised male or female practitioner who discovers and reveals 'treasure teachings' ascribed to Padmasambhava.

Thangka: Tibetan scroll paintings that commonly depict Buddhist deities and historical figures, as well as medical knowledge and esoteric anatomy.

Thödgäl: Meaning 'leaping over the skull' (into 'spontaneous presence', or *lhundrup*), *thödgäl* is generally held to be the most secret of all *Dzogchen* practices. It is based on specialised breathing techniques and methods of gazing to transcend ordinary appearances and realise one's intrinsic Buddhahood.

Trul khor: Specialised yogic movements that enhance the flow of subtle energy within the physical body in preparation for the yogic practice of 'inner fire' (see *tummo*) and the contemplative techniques of *Dzogchen*.

Tsa lung: Meaning 'channels and winds', *tsa lung* practices combine meditation and breath control and are often undertaken in preparation for the dynamic physical movements of *trul khor*.

Tummo: The yogic practice of 'inner fire' cultivates interior states of bliss that burn through conceptual thought to reveal the 'Clear Light' of the awakened mind.

Vajra: A Tantric ritual object, resembling a thunderbolt, that is used to indicate a dimension of reality beyond form or concept and to signify the indestructible 'diamond-like' nature of the enlightened mind.

Vajrayāna: Meaning 'indestructible vehicle'; another term for Tantric Buddhism.

Yamantaka: A bull-headed Tantric deity, the 'Vanquisher of Death', who represents the Tantric Buddhist goal of overcoming the recurring cycles of death and rebirth.

Yeshe Tsogyal: A Tibetan princess and enlightened yogini who, as Padmasambhava's spiritual consort, is credited with having compiled and concealed his 'treasure teachings' (see *terma*).

Yogi and yogini: Tantric Buddhist practitioners, outside of monastic contexts, who have attained or aspire to attain realisation of the mind's inherently enlightened nature.