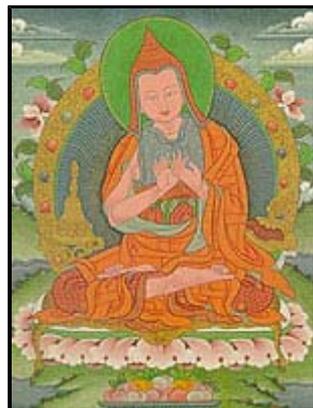


The New Kadampa Tradition

By BBC Team

The New Kadampa Tradition

Kadampa Buddhism



Atisha reintroduced
Buddhism into Tibet

The New Kadampa Tradition is one of the fastest growing Mahayana Buddhist traditions in the West, with 900 meditation centres in 37 countries. Founded by the Tibetan-born meditation master, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, supporters claim it offers local access to Buddha's teachings, meditation practice and an alternative view to life that promotes peace and harmony.

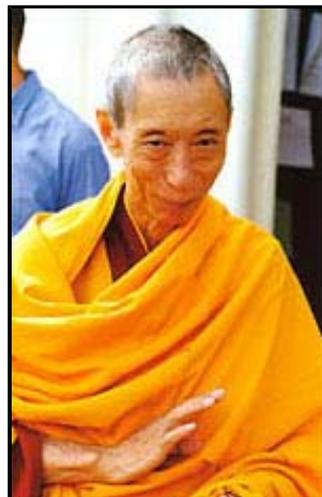
Kadampa Buddhism was founded in 11th Century Tibet by the Indian Buddhist Master Atisha (982 - 1054 CE). He was invited by King Jangchub Ö, a ruler of Ngari region of Tibet, to reintroduce Buddhism to Tibet. It had first been introduced by Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita 200 years earlier, but was largely destroyed by the anti-Buddhist purges of the Tibetan king, Lang Darma, who was a follower of Bön, the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet.

Atisha did revive Buddhist practice in Tibet, and founded what is now the tradition of Kadampa Buddhism. Ka means word and refers to the teachings of the Buddha and dam refers to Atisha's special presentation of them, known as Lamrim or stages of the path to enlightenment. Lamrim literally means Stages of the Path and encompasses all Buddha's teachings. Atisha showed how the paths of Sutra and Tantra were not separate and could be practised together.

Three centuries later (in the 13th century) the Tibetan Buddhist master Je Tsongkharpa, one of Tibet's saints, developed and promoted Kadampa Buddhism throughout the country. He reformed the monasteries, emphasizing the practice of moral discipline, systematic study and meditation, which characterize the three Kadam lineages. He also wrote commentaries to many sacred Buddhist texts, clarifying their meanings, and taught the union of Sutra and Tantra. His life was an example of purity in body, speech and mind. His followers became known as New Kadampas or Gelugpas (The Virtuous Ones) who strived to become great Bodhisattvas and Buddhas themselves, so they could help release others from the suffering of cyclic existence.

The New Kadampa Tradition in the West

In 1976 Geshe Kelsang was invited to teach in the UK by Lama Yeshe, the headteacher of the FPMT, Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition.



Venerable Geshe
Kelsang Gyatso

He taught at FPMT-Centre Manjushri Institute which was based at Conishead priory, Ulverston, Cumbria, England (now called Manjushri Kadampa Meditation Centre) with the blessing of the Dalai Lama.

In the late 1970s Geshe Kelsang took the controversial decision of opening his own Buddhist Centre in York. He was asked to resign his post at Conishead Priory but resisted pressure to leave after a group of his closest students pleaded with him to stay.

Critics claim this was the beginning of a rift between Kelsang and the FPMT. They also accuse Kelsang of starting a breakaway sect or cult and argue that the New Kadampa Tradition, as it is known today, is not part of the ancient Kadampa Tradition but a split from the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Despite the popularity of the New Kadampa Tradition - often known as the NKT for short - the organisation was involved in a public dispute with the Dalai Lama which began in 1996.

The problem centres on the emphasis placed on the Dharma Protector Dorje Shugden by Kelsang.

According to the NKT's website: "A Dharma Protector is an emanation of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva whose main functions are to avert the inner and outer obstacles that prevent practitioners from gaining spiritual realizations, and to arrange all the necessary conditions for their practice".

Kelsang teaches that the deity Dorje Shugden is the Dharma protector for the New Kadampa Tradition and is a manifestation of the Buddha.

The spirit Dorje Shugden is described by some as a "wrathful, sword-waving deity with big ears and menacing fangs" or as "a ...warrior figure, riding a snow lion through a sea of boiling blood".

The New Kadampa Tradition offers this description: "In his left hand he holds a heart, which symbolises great compassion and spontaneous great bliss... His round yellow hat represents the view of Nagarjuna, and the wisdom sword in his right hand teaches us to sever ignorance... Dorje Shugden rides a snow lion ...and has a jewel-splitting mongoose perched on his left arm, symbolising his power to bestow wealth on those who put their trust in him... His wrathful expression indicated that he destroys ignorance, the real enemy of all living beings, by blessing them with great wisdom."



Dorje Shugden atop his snow lion

The NKT venerates Dorje Shugden as its protector deity. The Dalai Lama, however, has rejected and spoken out against this practice. He has described Shugden as an evil and malevolent force, and argued that other Lamas before him had also placed restrictions on worship of this spirit.

After the Lama made these statements public in 1996 some followers of Dorje Shugden protested against the Dalai Lama in London, accusing him of suppressing their religious freedom.

Today members of the New Kadampa Tradition continue to worship Dorje Shugden.

Although some Buddhists and non-Buddhists regard the NKT as a cult, the organisation has continued to grow.

Based on Lama Tsongkhapa's influential works, Geshe Kelsang has written 20 books in English, and these have in turn been translated into other languages. The proceeds of these books are fed into the 'NKT International Temples Project', a Buddhist charity building temples dedicated to world peace.

Alongside this Kelsang has set up study programmes to encourage a Western audience to understand the Buddha's teachings.



The first New Kadampa Temple was built in 1998 at Manjushri Centre, Cumbria.

Geshe Kelsang has also been the driving force behind the building of the first New Kadampa Buddhist temple at the Manjushri Centre in Cumbria, England.

A second temple was opened in Glen Spey, New York in 2005. Work is underway on a third temple near Sao Paulo in Brazil, which will be known as the Centro de Meditacao Kadampa do Brasil. Plans are afoot for additional temples at Tara Centre in Derby, England and in Melbourne, Australia.

NKT members hope to build a Buddhist temple in every major town and city in the world. This project is known as the International Temples Project for World Peace.

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